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P9_TA(2021)0023

Mitigating the consequences of earthquakes in Croatia

European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on mitigating the consequences of earthquakes in Croatia (2021/2504(RSP))

(2021/C 456/17)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union,

— having regard to Article 174, Article 175, third paragraph, and Article 212 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

— having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund ([1]), amended by Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 ([2]) and Regulation (EU) 2020/461 ([3]),

— having regard to Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism ([4]), amended by Regulation (EU) 2018/1475 ([5]) and Decision (EU) 2019/420 ([6]),

— having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 May 2018 and the subsequent update of 14 January 2020 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument (COM(2020)0023),

— having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 ([7]), amended by Regulation (EU) 2015/1839 ([8]), Regulation (EU) 2016/2135 ([9]), Regulation (EU) 2017/825 ([10]), Regulation (EU) 2017/1199 ([11]), Regulation (EU) 2017/2305 ([12]), Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 ([13]), Regulation (EU) 2018/1719 ([14]), Regulation (EU) 2019/711 ([15]), Regulation (EU) 2020/460 ([16]), Regulation (EU) 2020/558 ([17]), Regulation (EU) 2020/1041 ([18]) and Regulation (EU) 2020/1542 ([19]),

([1]) OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3.
([2]) OJ L 189, 27.6.2014, p. 143.
([3]) OJ L 99, 31.3.2020, p. 9.
([4]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924.
([5]) OJ L 250, 4.10.2018, p. 1.
([6]) OJ L 77 I, 20.3.2019, p. 1.
([7]) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.
([8]) OJ L 270, 15.10.2015, p. 1.
([9]) OJ L 338, 13.12.2016, p. 34.
([10]) OJ L 129, 19.5.2017, p. 1.
([11]) OJ L 176, 7.7.2017, p. 1.
([12]) OJ L 335, 15.12.2017, p. 1.
([13]) OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1.
([14]) OJ L 291, 16.11.2018, p. 5.
([15]) OJ L 123, 10.5.2019, p. 3.
([16]) OJ L 99, 31.3.2020, p. 5.
([17]) OJ L 130, 24.4.2020, p. 1.
([18]) OJ L 231, 17.7.2020, p. 4.
([19]) OJ L 356, 26.10.2020, p. 1.

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— having regard to Council Regulation (EU) 2016/369 of 15 March 2016 on the provision of emergency support within the Union ([20]), amended by Council Regulation (EU) 2020/521 ([21]),

— having regard to the Commission communication of 14 October 2020 entitled 'A Renovation Wave for Europe — greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives (COM(2020)0662),

— having regard to Regulation (EU) No 375/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ('EU Aid Volunteers initiative') ([22]), corrected by a Corrigendum on 24 April 2014 ([23]),

— having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid ([24]), amended by Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003 ([25]), Regulation (EC) No 219/2009 ([26]) and Regulation (EU) 2019/1243 ([27]),

— having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management ([28]), in particular point 11 thereof, and to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources ([29]),

— having regard to the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 2020 on the mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund to provide assistance to Croatia and Poland in relation to a natural disaster and to provide for the payment of advances to Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal and Spain in relation to a public health emergency (COM(2020)0960),

— having regard to the Council decision of 30 October 2020 adopting the Council's position on draft amending budget No 9 of the European Union for the financial year 2020 ([30]),

— having regard to its resolution of 24 November 2020 on the Council position on Draft amending budget No 9/2020 of the European Union for the financial year 2020 accompanying the proposal to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund to provide assistance to Croatia and Poland in relation to a natural disaster and to provide for the payment of advances to Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal and Spain in relation to a public health emergency ([31]),

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 28 November 2008 calling for civil protection capabilities to be enhanced by a European mutual assistance system building on the civil protection modular approach,

— having regard to its resolution of 14 November 2007 on the regional impact of earthquakes ([32]),

— having regard to its resolution of 19 June 2008 on stepping up the Union's disaster response capacity ([33]),

