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PRESS RELEASE

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EU Solidarity Fund: Commission moves to help Serbia, Croatia and Bulgaria after May's major floods

EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, has today announced an aid package worth nearly €80 million proposed by the European Commission for Serbia, Croatia and Bulgaria after flooding disasters struck the countries in May and June 2014.

The proposed aid of €60.2m to Serbia, €8.96m to Croatia and €10.5m to Bulgaria is to help cover part of the emergency costs incurred by the public authorities in these three countries due to the disasters. In particular, it will help to restore vital infrastructure and services, reimburse the cost of emergency and rescue operations, and help cover some of the clean-up costs in the disaster-stricken regions.

Serbia, which is currently in negotiations to join the EU - and therefore eligible for the Fund - suffered the worst of the damage. The floods most severely hit the districts of Kolubara, Mačva, Moravcki, Pomoravlje, and part of Belgrade, with detrimental effects for some 1.6 million inhabitants. Essential power links were damaged, while drinking water suffers on-going pollution.

Commissioner Hahn, who oversees the Fund and signed today's proposal, said *"This decision reflects the very nature of this Fund, which is solidarity with our fellow Member States and those countries negotiating accession in their time of need after natural disasters. The European Solidarity Fund helps these countries get back on their feet and regain stability which is threatened by the severe damage to economic sectors such as tourism, or destruction of essential infrastructure. This proposed support will help Serbia, Bulgaria and Croatia to recover from the terrible flooding earlier this year and it will help to reimburse rescue and clean-up costs in the affected regions."*

He added: *"These amounts are specific and targeted to help address the immediate and direct impact of natural disasters. We have now approved these grants at the Commission. We also reformed the EU Solidarity Fund rules which entered into force on 28 June 2014 and simplified the existing system and criteria so that aid can be paid out more rapidly than before. Now we trust member states will also show solidarity and stand by their commitments in swiftly agreeing the funds set aside for this purpose."*

The support, under the European Solidarity Fund, still needs to be approved by the European Parliament and the Council. An amending budget is likely to be proposed by the commission in the coming days.

Background

Serbia: During May 2014 severe weather hit Serbia leading to some of the worst floods in living memory causing massive destruction of public and private infrastructure, as well as damaging hundreds of thousands of households. There were 60 casualties and almost

32,000 people were rescued by emergency services, with around 5 000 needing temporary accommodation.

The open pit mines Tamnava West Field, Veliki Crljeni, as well parts of the Kolubara coal basin were flooded. These coal mines are producing the coal for the major power plant "Nikola Tesla A" in Obrenovac which generates about 63% of electricity for the whole country. The hardest hit economic sectors are energy, mining, and agriculture but significant damages were also inflicted on transport infrastructure (roads, bridges and railways), as well as on numerous facilities for flood and coastal protection. The Serbian authorities estimate the total direct damage caused by the disaster at €1,106 billion (six times Serbia's threshold of €174,649 million for mobilising the EUSF).

Croatia: The national authorities estimate damages worth €297.6m, well above the country's threshold for mobilising the Fund. Five Eastern counties in the Sava river basin were affected: Osijek-Baranja, Vukovar-Srijem, Brod-Posavina, Požega-Slavonija and Sisak-Moslavina. Water levels partly exceeded the highest ever recorded, with flooding causing considerable damage to residential, commercial, communal and infrastructure facilities, as well as to agricultural crops and livestock. Over 26 000 people had to be evacuated. Energy networks failed, roads and bridges were seriously damaged. Some 2,700 residential buildings and over 4 000 farm buildings were flooded, many of which suffered structural damage.

Bulgaria: Some €311,3m worth of damage was reported, again above the threshold for the Fund. Flooding on 19 June 2014 significantly affected the Eastern, North-Eastern and Central parts of the country. The regions of Varna, Dobrich, Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo, Burgas, Montana, Kyustendil, Plovdiv, Haskovo, Yambol and the Sofia-region suffered most. In the coastal municipality of Asparuhovo (Varna) heavy rainfall and a tidal wave destroyed houses and farms, flooded buildings and streets and destroyed cars. Electricity and communication networks throughout the region were disrupted. 15 casualties were reported, while hundreds had to be evacuated and temporarily housed. There are damages to the public infrastructure and facilities in the areas of energy, water and water resources, telecommunications, transport, health, education, emergency services, cultural heritage and protected natural areas.

The total annual allocation available for the Solidarity Fund in 2014 is €530,604m (€500m in 2011 prices). In order to take account of the lower annual allocation introduced in 2014 (€500m plus any remainder of the preceding year compared with €1 billion before) and to avoid early depletion of the Fund, the maximum financial contribution for a given disaster may not exceed two-thirds of the annual allocation of the Fund - €353,736m in 2014.

The financial contribution from the Fund is calculated based on the total direct damage resulting from a disaster. This aid may only be used for essential emergency and recovery operations as defined in Article 3 of the Regulation.

The European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was set up to support EU member states and accession countries by offering financial support after major natural disasters. The Fund was created in the wake of the severe floods in Central Europe in the summer of 2002.

The revised EU Solidarity Fund Regulation entered into force on 28 June 2014 and simplifies the existing rules so that aid can be paid out more rapidly than before. The newly introduced use of advance payments will become possible for the first time for Member States from 2015.

More information

Decisions: [EU Solidarity Fund](#)

EUSF Reform: [Press Release](#) and [MEMO/13/723](#)

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