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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

2023 European Union Solidarity Fund Annual Report

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INTRODUCTION

Article 12 of Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund¹ ('the Regulation') lays down that the Commission must present a report on the activity of the EU Solidarity Fund ('EUSF') in the previous year to the European Parliament and to the Council. This report therefore describes the activities of the EUSF in 2023. It summarises (i) the applications received, (ii) the financial contributions proposed and approved, and (iii) the cases closed during the reporting period of calendar year 2023. The Commission assessed all applications according to the criteria laid down in the Regulation.

In **2023**, the Commission received **five new applications** for financial contributions from the EUSF, namely from Greece (floods), Italy (Emilia-Romagna region floods), Austria (floods), Slovenia (floods) and Türkiye (earthquake). Four applications concerned 'major natural disasters', and one concerned a 'natural disaster in a neighbouring country'. All applications were assessed as eligible according to the criteria in the Regulation.

Italy, Slovenia and Greece requested advance payments. Within a few weeks of receiving the applications, the Commission granted all advance payments and paid a total of around EUR 220.09 million.

In the case of the earthquake in Türkiye, the implementing decision was adopted in November 2023 and the Delegation Agreement was signed in February 2024. The implementing decisions on the other four successful applications in 2023 (Greece, Italy, Austria, Slovenia) were adopted in November and December 2024. Moreover, the Commission closed two EUSF cases in 2023.

Annex I lists the 'major natural disaster' damage thresholds applicable in 2023 for mobilising the EUSF. Annex II presents an overview of the applications received in 2023, including the relevant financial information.

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED IN 2023:

The Commission received five applications for a financial contribution from the EUSF in 2023. They all reached the Commission within the legal deadline of 'no later than 12 weeks after the first occurrence of damage' (Article 4(1) of the Regulation). Four applications concerned 'major natural disasters' and one concerned a 'natural disaster in a neighbouring country'.

Detailed financial tables regarding these applications can be found in Annex II to this report.

TÜRKIYE - EARTHQUAKES

On 6 February 2023, two major earthquakes measuring 7.8M_w and 7.5M_w magnitude² hit southern Türkiye in the region of Kahramanmaraş, close to the border with northern Syria. On 20 February 2023, another powerful earthquake measuring 6.3M_w hit the province of Hatay. These major earthquakes created widespread damage and claimed tens of thousands of lives. There were more than 10 000 aftershocks in the three weeks that followed. Significant

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 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 of 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 of the Council of 30 March 2020 (OJ L 99, 31.3.2020, p. 9).

² M_w - 'Richter' seismic magnitude scale or moment magnitude scale.

material losses were suffered in 11 provinces. According to the damage assessment, close to 1 million buildings were damaged, of which approximately 280 000 collapsed or sustained severe damage. The earthquakes severely damaged road, railway, communication, energy, natural gas supply networks and water infrastructure. It is estimated that 14 million people, or 16% of the Turkish population, were affected.

In the months which followed the disaster, 332 tent cities and 189 container cities were set up in the affected region. Nearly 1.6 million people were provided with emergency shelter in the earthquake-stricken region. In other provinces, 330 000 citizens affected by the disaster were provided with accommodation. In addition, of the approximately 3.5 million Syrians living under temporary protection in Türkiye, more than 1.7 million were living in the affected region.

On 20 April 2023, Türkiye submitted an application for a contribution from the EUSF to finance emergency and recovery operations following the earthquakes. Since Türkiye is involved in accession negotiations with the EU it was eligible to apply for assistance from the EUSF in accordance Article 2(1) of the Regulation.

The Turkish authorities estimated the total direct damage at EUR 81.7 billion, of which the Commission accepted EUR 78.8 billion as eligible total direct damage. This amount exceeded the applicable absolute ‘major natural disaster’ threshold of EUR 3 billion in 2011 prices, equating to EUR 3.804 billion in 2023 prices. This therefore qualified the disaster as a ‘major natural disaster’.

Following the Commission’s proposal COM(2023) 381 of 23 August 2023, on 4 October 2023 the budgetary authority approved a payment of EUR 400 million from the EUSF to Türkiye. On 17 November 2023, the Commission adopted Implementing Decision C(2023) 7975 awarding a financial contribution from the EUSF.

Türkiye’s status as a country negotiating accession to the EU required it to sign a Delegation Agreement with the European Commission. That Agreement was signed in February 2024, following which EUR 400 million was paid on 19 April 2024.

ITALY - EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION FLOODS

Between 1 and 17 May 2023, the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy was hit by heavy rain and flooding. Seven provinces in the central-eastern sector of the region were affected, with extremely heavy downpours and high cumulative rainfall occurring in particular in hilly and mountainous areas. The total cumulative rainfall was between 200 and 500 mm. The consequences of the subsequent flooding were severe. On top of the extensive economic losses resulting from damage to infrastructure and to public and private assets, 14 people lost their lives. More than 1 500 landslides were triggered by the extreme weather conditions, which heavily damaged roads, buildings, public utilities and watercourses.

