Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund: assistance to Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania and Poland following natural disasters in 2017

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PURPOSE: to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund to assist Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania and Poland following a series of disasters in these countries in the course of 2017.

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

CONTENT: the Commission proposes to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) for an amount of **EUR 33 992 206** to assist Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania and Poland following a series of disasters in these countries during 2017.

(1) Bulgaria - flooding: on 25 and 26 October 2017 the south-eastern part of Bulgaria experienced unusual intense rainfall and violent storms causing damage to bridges, drainage channels and retaining walls and the basic infrastructure.

A state of emergency was declared and the regional plan for disaster protection was launched. The flood claimed 5 lives and affected about 6000 people. 142 residential properties and over 1 200 non-residential properties were flooded.

The Bulgarian authorities estimate the **total direct damage caused by the disaster at EUR 90.3 million**. The damage caused by the floods in Burgas represents **1.6 % of the GDP** of the NUTS level 2 region concerned, namely Yugoiztochen, and thus exceeds the threshold of 1.5 % of regional GDP laid down in the EUSF Regulation.

Bulgaria estimated the cost of emergency and recovery operations eligible under the EUSF Regulation at **EUR 90.1 million**.

(2) Greece - earthquake on the island of Kos in 2017: on 20 July 2017, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.6 on the Richter scale, followed by numerous aftershocks, struck the South Aegean region between Bodrum (Turkey) and the island of Kos (Greece), causing damage which mainly affected infrastructure and public property, as well as important cultural heritage sites. Greece reported 10 victims and over 100 injured. The port of Kos suffered extensive damage. 150 houses will have to be repaired and 10 rebuilt. 33 businesses need repairs and 5 need rebuilding. 3 public buildings were also affected.

The Greek authorities estimate the **total direct damage caused by the disaster at EUR 101.4 million**. The damage caused by the earthquake in Kos represents 1.8% of the GDP of the NUTS level 2 region concerned, namely the Southern Aegean, and thus exceeds the threshold of 1.5% of regional GDP provided for by the EUSF Regulation.

Greece estimated the cost of emergency and recovery operations eligible under the EUSF Regulation at **EUR 93.9 million**.

(3) Lithuania - flooding: during the summer and autumn, Lithuania was affected by continuous rainfall which saturated the soil, unable to absorb the excess water. This situation led to flooding, mainly causing damage to infrastructure and the agricultural sector. A period of excessive rainfall over several months,

with precipitation rates reaching up to 280% of the normal led to waterlogged soil, excessive inland water levels and critical overloading of drainage systems. On 4 October 2017, Lithuania declared a nationwide emergency. Torrential rains also damaged more than 100 km of local roads.

The Lithuanian authorities estimate the **total direct damage caused by the flood at EUR 407.4 million**. This amount exceeds the EUSF intervention threshold for a so-called 'major disaster threshold' applicable to this country in 2017, which amounts to EUR 214.9 million (0.6 % of gross national income based on 2015 data).

Lithuania estimated the cost of emergency and recovery operations eligible under the EUSF Regulation at **EUR 240.2 million**.

(4) Poland - storm: between 9 and 12 August 2017 parts of Poland were affected by exceptionally violent storms and heavy rainfall causing widespread damage to private and public forests, public infrastructure and other assets. The storm came with intense rain and local hail causing 6 fatalities and 39 people injured. The districts of Toru and Gdask were hardest hit. The disaster caused significant losses of natural resources and affected for example 22 forest reserves, 15 bird species and 134 habitats (Natura 2000). In addition, more than 13 600 farms and almost 99 000 ha of crops were affected.

The Polish authorities estimate the total direct damage caused by the disaster at **EUR 491.2 million**. The storm damage represents **2.0%** of the weighted average regional GDP of the three regions concerned, namely the voivodships of Kujawsko-Pomerania, Pomerania and Wielkopolska, and thus exceeds the threshold of 1.5% set in the EUSF Regulation.

Poland estimated the cost of emergency and recovery operations eligible under the EUSF Regulation at **EUR 324.5 million**.

Financing: Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1311/2013 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the period 2014-2020, and in particular Article 10 thereof, allows the mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund up to an annual ceiling of EUR 500 million (2011 prices), above the ceilings of the relevant headings of the financial framework.

In the context of the general budget of the Union for the financial year 2018, the Commission proposes to mobilise the following amounts in commitment and payment appropriations under the EUSF:

- **EUR 2 258 225 for Bulgaria,**
- **EUR 2 535 796 for Greece,**
- **EUR 16 918 941 for Lithuania,**
- **EUR 12 279 244 for Poland.**

The total amount available for the mobilisation of the EUSF at the beginning of 2018 was **EUR 421 142 057**, being the sum of the remaining 2018 allocation of EUR 280 371 754, plus the remaining 2017 allocation of EUR 140 770 303 that remained unspent and was carried over to 2018.

The amount that may be mobilised at this stage of the year 2018 is **EUR 173 389 397**. 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 as stipulated by Article 10(1) of the MFF regulation and minus EUR 104 166 951 mobilised for Greece, Spain, France and Portugal earlier this year.

This mobilisation is accompanied by draft amending budget (DAB) No 4/2018 that proposes to enter the necessary appropriations in the general budget 2018.