

European Union Solidarity Fund

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The Commission presented the European Union Solidarity Fund Annual Report 2012.

The present report presents the activities of the Fund in 2012 covering, as in previous reports, the treatment of pending and new applications and the assessment of implementation reports with a view to preparing these for closure.

Implementation 2012: in the course of 2012, a total of seven applications for Solidarity Fund assistance were received which represents a normal and average year in terms of the number of applications. Two applications were received during the first half of the year and five more followed over the summer and autumn months.

The **seven** applications received in 2012 concerned:

- **two** disasters in Italy (severe winter conditions in major parts of the country, and the earthquakes in Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia and Veneto),
- **four** cases from Spain (forest fires in Valencia, fires in the Canary Island, fires in Malaga and flooding in Andalusia, Murcia and Valencia),
- **one** case from Romania (drought and fires).

Italian applications: the application received from Italy relating to the severe weather conditions of February 2012 could not be accepted by the Commission. However, the second application from Italy relating to the series of earthquakes that struck the regions of Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia and Veneto of May 2012 led to the biggest grant ever in the history of the Solidarity Fund. **An amount of over EUR 670 million was paid out to Italy in December 2012**, just six months after the disaster struck.

Spanish applications: the Spanish applications concerned smaller disasters with damage considerably below the normal threshold for mobilising the Solidarity Fund. **In none of these cases**, the conditions of the Regulation for exceptionally mobilising the Fund under the criteria for “regional disasters” were found not to meet.

Romanian application: the assessment of the application from Romania was still pending by the end of the year.

Other applications: in the course of 2012, the Commission also completed its assessment of two cases pending from 2011. The application from Italy relating to flash floods in Liguria and Tuscany of 2011 was accepted. The application from Cyprus relating to the naval base explosion of 2011 was not accepted.

Total financing granted and main lessons: in the course of 2012, the **Commission granted Solidarity Fund aid amounting to a total of EUR 688 254 041**. Moreover, the management of the Solidarity Fund in 2012 confirmed the experience from preceding years: Major disasters - which are the principal concern of the Solidarity Fund - represent only a small part of applications for aid. **The biggest number of applications relate to smaller disasters below the damage threshold**. The assessment of the latter however reveals that the majority of these cases do not meet the conditions for exceptionally mobilising the Fund. Replacing these rather complicated requirements in the Regulation with a **clear and simple condition** was one of the elements of the Commission’s preparatory work during 2012 for the review of the Solidarity Fund Regulation.

The report noted that the Solidarity Fund proved its ability to cope with such events by making a record amount of aid available within record time. Such results can only be achieved with the good cooperation of the applicant State as was the case here.

By contrast, applications based on the exceptional criteria for “**extraordinary regional disasters**” – again proved to be difficult to assess and were not successful. Five such cases were received during 2012 – none of which could be accepted. Especially those cases where damage remains very limited to a few per cent of the national threshold hardly ever meet the specific conditions of the Regulation.

Modification of the basic criteria for the mobilisation of the Funds in the framework of the 2014-2020 reform: simple and clearer criteria would help potential applicant States assess the likelihood of a successful application better, save unnecessary work and spare them the frustration of having applications rejected.

In this regard, the case of the application relating to the naval base explosion in Cyprus is another example demonstrating that applications relating to man-made disasters will hardly ever meet the eligibility criteria of the Solidarity Fund Regulation because of liability issues, the polluter pays principle and the exclusion of insurable damage from Solidarity Fund aid.

Key provisions of the current Regulation should be adjusted such as:

- the possibility to make advance payments,
- a clear and simple definition of regional disasters,
- a specific provision on drought,
- administrative streamlining,
- the introduction of measures encouraging implementation of relevant EU legislation on disaster risk prevention.