— having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

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([20]) OJ L 70, 16.3.2016, p. 1.
([21]) OJ L 117, 15.4.2020, p. 3.
([22]) OJ L 122, 24.4.2014, p. 1.
([23]) OJ L 123, 19.5.2015, p. 122.
([24]) OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, p. 1.
([25]) OJ L 284, 31.10.2003, p. 1.
([26]) OJ L 87, 31.3.2009, p. 109.
([27]) OJ L 198, 25.7.2019, p. 241.
([28]) OJ C 373, 20.12.2013, p. 1.
([29]) OJ L 433 I, 22.12.2020, p. 28.
([30]) OJ C 372 I, 4.11.2020, p. 1.
([31]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0313.
([32]) OJ C 282 E, 6.11.2008, p. 269.
([33]) OJ C 286 E, 27.11.2009, p. 15.

A. whereas major devastating earthquakes have struck Croatia over the past year, with one hitting the city of Zagreb and the counties of Zagreb and Krapina-Zagorje on 22 March 2020 with a magnitude of 5,5, another two hitting Sisak-Moslavina county on 28 and 29 December 2020 with magnitudes of 5,2 and 6,4 respectively, and a final earthquake hitting the same county on 6 January 2021 with a magnitude of 5,0;

B. whereas the earthquake in March 2020 was the strongest to hit the Zagreb area since 1880, damaging over 26 000 buildings, of which 1 900 were declared unusable, and causing over EUR 11,5 billion in damage;

C. whereas the city of Zagreb and the counties of Zagreb and Krapina-Zagorje are still recovering from that earthquake, which caused one fatality, left 26 people injured, and had enormous socio-economic, cultural and infrastructural repercussions and long-lasting psychological effects;

D. whereas the European Parliament approved an allocation of EUR 683,7 million from the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) in November 2020 to deal with the aftermath of the Zagreb earthquake in March 2020;

E. whereas the most recent earthquakes in central Croatia practically destroyed the town of Petrinja and seriously affected the nearby towns of Glina, Sisak, Hrvatska Kostajnica, Majske Poljane and other villages in Sisak-Moslavina county, as well as Zagreb and Karlovac counties;

F. whereas the tremors caused eight fatalities and left 36 people injured, with 30 people saved from the rubble; whereas over 45 000 buildings ([34]) were damaged and more than 70 000 people were directly affected, with the earthquake also being felt in Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and, to a lesser extent, in Germany, Slovakia and Czechia;

G. whereas on 22 March and 29 December 2020 Croatia activated the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and requested winter tents, lighting systems and lighting towers, electric heaters, folding beds, sleeping bags and housing containers;

H. whereas on 4 January 2021 the Croatian Government declared a state of catastrophe in the hardest hit counties, specifically Sisak-Moslavina county and parts of Zagreb and Karlovac counties;

I. whereas aftershocks continued in the following weeks and are still being felt in the affected areas and well beyond the epicentre of the strike; whereas people are facing constant distress amid uncertainty and fears of possible new tremors, which continue to happen on a daily basis and pose a risk of further buildings collapsing owing to the occurrence of subsequent earthquakes; whereas all of this has been happening in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could trigger mental health issues and post-traumatic illness in the upcoming period;

J. whereas the regions and cities affected have suffered tremendous material and socio-economic damage not seen since the Homeland War in the 1990s and need to be rebuilt urgently and swiftly, in addition to a long-lasting recovery programme; whereas the quakes have driven large numbers of the inhabitants of the affected areas to the brink of despair and caused various indirect forms of damage in the surrounding areas; whereas the areas in question were already extremely socially disadvantaged and poor in economic terms and whereas the recent earthquakes will have further negative financial and socio-psychological consequences for their residents and the entire region;

K. whereas according to estimates, roughly 90 % of the houses in Petrinja need to be pulled down; whereas smaller parts and villages around Glina, such as Majske Poljane, were partly without access to electricity and water even before the earthquake, which has now left residents further isolated from basic infrastructure and services;

L. whereas there are indications that the earthquakes have caused significant damage to embankments and flood defence systems, which may bring about further harm to the already devastated areas in the current season of increased rainfall and floods;

M. whereas local and regional infrastructure has been severely damaged, historical and cultural heritage ruined, and economic activities haltered, particularly agriculture, livestock and animals, on which the local population is most reliant;

([34]) According to preliminary estimates by the Croatian Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets (https://mgipu.gov.hr/en).

