Internal Security Fund: instrument for financial support for external borders and visa 2014-2020

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In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 514/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the Commission presents the results of the interim evaluation of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund.

The report covers:

- Regulation (EU) No 514/2014 (horizontal provisions) as well as:

- the Specific Regulation No 513/2014 establishing as part of the Internal Security Fund the instrument for police cooperation, preventing and combating crime and crisis management (ISF-P);
- this Specific Regulation 515/2014 establishing as part of the Internal Security Fund the instrument for external borders and visa (ISF-BV); and
- the Specific Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

The evaluation covers the period between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2017 and reports on all national programmes, Union actions and emergency assistance financed under the funds.

This summary concerns **Internal Security Fund-Borders (ISF-BV),** which aims to ensure a high level of security in the EU while facilitating legitimate travel, and achieve these two objectives through (i) uniform and high-level control of the external borders and (ii) the efficient processing of Schengen visas. The report notes that since 2009, applications for EU visas have risen by 50 %. The **EU's common visa policy** has also been affected by the migration crisis with the increasing need for cooperation on irregular migration and return.

Budget: the total resources for ISF-BV's implementation over the period 2014-2020 were initially estimated at EUR 2 760 million. This was later reprogrammed to EUR 2.61 billion to take into account the increased allocation for EMAS and Frontex equipment, and the transfer of some part of the funds allocated to the IT systems supporting the management of migration flows at the external borders (e.g. Entry/Exit system, European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)) to EU-Lisa. Around 65 % of the total (EUR 1.6 billion) is allocated to national programmes. In response to unforeseen needs caused by the migration crisis, the amount allocated for emergency assistance significantly increased from an initial 1.3 % to 14.8 % of the total Fund.

Member States have allocated 9 % (EUR 151 million) to the common visa policy objective, **57 % (EUR 928 million) to the borders management objective**, 21 % (EUR 333 million) to operating support, 9 % (EUR 148 million) to the Special Transit Scheme for Lithuania and 4 % (EUR 64 million) for technical assistance

Main findings:

Relevance: the report observes that the fund's original rationale and objectives are still relevant in the aftermath of the migratory crisis. The flexibility offered by the fund, consisting of transfers of money between different objectives, helped to address these changing needs.

Effectiveness: ISF-BV is considered effective in both the areas of common visa policy and integrated border management. This fund helped Member States to (i) purchase equipment to check the authenticity of documents used for visa applications, the development of information system for coordinating visa applications and (ii) procure security equipment for consular representations in third countries. The fund also:

- supported the purchase and upgrade and replacement of border control and surveillance equipment (e.g. document checking devices, communication equipment);
- training for harmonisation of practices on visa issuance, by providing consular staff with technical and up to date information on subjects related to visa and related systems;
- spent around EUR 200 million on specific actions to support the purchase of the European Borders and Coast Guard Agency equipment by 14 Member States, to be used in joint operations.
- used emergency assistance in seven Member States, mainly in Greece, Italy and Bulgaria, and played an important role in addressing the emergency needs at beginning of the period and in bridging the funding gap until the adoption of national programmes.

Coherence: the fund is considered to be coherent with other EU and national interventions, although the report notes room for improvement in terms of potential areas for synergies with the EU's Customs 2020 programme.

EU added value: this was ensured through innovative investments in infrastructure and equipment, and supporting cooperation between Member States. The report considers that a higher EU added value could have been expected in the areas of **consular cooperation, cooperation with third countries and IT systems**. Since large-scale IT systems need huge investments, it is likely that, without an EU intervention, national IT systems would have continued to be diverse, thus affecting the EU's capacity to achieve the overall objectives in its border and visa policy. The efficiency and speed of the Schengen Information System and the Visa Information System was improved, strengthening the interconnection with the Schengen partners.

Mid-term review: this review affected all the funds and allowed for the realignment of national programme priorities to the new policy initiatives and for the adaptation to the new situation in the security, borders and migration areas. However, it was **most relevant for ISF-BV** where an **extra financial allocation** of EUR 128 million was made available, which allowed for a renewed focus on certain specific priorities and needs at Member State level.

The report goes on to make a number of **general remarks about all three funds**. Overall and in the limits of available data, the evaluation indicated that the results of the funds were achieved at **reasonable costs** in terms of both human and financial resources. The Commission notes that the scope of ISF might need to be adapted further in the future to cater for the new policy initiatives to strengthen operational cooperation and exchange of information.

Lastly, the Commission recommends that an emergency instrument should be maintained and its ability further strengthened so it can respond rapidly and efficiently to changing circumstances.