

**Question for written answer E-002422/2014
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Ecological disaster in Gorski Kotar

Gorski Kotar has been beset this winter by freezing rain, which has done calamitous damage in forests in what is otherwise the most plentifully wooded part of Croatia and a region that is economically dependent on the timber and wood-processing industry.

Fallen, broken, and uprooted trees, equivalent to a volume of wood pulp running into many thousands of cubic metres, account for most of the damage, and repairing it will be an arduous, costly process which Gorski Kotar will take decades to complete.

Apart from the short-term problem of cleaning up in the aftermath of the disaster, there is also the long-term problem, first and foremost as regards replanting the woodlands, conserving habitats, and saving forests and the forest floor.

Reports from the scene speak of an ecological disaster on a scale unprecedented in Gorski Kotar's history. The great dangers lie in the onset of pests and disease, soil erosion, flooding, landslides, and choking of the soil, all of which would destroy the basic characteristics of plant – that is to say, forest – communities in Gorski Kotar.

1. Given that the ecological disaster in Gorski Kotar is one with serious and lasting repercussions on living conditions and economic stability, does the Commission consider it to satisfy the regional eligibility criteria applying to the European Union Solidarity Fund, which would ensure that the Gorski Kotar region could still receive assistance under the Fund even if it fell short of the national threshold?
2. When there are ecological disasters of this kind, does the Commission have any other assistance measures to propose under existing EU instruments?