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N. whereas local agricultural facilities such as buildings, machinery, equipment, production fields and feed storage have been severely damaged and whereas a significant number of livestock and pet animals perished or were left behind, suffering the consequences of the earthquake;

O. whereas the earthquake has significantly hindered the functioning of public and health institutions and infrastructure such as roads and electricity; whereas special focus should be placed on building the basic infrastructure that was lacking prior to the earthquake and whereas access to basic needs and services should be promptly re-established in all parts of the affected areas;

P. whereas a significant number of schools have to be completely demolished and some university buildings, such as the Faculties of Metallurgy and of Teacher Training in Sisak, can no longer be used for the purposes of carrying out their educational activities at the beginning of the new school semester; whereas these institutions had already been put under strain by the COVID-19 pandemic, and now the children can neither attend classes physically nor use the online education facilities from their homes;

Q. whereas Sisak Health Centre had to be swiftly evacuated moments after the earthquake, exposing patients with COVID-19 and other patients to increased health risk, including persons with disabilities and children; whereas the health centres in Glina and Petrinja, including pharmacies, suffered major damage; whereas the earthquakes have placed an additional burden on the Croatian health and care systems and have accelerated the spread of COVID-19, particularly in the affected areas;

R. whereas some territories in the European Union are more vulnerable than others and are at high seismic risk; whereas sustainable reconstruction efforts and earthquake-proof and resilient building projects need to be properly coordinated and monitored in order to remedy the economic and social losses, while respecting transparency, best practices and public procurement rules;

S. whereas the rapid and professional reaction by the national, regional and local authorities, civil protection and rescue units, the Croatian Armed Forces, various humanitarian organisations and in particular hundreds of volunteers have greatly mitigated the immediate consequences of the earthquake;

T. whereas the COVID-19 crisis and the spread of the virus further complicates the execution of rescue and recovery activities; whereas the COVID-19 pandemic is a burden on the Croatian economy and necessitates additional financial resources;

1. Expresses its deepest solidarity and sympathies with all the individuals affected by the earthquakes, with their families, and with Croatia's national, regional and local authorities involved in relief efforts;

2. Praises the ceaseless and swift efforts undertaken in the devastated areas by the rescue units, civil protection forces, Croatian Armed Forces, volunteers, civil society organisations, international organisations, local, regional and national authorities, and all other relevant actors in an effort to save lives, contain the damage and bring back the basic activities needed to maintain a decent standard of living; expresses its gratitude to all individuals, organisations and initiatives that expedited these efforts and sent support and assistance;

3. Welcomes the solidarity of the Member States and other countries that are lending their support to this emergency in the form of mutual assistance, including basic necessities, financial aid, volunteers and other assistance, thereby helping to relieve the burden of the interventions; welcomes the solidarity shown by the EU institutions and the international community through mutual assistance in emergency situations; stresses, therefore, the importance of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism in fostering cooperation among national civil protection authorities across Europe in adverse situations and in minimising the effects of exceptional events;

4. Calls on the Commission and the Croatian authorities to identify all possible ways to provide immediate help and support in ensuring decent and safe living conditions for the many people who have been deprived of their homes and still lack safe accommodation, at least in the form of containers, which could provide a minimum degree of shelter during the harsh winter conditions over the coming months;

5. Calls for particular attention to be devoted to persons with disabilities, elderly people, and children and adolescents with critical needs, as the most vulnerable individuals in society; welcomes, in that regard, all assistance already provided by organisations on the ground;