The Italian authorities estimated the total direct damage at EUR 8.53 billion which the Commission accepted fully. This amount exceeded the ‘major natural disaster’ threshold for Italy of 0.6% of its gross national income, which equated to EUR 3.8 billion in 2023. This therefore qualified the disaster as a ‘major natural disaster’.

On 24 July 2023, Italy submitted an application for a financial contribution from the EUSF to finance emergency and recovery operations following the floods in May 2023. Italy requested an advance payment.

The Commission awarded an advance of EUR 94 708 385 to Italy by Implementing Decision C(2023) 7823 of 13 November 2023. That amount was paid in November 2023.

Following the Commission's proposal COM(2024) 325 of 27 August 2024, the budgetary authority approved a payment of EUR 378 833 540 from the EUSF to Italy. On 18 December 2024, the Commission adopted Implementing Decision C(2024) 9259 awarding a financial contribution from the EUSF. The balance of EUR 284 125 155 was paid in December 2024.

SLOVENIA - FLOODS

Between 3 and 6 August 2023, a strong low-pressure system caused extensive rainfall in Slovenia. Torrential downpours triggered large-scale flooding, landslides, and mudslides. Most precipitation occurred in the northern half of Slovenia where up to 150-200 mm of rainfall was recorded. The scale of the flooding was unprecedented and involved Slovenia's largest rivers. The high waters destroyed roads, bridges, drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, energy infrastructure, urban spaces, agricultural land, and numerous homes.

The Slovenian authorities estimated the total direct damage at close to EUR 10 billion, of which the Commission accepted EUR 7.32 billion as eligible total direct damage. This amount exceeded the 'major natural disaster' threshold for Slovenia of 0.6% of its gross national income, which equated to EUR 308.8 million in 2023. This therefore qualified the disaster as a 'major natural disaster'.

On 20 October 2023, Slovenia submitted an application for a financial contribution from the EUSF to finance emergency and recovery operations following the floods in August 2023. Slovenia requested an advance payment.

The Commission awarded an advance of EUR 100 000 000 to Slovenia by Implementing Decision C(2023) 8168 of 23 November 2023. That amount was paid in December 2023.

Following the Commission's proposal COM(2024) 325 of 27 August 2024, the budgetary authority approved a payment of EUR 428 405 059 from the EUSF to Slovenia. On 20 November 2024, the Commission adopted Implementing Decision C(2024) 8331 awarding a financial contribution from the EUSF. The balance of EUR 328 405 059 was paid in December 2024.

AUSTRIA - FLOODS

Between 3 and 6 August 2023, heavy rain caused damage to a range of public and private infrastructure in southern Austria, in particular in southern Carinthia and Styria. The rainfall flooded buildings, cellars, garages, forests and fields and triggered over 900 mudflows and landslides. More than 120 municipalities suffered storm damage, including isolated power outages due to high groundwater. Damages were also reported in neighbouring provinces such as Salzburg and Burgenland.

The Austrian authorities estimated the total direct damage at EUR 208 million which the Commission accepted. They submitted an application under the 'neighbouring country natural disaster' criterion, according to which assistance from the EUSF may also be mobilised for any natural disaster in an eligible State that is also a 'major natural disaster' in a neighbouring

eligible State. As the same natural disaster qualified as a ‘major natural disaster’ in Slovenia, Austria’s application was eligible for a contribution from the EUSF without a specific threshold.

On 19 October 2023, Austria submitted an application for a financial contribution from the EUSF to finance emergency and recovery operations following the floods in August 2023.

Following the Commission’s proposal COM(2024) 325 of 27 August 2024, the budgetary authority approved a payment of EUR 5 199 245 from the EUSF to Austria. On 16 December 2024, the Commission adopted Implementing Decision C(2024) 8860 awarding a financial contribution from the EUSF. The contribution was paid in December 2024.

GREECE – THESSALY REGION FLOODS

Between 4 and 11 September 2023, a powerful and widespread storm producing extreme levels of rainfall swept through parts of Greece, resulting in catastrophic flooding at multiple locations in the centre of the country, particularly in Thessaly. Total cumulative rainfall was between 400 and 1 000 mm in the affected regions. In the course of the storm, most of the region received the equivalent of an average year’s worth of rain. The torrential rain caused major flooding in central Greece, leaving vast areas under water. The flooding caused serious damage to infrastructure, turned streets into rivers, brought down buildings and bridges, and left whole villages submerged. On top of the extensive economic losses resulting from damage to infrastructure and to public and private assets, 17 people lost their lives.

The Greek authorities estimated the total direct damage at EUR 2.33 billion which the Commission accepted. This amount exceeded the ‘major natural disaster’ threshold for Greece of 0.6% of its gross national income, which equated to EUR 1.09 billion in 2023. This therefore qualified the disaster as a ‘major natural disaster’.

On 20 November 2023, Greece submitted an application for a financial contribution from the EUSF to finance emergency and recovery operations following the floods in Thessaly in September 2023. Greece requested an advance payment.

The Commission awarded an advance of EUR 25 382 237 to Greece by Implementing Decision C(2024) 505 of 23 January 2024. That amount was paid in February 2024.

