



**Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament**

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Brussels, 20 September 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,

I am writing to you with great concern and urgency following my visit to the devastated region of Thessaly, which was hit by storm Daniel on 5 September.

This was the strongest storm ever recorded in Greece with more than 600mm of water falling in less than 24 hours. As a result, more than 72,000 hectares have been flooded, destroying almost 23% of the farming area of Greece. More than 100,000 animals have been killed (sheep, cows, pigs). The destruction is colossal, especially in the regions of Trikala and Karditsa.

In addition to the destruction of houses, agricultural and livestock farms, basic infrastructure has been destroyed.

As tens of thousands of animals have drowned, the floodwater is now considered toxic, posing a long-term risk to public health. I was particularly shocked to see during my visit, that after nearly two weeks, the authorities have not yet intervened to remove the dead animals, posing a huge long-term health risk to the area by contaminating water resources.

I personally travelled to the area and met with the affected citizens, their families, farmers, and local authorities, so please allow me to pass on their distress and calls for help. I was particularly appalled by the meetings I had in Metamorfosis, Trikala and the village of Keramidion, which was isolated for more than 12 days.

The scale of the impact of the flood calls for extraordinary and urgent measures in the spirit of European solidarity. At the same time, we need to work and prepare beyond the short term and plan for medium-term and long-term actions.

I welcome your commitments of 12 September and welcome your openness for flexibility that would allow funds to urgently be made available to Greece. I believe that Europe should do it utmost within the treaties and in compliance with the current financial rules to allow for swift financial support in full transparency and accountability.

We need to pay special attention to the agricultural sector that is the core economic base of the affected regions, I met with farmers who have lost all their investments, and whose land could take a long time to recover and become fertile again. We must be ready to help those farmers to rebuild and repopulate their farms as soon as possible.

Cohesion policy has a major role in ensuring solid disaster risk management, restoring infrastructure, supporting SMEs and providing social housing for people in need. Furthermore, the European Social Fund can support short-term work schemes in companies currently unable to operate. We encourage the Commission to make full use of cohesion policy's ability to support long-term investments to increase the resilience of these communities.

Beyond the urgency, this is a clear sign that climate emergencies are becoming more and more severe, and that Europe should strengthen its capacity to act and prepare for such events.

The limits of the European Solidarity Fund need to be revisited, given the increasing frequency of climate disasters.

The Union should prioritise preventative actions and increase the pressure to implement the EU legislation fully and in a timely manner, in this case the river basin management plans and flood risk management plans.

I urge the Commission, together with the Greek authorities, to put in place a plan, including regional and local authorities, in order to implement the necessary measures. We have to move from a logic of reacting to catastrophes to one based on prevention and preparedness. Those are our best tools to protect our citizens, this goes not only for floods but also for forest fires and all kinds of climate emergencies.

I count on your support!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Iratxe García Pérez', with a large flourish at the end.

Iratxe García Pérez

President of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament

CC:

Commissioner Johannes Hahn
Commissioner Nicolas Schmit
Commissioner Elisa Ferreira
Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski
Commissioner Janez Lenarčič