European Union Solidarity Fund: common and coordinated action to provide assistance to the Member States and the candidate countries in case of major disasters or public health emergencies

2005/0033(COD) - 21/03/2006

The committee adopted the report by Rolf BEREND (EPP-ED, DE) amending - under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure - the proposed regulation on renewing the EU Solidarity Fund from 2007. The main amendments were as follows:

- the scope of the regulation (Article 1) should be extended to enable assistance to be provided under the Fund in the event of "crisis situations" as well as major disasters;

- the committee reinserted the clause, included in Article 2 of the current Solidarity Fund regulation, stipulating that "special consideration should be given to remote or isolated regions, such as the insular and outermost regions defined in Article 299(2) of the Treaty";

- in an amendment to recital 5, the committee said that, in cases of terrorist attack, the EU should "react to events even where the material damage does not reach the threshold for mobilisation of the Fund but the consequences of the attack are so serious that Community solidarity becomes imperative";

- the operations eligible for financial assistance under the Fund should include the creation of emergency infrastructure to guarantee the immediate supply needed to satisfy the population's needs in the field of energy, drinking water and waste water, telecommunications, transport, health and education, and essential emergency operations for "the immediate tackling of natural disasters or their immediate impact";

- the ‘polluter pays’ principle should apply, particularly in the event of industrial and technological disasters. Beneficiary states must therefore prove that they are seeking all possible compensation from third parties. MEPs argued that the Solidarity Fund must not relieve those responsible for a disaster of their liability;

- if a beneficiary state has not taken preventive measures, following a previous major disaster, which would have helped to reduce or prevent damage following from another major disaster, it should be required to reimburse all or part of the financial assistance received;

- the committee wanted to see more flexible financial management, enabling the Fund to be used even where the remaining resources available for a given financial year are not sufficient to provide the necessary amount of financial assistance. Whereas the Commission had proposed that the difference be financed from the appropriations available for the Fund for the following year, the committee suggested that it be financed from the appropriations available for the following two years;

- lastly, MEPs were concerned to speed up procedures following the negative experiences with delays in 2005, and introduced a number of amendments to that end. They specified inter alia that "the whole procedure for presenting all the necessary proposals to mobilise the Fund.....may not exceed a period of 3 months after reception of the application from the State concerned".