Following the Commission’s proposal COM(2024) 325 of 27 August 2024, the budgetary authority approved a payment of EUR 101 528 949 from the EUSF to Greece. On 22 November 2024, the Commission adopted Implementing Decision C(2024) 8417 awarding a financial contribution from the EUSF. The balance of EUR 76 146 712 was paid in December 2024.

FINANCING

The individual amounts of assistance proposed by the Commission were calculated using the method that was decided on in 2002 and has been applied in all subsequent cases. It is based on the accepted total direct damage caused by the disaster in relation to the relative wealth of the affected state as reflected by the threshold for a major disaster (see Annex I).

Accordingly, for ‘major natural disasters’, a progressive two-step system is applied whereby the country receives a lower rate of aid of 2.5% of the total direct damage for the part of the damage below the threshold and a higher rate of aid of 6% for the part of the damage exceeding the threshold. The two amounts are added up. ‘Regional natural disasters’ and ‘neighbouring country natural disasters’ receive 2.5% of the total direct damage.

Once the European Parliament and the Council had approved the mobilisation of the EUSF and made the necessary budget appropriations available in the EU budget, the Commission adopted implementing decisions awarding the assistance to the individual countries and then paid the full amount. In cases where an advance had been awarded, only the balance of the full contribution was paid.

The annexes to the implementing decisions included a generic description of the intended use of the money, listed the authorities nominated by the beneficiary States to process the EUSF contribution and named the independent authority responsible for audit and control.

During the reporting period, the European Parliament and the Council, as the budgetary authority, approved three financial contributions from the EUSF as proposed by the Commission. The Commission presented its proposal for the mobilisation of the EUSF in one group:

- On 28 August 2023, the Commission issued a proposal³ for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the mobilisation of the EUSF to provide assistance to Romania, Italy and Türkiye following natural disasters in 2022 and 2023. This proposal was accompanied by Decision No 10/2023 that proposed to transfer EUR 446 836 375 from the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (‘the SEAR’) reserve line to the EUSF operational budget line, both in commitments and payments.

The proposal was adopted by the budgetary authority on 4 October 2023 which awarded EUR 454 835 030 of EUSF assistance to: (i) Romania in relation to the drought in the summer of 2022; (ii) Italy in relation to the flood in the Marche region in September 2022; and (iii) Türkiye in relation to the earthquakes in February 2023. Following the adoption of the respective implementing decisions awarding assistance, EUR 33 895 935 was paid to Romania on 14 December 2023, EUR 20 939 095 was paid to Italy on 14 December 2023, and EUR 400 000 000 was paid to Türkiye on 19 April 2024.

MID-TERM REVISION OF THE MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2021-27

In June 2023, due to growing demands on the EUSF, the Commission proposed as part of the mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to increase the ceiling of the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (SEAR), including the EUSF, by EUR 2.5 billion (in 2023 prices) for the remaining four years of the MFF 2021-27. The aim of this proposal was to bolster the EU’s capacity to respond to crises and emergency situations. The mid-term revision was finalised in 2024, and its outcome will be analysed in the 2024 EUSF annual report.

³ COM(2023) 381 of 23.8.2023.

CLOSURES

Article 8(3) of the Regulation lays down that within 24 months of the date of disbursement of the financial contribution, the beneficiary State must present a report on the financial execution ('implementation report') with a statement substantiating the expenditure ('validity statement').

The Commission closed two EUSF cases in 2023.

Hungary, COVID-19 pandemic in 2020: the financial contribution from the EUSF amounted to EUR 39 723 926. The Hungarian authorities submitted the implementation report and statement of validity in June 2022. Based on the information provided by Hungary, the eligible expenditure amounted of EUR 39 723 926 and no irregularities were found. The Commission found that no financial correction was needed, and the file was closed in October 2023.

Italy, severe weather in 2019: the financial contribution from the EUSF amounted to EUR 211 707 982. The Italian authorities submitted the implementation report and the statement of validity in February 2023. Based on the information provided by Italy, the eligible expenditure amounted to EUR 213 626 902.82 which was more than the EUSF contribution. The Commission found that no financial correction was needed, and the file was closed in December 2023.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2023, the trend towards severe natural disasters continued, from unprecedented flooding in the Union to a catastrophic earthquake in Türkiye.

These events not only claimed lives but also put immense strain on the economies and ecosystems of the Union and candidate countries, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated action to combat climate change and build resilience for the future.

These disasters also put strain on the EUSF's already stretched budget. The EUR 400 million paid to Türkiye is the highest amount of assistance ever paid to a country negotiating accession to the EU. This amount paid out by the EUSF is significant when viewed against the total EUSF budget for 2023 which was only EUR 500 million in 2011 prices and EUR 662.45 million in 2023 prices. At the same time, the EUR 100 million advance payment to Slovenia following the floods in August 2023 was also a record high for the EUSF.

To conclude, the size of the applications for assistance received in 2023 and the increased pressure on the EUSF budget confirmed the significant need for the Fund's support.