

## EU rallies around Greece as deadly fire rages on

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News

European humanitarian aid and crisis management Commissioner Christos Stylianides has arrived in Athens to personally coordinate EU assistance being provided to Greece through the EU civil protection mechanism following the deadly fires in the country.



*Photo credit: Natalie Hill*

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It comes with the Greek authorities still looking for dozens of people missing after the deadly wildfires near Athens.

At least 80 people have died, and a search continues for survivors who fled the blaze, including those who escaped to sea by boat.

The fire is thought to have been the deadliest on record in Greece.

The EU is rallying together to support Greece, as deadly wild fires continue to rage in the country. Planes, firefighters and medics are among the resources promised as part of the bloc's civil protection system.

With Athens appealing for help, European Council President Donald Tusk tweeted, "Europe will stand by our Greek friends in these difficult times."

Tusk also confirmed that help was on the way.

On Wednesday, Commission spokesperson Alexander Winterstein told reporters, "During these difficult times, we stand side by side with the Greek people and authorities and I commend the tireless and courageous efforts of the emergency responders. Everything possible will be done to provide support today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes."

As Greece battles to contain the disaster Italy, Germany, Poland and France have all sent help in the form of planes, vehicles and firefighters, while Spain, Turkey, and Cyprus have also offered assistance.

The Commission announced that Italy and Romania have sent four planes and ground forces from Cyprus started operating on Tuesday.

Offers of assistance to Greece through the mechanism were also made by Bulgaria, Croatia, Portugal, Malta and Montenegro.

On Wednesday, Stylianides was due to meet with Greek Prime Minister Tsipras and Kyriakos Mitsotakis, leader of the opposition as well as visit the affected areas and coordinate the EU's support on the ground.

Stylianides said, "Here in Athens I have met the Greek officials to exchange information on developments."

He added, "I reiterated that the EU will continue to do all it takes to help the Greek people and authorities in this heart-breaking situation. We are all in this together. It is a day of grief, but together, as Europeans, we are determined to decisively combat these fires.

"Through our EU civil protection mechanism, we have helped mobilise planes, vehicles, medical personnel and firefighters. We had further offers last night and I thank all countries that have offered support. The priority must continue to be to help those affected for as long as it takes."

The EU Copernicus satellite system has also been activated to provide the authorities with highly specialised maps. The Commission said it also continues to help other member states that have asked for help.

In Sweden, EU support continues with seven planes, over 300 firefighters and 60 vehicles, already operating in the affected areas.

For Latvia, the satellite system has been activated to assist the national authorities with emergency mapping of the risk areas. The Commission co-finances the transport costs of assistance through the civil protection mechanism and links together all civil protection authorities in Europe.

A Commission spokesman said it has proposed to strengthen EU civil protection response through rescEU scheme so that when multiple disasters hit member states they are better prepared to confront them.

On Wednesday, meanwhile, Luca Jahier, President of the EESC pledged the institution's "full solidarity", adding, "Our deep thoughts go to the victims and the families who are mourning their losses in that tragedy. We strongly call on the European Union to implement all possible mechanisms to support the Greek government in responding to this natural disaster.

"This and other similar catastrophes hitting other countries in Europe are the consequence of climate change and a clear warning."

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