



Plenary sitting

A8-0341/2016

17.11.2016

REPORT

on the European Union Solidarity Fund: an assessment
(2016/2045(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Salvatore Cicu

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	9
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETS.....	11
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETARY CONTROL	14
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE.....	19

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the European Union Solidarity Fund: an assessment (2016/2045(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 175 and 212(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2013 on the European Union Solidarity Fund, implementation and application²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund³,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (COM(2013)0522)⁴,
- having regard to the Commission report entitled ‘The European Union Solidarity Fund – Annual Report 2014’ (COM(2015)0502),
- having regard to its resolution of 5 September 2002 on floods in Europe⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 September 2005 on the natural disasters (fires and floods) of the summer of 2005 in Europe⁶,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘The Future of the European Union Solidarity Fund’ (COM(2011)0613),
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 28 November 2013 - European Union Solidarity Fund⁷,

¹ OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0003.

³ OJ L 189, 27.6.2014, p. 143.

⁴ OJ C 170, 5.6.2014, p. 45.

⁵ OJ C 272E, 13.11.2003, p. 471.

⁶ OJ C 193E, 17.8.2006, p. 322.

⁷ OJ C 114, 15.4.2014, p. 48.

- having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline, cooperation in budgetary matters and sound financial management¹,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinions of the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0341/2016),
- A. whereas the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was set up under Regulation 2012/2002 in response to the disastrous flooding in Central Europe in the summer of 2012, as a valuable instrument enabling the EU to respond to major natural disasters, and to extraordinary regional disasters, inside the Union and in countries involved in accession negotiations, and to demonstrate solidarity with the eligible regions and states; whereas it supports only emergency and recovery operations, carried out by governments following natural disasters, that have a direct impact on people's lives, the natural environment or the economy in a given affected region (though it should be noted that in 2005 the Commission presented a proposal aimed at expanding the original scope even more);
- B. whereas since it was established, the EUSF has served a very useful purpose, having mobilised, in total, EUR 3.8 billion in connection with more than 70 disasters within 24 beneficiary states and accession countries, and has been used in response to a wide range of natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, flooding, forest fires, storms and, more recently, drought; whereas the EUSF remains one of the EU's strongest symbols of solidarity in times of need;
- C. whereas the instrument was comprehensively overhauled in 2014 with a view to: improving and simplifying the procedures, and ensuring more rapid response within six weeks following application; re-determining its scope; establishing clear criteria for a regional disaster; and strengthening disaster prevention and risk management strategies, thus enhancing the effectiveness of relief funding, in line with the numerous requests made over the years by Parliament, as well as by local and regional authorities; whereas a new revision of the Fund is foreseen in the proposed Omnibus Regulation² proposed by the Commission on 14 September 2016 with a view to improving the readiness and effectiveness of emergency relief funding;
- D. whereas Parliament has strongly supported the proposed changes, most of which it had already called for in previous resolutions;
- E. whereas applications received prior to June 2014 (when the revised regulation entered into force) were assessed under the original regulation, while applications received since have been assessed under the revised regulation;
- F. whereas investments in the prevention of natural disasters are of utmost importance in response to climate change; whereas significant amounts of EU funding have been

¹ OJ C 373, 20.12.2013, p. 1.

² COM(2016)0605, 2016/0282(COD), Brussels, 14.9.2016.

allocated for investments in the prevention of natural disasters, and in risk management strategies, in particular under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF);

- G. whereas, exceptionally, in the event that the funds available in a given year are insufficient, the following year's funds may be used, taking into consideration the annual budgetary ceiling of the fund, both in the year when the disaster occurred and in the following year;
1. Recalls that, since it was established in 2002, the EUSF has been a significant source of funding for local and regional governments, alleviating the consequences of natural disasters occurring across Europe, from floods to earthquakes and forest fires, and has served as a means of demonstrating European solidarity with affected regions; emphasises that, as far as the public is concerned, the EUSF is one of the most concrete and tangible manifestations of the support that the EU can give to local communities;
 2. Emphasises that, since the EUSF was established, natural disasters in the European Union have increased significantly in number, severity and intensity, as a consequence of climate change; stresses, therefore, the added value of a sound and flexible instrument as a means of showing solidarity, and of providing proper, rapid assistance to people affected by major natural disasters;
 3. Points out that the EUSF is financed outside the European Union budget, with a maximum allocation of EUR 500 million (at 2011 prices), and that despite the built-in flexibility (carry-over N+1), substantial funds may sit unused each year; notes, in this context, the partial 'budgetisation' of the annual financial allocation foreseen in the proposed Omnibus Regulation, with a view to accelerating the mobilisation procedure and to providing an earlier and more effective response to citizens affected by a disaster;
 4. Points out that use of the yearly threshold proves that the annual level of appropriations, after the new MFF programming period, is adequate;
 5. Emphasises the importance of the 2014 revision, which managed to overcome the blockage in the Council, and represented a belated response to Parliament's repeated calls for improved responsiveness and effectiveness of aid, in order to ensure a rapid and transparent response in support of people affected by natural disasters; welcomes, moreover, the recent Omnibus Proposal, which introduces new provisions in terms of simplification and of easier mobilisation of funding;
 6. Emphasises the main components of the reform, such as: the introduction of advance payments, whereby up to 10 % of the anticipated financial contribution is available on demand soon after an application for a financial contribution from the Fund has been submitted to the Commission (capped at EUR 30 million); the eligibility of costs relating to the preparation and implementation of the emergency and recovery operations (a major Parliament request); the extension of the deadlines by which eligible states must make applications (12 weeks after the first damage) and set up the project (18 months); the introduction of a six-weeks deadline by which the Commission must respond to applications; new provisions on the prevention of natural disasters; and improvements in procedures with regard to sound financial management;