6. Stresses the importance of taking particular care over the large number of livestock, farm and pet animals injured or dispersed following the earthquake; welcomes, in this regard, the considerable efforts of and collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture, local and regional authorities, and animal welfare NGOs;

7. Underlines the seriousness of the situation on the ground, which is putting considerable and intense financial pressure on the national, regional and local public authorities in Croatia and may lead to irreversible population decline in the affected areas, with the people affected facing devastating social and economic consequences and extreme psychological and social pressures;

8. Encourages the Croatian authorities, together with Commission experts, to swiftly and thoroughly assess the overall damage in Sisak-Moslavina county in order to begin renovation and seismic-resistant reconstruction work as soon as conditions allow; stresses that great importance needs to be attached to stimulating sustainable economic revitalisation and people's livelihoods when the regional recovery and reconstruction work begins;

9. Encourages Croatia's national, regional and local authorities to closely monitor the reconstruction activities and to ensure that they comply with requirements for earthquake-resistant buildings and infrastructure and apply best professional practices and expertise from other Member States; calls on the Croatian authorities and the institutions responsible to take account of the experiences from the post-war reconstruction process in the affected areas in order to clarify whether irregularities in building practices led to poor quality and contributed to the devastating consequences of the recent earthquakes; welcomes the Croatian Government's decision to publish the register of companies which took part in the reconstruction process as a first step towards this aim;

10. Highlights the problems of forecasting associated with earthquake systems in the highly seismic regions of Southeast Europe; calls on the Commission, together with the Member States, to strengthen research and education with a view to putting in place a system that ensures better preparedness in order to prevent and manage similar crises and minimise the impact of similar disasters;

11. Calls for greater coordination and cooperation between the research and development institutions of the Member States, in particular those facing similar risks; calls for enhanced early warning systems in the Member States and the creation and strengthening of links between the various early warning systems;

12. Calls on the Croatian authorities to prioritise renovation in its recovery and resilience plan, devoting particular attention to comprehensive preventative renovations that ensure the highest seismic standards for housing and buildings at greatest risk in its most earthquake-prone regions;

13. Emphasises that in cases of severe earthquakes, such as those recently witnessed in Croatia, mitigating the consequences takes considerable time, which should be taken into account when it comes to a future revision of the EUSF to ensure that there is sufficient absorption time for funding beyond the current application deadlines; underlines the importance, moreover, of strengthening EUSF spending not only for damage repair, but also for resilience in relation to climate change, natural disasters and public health emergencies in order to emerge stronger from disasters;

14. Welcomes the support from the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund for disaster risk prevention, resilience, energy and seismic retrofitting in the current financial period; encourages the Croatian authorities to include these measures in their planning and programming for the 2021-2027 EU budget allocations accordingly; calls on the Commission to demonstrate flexibility with regard to programming and the amending of national operational programmes when it comes to dealing with natural disasters;

15. Calls on the Commission, in cooperation with the EU and Croatian institutions, to devise a swift way of distributing the necessary financial and other assistance to ensure a speedy recovery of the affected areas, to make all possible financial means available to help Croatia oversee a rapid recovery and provide assistance to all those in need, and to minimise the administrative burden in accessing help and support for people on the ground;

16. Stresses the importance of prioritising residents of the affected areas for COVID-19 vaccination; encourages the Croatian Government to implement the decision it has announced to redirect a significant proportion of its vaccine supply to Sisak-Moslavina county in order to immediately protect the health of all residents, helpers and workers on the ground; welcomes, in that regard, the decision of the Member States to give part of their vaccination supplies to Croatia;

17. Points out to the Commission that the new damage caused by the recent earthquakes to buildings also damaged during the earthquake in March 2020 will require a further assessment and renovation projects; urges the Commission, furthermore, to include targeted measures to deal with earthquakes and their consequences in planning and legislation under the Renovation Wave;

18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Government of Croatia, the regional and local authorities of the affected areas, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.