

European Union Solidarity Fund

2002/0228(CNS) - 31/01/2020 - Follow-up document

The European Commission presented its 2017-2018 annual report on the implementation of the European Union Solidarity Fund.

Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) provides that a report on the activity of the Fund in the previous year shall be presented to the European Parliament and to the Council.

The present report presents the activities of the Fund during 2017 and 2018.

Applications and closures

2017

In 2017, the Commission received ten new applications for financial contribution from the Solidarity Fund, namely from France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Spain. In addition and most importantly, Italy revised and updated its application initially submitted in 2016 for the series of major earthquakes that started in August 2016 and continued into early 2017. Portugal, Greece, France and Spain requested advance payments for five applications of which three could be granted. The Commission paid out these advances totalling EUR 6.5 million within a few weeks after receiving the applications. Two of the applications received, namely those for flooding in Murcia and fires in Doñana in Spain, did not meet the conditions of the Regulation and therefore were not accepted.

The decisions on the other eight new applications from 2017 were adopted in 2018. Moreover, the Commission closed six earlier Solidarity Fund interventions.

Specific applications: the Commission assessed and proposed to mobilise the Solidarity Fund as regards the following:

- ***Italy - earthquakes:*** Italy was entitled to receive almost EUR 1.2 billion. This amount, by far the largest aid amount ever paid under the Solidarity Fund, exceeded more than twice the maximum annual allocation available to the Fund.

- ***France - hurricanes:*** An advance was paid out to France amounting to EUR 4 890 603 which represents 10% of the anticipated financial contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 48 906 025.

- ***Greece - earthquake:*** The Commission paid out an advance to Greece amounting to EUR 135 912 which represents 10% of the anticipated financial contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 1 359 119 following the Lesbos earthquake. Another application was eligible for a contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 2 535 796 following the Kos earthquake.

- ***Latvia - floods:*** The application from Latvia was eligible for a contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 17 730 519.

- ***Lithuania - floods:*** As the estimated total direct damage exceeded that threshold, the disaster qualified as a 'major natural disaster' and thus qualified for a contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 16 918 941.

- **Poland - storms:** The application from Poland was eligible for a contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 12 279 244. Poland had not requested the payment of an advance.

- **Portugal - forest fires:** The Commission paid out an advance to Portugal amounting to EUR 1 494 331 based on the damage reported in an earlier application. The final financial contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounted to EUR 50 673 132.

- **Spain - forest fires:** The application submitted by Spain therefore failed to meet the most essential condition for mobilising the Solidarity Fund and consequently was not eligible for a contribution from the Solidarity Fund.

2018

In 2018, the Commission received four applications for the Solidarity Fund assistance, namely from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Romania, of which the Commission could not accept the application from Cyprus. None of the three other countries requested an advance payment. In 2018, the Commission paid out the total amount of EUR 2.3 million to Bulgaria. The decisions on the applications from the other two countries received in 2018 were still pending at the end of that year.

- **Bulgaria - floods:** The application from Bulgaria was eligible for a contribution from the Solidarity Fund amounting to EUR 2 258 225. While Bulgaria had applied for the payment of an advance, initial uncertainties about the eligibility of the application did not allow paying it.

- **Cyprus - drought:** The Commission concluded that drought in Cyprus did not meet the conditions for mobilising the EUSF set out in the Regulation and consequently was not eligible for a financial contribution from the Fund. The application was therefore not accepted.

- **Romania - floods:** As at the end of the 2018, a decision on this application was still pending it will be reported in the 2019 annual report on the Solidarity Fund. Romania had not requested the payment of an advance.

- **Italy – floods:** As at the end of the 2018, a decision on this application was still pending, it will be reported in the 2019 annual report on the Solidarity Fund. Italy had not requested the payment of an advance.

Conclusions

2017 and 2018 showed again the unpredictability of the number, nature and severity of natural disasters. While overall flooding disasters make up some two thirds of all Solidarity Fund applications, the reporting period was marked by significant storms, forest fires and earthquakes. One event in particular, the earthquake disaster in the central Apennines, stood out as it exceeded by far anything experienced under the Solidarity Fund before, in terms of damage as well as assistance mobilised.

The report noted that not all Member States requested the payment of an advance. While the Commission is not aware of the reasons in each case, it may have to do with the modest amounts to be expected. In many instances, Solidarity Fund contributions are below EUR 10 million so that a 10% advance would amount to a few hundred thousand euros only. On the other hand, some applications, after a preliminary assessment, did not show the necessary degree of plausibility allowing to approve the requested advance payment.