

European Union Solidarity Fund

2002/0228(CNS) - 23/12/2005 - Follow-up document

The Regulation setting up the European Solidarity Fund requires the Commission to prepare an activity report on the Fund's activities in the previous year and to present its findings to both the European Parliament and to the Council. This is the second such report prepared under Article 12 of Regulation 2012/2002. The Report finds:

- In 2003 the Commission received ten new applications to mobilise the Fund. For three of these requests (i.e. for the Prestige oil spill in Spain, the Molise earthquake and eruption of Mount Etna in Italy, grant decisions had already been adopted at the end of 2003). The three grants were paid out in March 2004 as soon as the corresponding credits had been carried over to the 2004 budget.

- In March 2004, the Commission took six decisions. Firstly, it turned down a request by Greece for a assistance following unusual weather in December 2002, on the grounds that they had not fulfilled the rule of applying for assistance within ten weeks of the damage being recorded. Secondly, the Commission rejected a request by France for damage caused by forest fires in July and August 2003, since the conditions for applying the extraordinary regional disaster criterion had not been met. On a request from Spain, the Commission agreed to release funds totalling EUR 1.331 million for a forest fire which occurred with its neighbouring country, Portugal. In April, 2004, the Commission granted Malta aid worth EUR 24.26 million for a heavy storm that caused subsequent flooding. Lastly, the Commission rejected an application from Italy for assistance to help populations affected by flooding in the Friuli Venezia-Giulia province.

- In the course of 2004, the Commission received eleven new applications for Solidarity Fund assistance. All were rejected. Their cases are outlined in detail in an Annex accompanying the Communication.

The six cases that were dealt with received funding through two amending budgets. The first three cases were grouped in Preliminary Draft Amending Budget (PDAB) 5/2003. However, given that the implementation agreements in all these cases could only be signed in January 2004, the resources granted by amending budget in 2003 needed to be transferred to 2004. Payments could finally be made on 11 March 2004. The remaining three cases were grouped in PDAB 5/2004. The budget authority approved this amending budget quite rapidly so that the first subsequent grant decision could be approved by the Commission in April 2004. In all six cases the amending budgets asked for commitment appropriations only. The necessary payment appropriations were provided from the budget line for the Cohesion Fund. The amounts paid out in 2004 were as follows:

- Spain: Prestige oil spill: EUR 8.626 million
- Italy: Molise earthquake: EUR 30.826 million
- Italy: Mount Etna eruption: EUR 16.798 million
- Spain: Forest fire (PT Border): EUR 1.331 million
- Malta: Flooding and storm: EUR 0.96122 million
- France: Rhone flooding: EUR 19.625
- Total: EUR 78.167 220 million

To conclude, in 2004, a total of eleven new applications were presented to the Commission none of which, on the basis of evidence submitted, met the major disaster criteria laid out by Regulation 2012/2002. This indicates that the Member States are making increasing use of the extraordinary regional disaster criteria, which is foreseen for exceptional circumstances only. The process of cases in 2004 demonstrates that the conditions for a successful application are difficult to meet. One particular case in point, being that of forest fires, where their direct impact on local populations are limited. In terms of reviewing provisions laid out in the Regulation governing the Solidarity Fund, the Commission proposes that certain clarifications could be made regarding the kinds of assistance available. This would allow Member States to be more selective in submitting requests and help them avoid submitting detailed and costly applications. The Commission also makes note of the lengthy delays between being granted aid and actual payment. This can be attributed to the fact that the Fund is financed outside of the normal Community budget. On a final point, the Report makes note of the positive impact the Fund has had in those countries which have benefited from its provisions.