

Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund: assistance to Greece, Spain, France and Portugal

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PURPOSE: to mobilise the Solidarity Fund to provide assistance to Greece, Spain, France and Portugal.

PROPOSED ACT: Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: the European Union Solidarity Fund aims to enable the Union to respond in a rapid, efficient and flexible manner to emergency situations in order to show solidarity with the population of regions struck by natural disasters. The Fund is **not to exceed a maximum annual amount of EUR 500 million** (2011 prices), as laid down in Article 10 of Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1311/2013 laying down the multiannual financial framework (MFF).

This decision covers the **mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) for an amount of EUR 104 166 951** to provide assistance to Greece in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Lesbos, France for hurricanes in Saint-Martin and Guadeloupe, as well as in Portugal and Spain following forest fires in the Centro region and Galicia in the course of 2017.

This mobilisation is accompanied by [Draft Amending Budget \(DAB\) No 1/2018](#) that proposes to enter the necessary appropriations in the general budget 2018, both in commitments and payments, after having deducted the advance already paid (EUR 6 520 846).

Greece – Earthquakes in Lesbos: on 12 June 2017, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.3 on the Richter scale affected the island of Lesbos in the Northern Aegean. A multitude of aftershocks followed causing damage to private homes, businesses and local infrastructure.

The Greek authorities estimate the total direct damage at **EUR 54.4 million**. The damage caused on Lesbos represents 2.14 % of the GDP of the concerned Northern Aegean NUTS 2 level region and thus exceeds the threshold of 1.5 % of regional GDP laid down in the Regulation.

In its application Greece requested the **payment of an advance**. The Commission awarded a **10 % advance of EUR 135 912** on the anticipated financial contribution from the EUSF.

France – Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Saint Martin and Guadeloupe: on 5 and 6 September 2017, a category 5 hurricane named Irma of unprecedented violence, travelled north-west through the Caribbean, killing and injuring a great number of people and leaving a trail of destruction behind. The eye of hurricane Irma crossed the island of Saint Martin/Sint Maarten with an average speed of 290-295 km/h destroying over 90 % of the island. Only two weeks later on 18 and 19 September hurricane Maria, another category 5 hurricane resulting from the same meteorological and climatic conditions as Irma, crossed the Caribbean and again caused significant damage on Saint Martin/Sint Maarten, Guadeloupe and parts of Martinique.

The French authorities estimate the total direct damage caused by the disaster at **EUR 1 956.2 million**. The reported direct damage represents 21.9 % of the region's GDP and exceeds by far the applicable 1 %-threshold for outermost regions laid down in the Regulation.

In its application France requested the payment of an advance. The Commission awarded a **10 % advance of EUR 4 890 603** on the anticipated financial contribution from the EUSF.

Portugal – Forest fires in Centro: between June and October 2017, Portugal suffered several waves of large forest fires triggered by high temperatures, strong winds and extreme low humidity. These fires affected mainly Portugal's Central and Northern regions and had a devastating effect causing the destruction of essential public infrastructure, public buildings, private homes, businesses and destroying agricultural and forest land.

In their final application the Portuguese authorities estimate the total direct damage caused by the fires from June to October at **EUR 1 458.0 million**. This amount represents 0.832 % of Portugal's GNI, and exceeds the major disaster threshold for mobilising the Solidarity Fund of EUR 1 051.6 million in 2017 (i. e. 0.6 % of Portugal's GNI).

In its application Portugal requested the payment of an advance. The Commission awarded **an advance of EUR 1 494 331**, representing 10 % of the financial contribution from the EUSF anticipated at that moment.

Spain – Forest fires in Galicia: large wildfires broke out in north-western Spain in the region of Galicia during the period between 10 and 17 October 2017. The fires caused considerable destruction of essential public infrastructure, private homes, businesses and forest land.

The Spanish authorities estimate the total direct damage caused by the disaster at **EUR 129.1 million**. This amount is considerably below the major disaster threshold applicable to Spain in 2017 of EUR 3 378.5 million (i.e. EUR 3 billion in 2011 prices). Therefore, the Spanish authorities presented their application under the so called '**neighbouring country provision**', whereby an eligible country affected by the same disaster qualifying as a major disaster in a neighbouring eligible country may also benefit from EUSF aid.

Given the low level of the damage and of the anticipated amount of aid the **payment of an advance was not justified**.

Conclusion: the Commission considers that the disasters referred to in the applications submitted by Greece, France, Portugal and Spain **meet the conditions** set out in the Regulation for mobilising the EUSF.

Financing: the amount that may be mobilised at this stage of the year 2018 is **EUR 277 556 348**. This corresponds to the total amount available for the mobilisation of the EUSF at the beginning of 2018 (EUR 421 142 057), minus the retained amount of EUR 143 585 709 in order to respect the obligation of keeping aside 25 % of the 2018 annual allocation until 1 October 2018.

In the framework of the general budget of the Union established for the financial year 2018, the Commission proposes to mobilise the following amounts in commitment and payment appropriations under the European Union Solidarity Fund:

- EUR 1 359 119 for Greece,
- EUR 3 228 675 for Spain,
- EUR 48 906 025 for France,
- EUR 50 673 132 for Portugal.

In order to minimise the time taken to mobilise the Fund, this Decision should apply from the date of its adoption.