

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-001909/24
to the Commission
Borja Giménez Larraz (PPE)
(1 October 2024)**

Subject: Aid reopening border crossings between Spain and France

On 6 September 2024 heavy rains caused the closure of two border crossings between France and Spain through the Bielsa and Somport tunnels — the former due to landslides and the latter due to a collapse on the French side. As a result, lorry traffic has been interrupted until the Somport tunnel is reopened, a process that the French Government estimates could take up to six months.

This situation affects both countries, as the tunnels are a key border crossing between the Aragon and Aspe valleys, and many people cross the border every day for work, business or school purposes. Moreover, located in the Central Pyrenees, the Somport tunnel is one of the longest in Europe, serving as a major international road freight transport route, handling approximately 1 600 vehicles a day.

1. What means does the Commission have at its disposal to ensure the tunnels are immediately reopened and normal operating conditions are restored?
2. Does the Commission plan to activate the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (SEAR) to provide a rapid response to this unfortunate natural disaster?
3. Finally, how does the Commission intend to support national authorities to improve existing transport routes and ensure the cross-border transportation of goods?

Submitted: 1.10.2024

**Answer given by Ms Ferreira on behalf of the European Commission
(30 October 2024)**

The Commission is aware of the closure of road RN134 in France. The French authorities reported to the Commission that the Inter-Department Directorate for Atlantic Roads (DIRA) carried out a technical assessment on the ground, based on which it presented a proposal to repair the damage. Accordingly, the DIRA estimates that the works should be concluded in 2025 ⁽¹⁾.

The EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) ⁽²⁾ can only be activated at the request of an eligible state, which has a deadline of 12 weeks as from when the first damage occurred, demonstrating that the total direct damage exceeds the thresholds specified in Article 2 Regulation (EC) No 1012/2002.

The EUSF may cover a part of the costs for emergency and recovery operations incurred by public authorities ⁽³⁾. Private damage is not eligible. France has not requested EUSF assistance for this disaster yet.

The Commission supports Member States in improving their transport networks through different instruments, including Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for transport and Cohesion Policy's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

CEF supports the development of an interconnected trans-European transport network. Interreg supports cross border cooperation to promote the development of joint strategies and projects in relevant sectors for border regions.

The Spain-France-Andorra cooperation programme 2021-2027 invests EUR 18.7 million from the ERDF to promote climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches.

An additional EUR 12.4 million from the ERDF will be invested to increase the institutional capacity of regional authorities to deliver common services and to solve existing legal and administrative obstacles for better cooperation.

⁽¹⁾ Although the traffic could already be restored in January 2025.

⁽²⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 1012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3) as amended by Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 May 2014 (OJ L 189, 27.6.2014, p. 143) and by Regulation (EU) 2020/461 of the European Parliament and the Council of 30 March 2020 (OJ L 99, 31.3.2020, p. 9). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32002R2012>

⁽³⁾ Eligible operations include the restoring of essential infrastructure, the provision of temporary accommodation to the population, cleaning-up operations and protection of cultural heritage.