7. Emphasises, however, that, in spite of the introduction of an advance payment mechanism upstream of the standard procedure, beneficiaries still face problems as a result of the length of the overall process from application to payment of the final contribution; emphasises, in this context, the need to put forward the application as soon as possible after a disaster, as well as for further improvements in the assessment phase, and in subsequent phases, in order to facilitate the execution of payments; takes the view that the newly proposed Omnibus provisions with regard to the EUSF may contribute to faster mobilisation, in order that the real needs on the ground may be met; stresses as well that the Member States must look at their own administrative procedures with a view to accelerating the mobilisation of aid for affected regions and states; suggests, moreover, with a view of potential improvements in a future reform, the introduction of a request for mandatory updated national plans for disaster management, as well as of a requirement that information be provided on the preparation of agreements on emergency contracts;
8. Calls on the Member States themselves to improve their means of communication and cooperation with local and regional authorities, both when assessing eligible damage for which EUSF financial support is requested and when preparing applications, as well as when implementing projects to counter the effects of natural disasters, thereby ensuring that the Union's assistance is effective on the ground and that sustainable solutions are promoted; considers, moreover, that EUSF support should be communicated to the public at large; calls on the authorities concerned to improve communication, and to provide information on EUSF support, without generating additional administrative burdens;
9. Stresses the importance of ensuring that public procurement procedures are followed by Member States in response to natural disasters, with a view to identifying and disseminating best practices and lessons learned with regard to contracts in emergency situations;
10. Welcomes the Commission's clarification of the rules on the eligibility of regional natural disasters, but points out that the final agreement between Parliament and the Council maintains the eligibility threshold at 1.5 % of regional GDP, in line with the Commission proposal, in spite of Parliament's efforts to reduce it to 1 %; notes that the vulnerability of the outermost regions has been taken into account, with the threshold being reduced to 1 %;
11. Acknowledges that the Fund provides assistance for non-insurable damage and does not provide compensation for private losses; emphasises that long-term measures, such as sustainable reconstruction, or economic development and prevention activities, are eligible for financing under other Union instruments, in particular ESI Funds);
12. Calls on the Member States to optimise the use of existing EU funding, in particular the five ESI Funds, for investments to prevent natural disasters from occurring, and points to the importance of developing synergies between the various Union funds and policies with a view to preventing the impact of natural disasters and, in cases where the EUSF is activated, to guaranteeing the consolidation, and long-term sustainable development of reconstruction projects; maintains that whenever the EUSF is to be used, the Member State concerned should formally undertake to carry out all measures necessary for

disaster prevention and the sustainable reconstruction of the areas affected; calls, when synergies are brought into play, for the process of using funds in combination to be simplified, to the extent possible, in administrative terms;

13. Stresses, therefore, that efforts to invest in climate change mitigation and adaptation must be stepped up, taking into account preventive measures when supporting reconstruction and reforestation under the EUSF; considers that prevention should become a horizontal task, and suggests that preventive measures following the ecosystem based approach be taken when mitigating the consequences of disaster under the EUSF; calls, moreover, on the Member States to establish risk prevention and risk management strategies, considering as well that many natural disasters today are direct consequences of human activity;
14. Stresses the importance of ensuring maximum transparency in the awarding, management and implementation of the EUSF; considers it important to determine whether EUSF subsidies have been used in compliance with the principles of sound financial management, in order to identify, develop and share best practices and lessons learned; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to improve transparency, and to guarantee public access to information throughout the assistance mobilisation process, from the submission of an application to project closure; calls as well for a special report from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the functioning of the EUSF, not least in consideration of the fact that the latest report available is from before the 2014 revision of the EUSF Regulation;
15. Notes that 13 new applications were received in 2014, and draws attention to the special circumstances of that year, in which six of these applications were assessed under the old regulation, while the remaining seven applications were assessed under the revised regulation;
16. Recalls that two applications were rejected in 2014 under the former EUSF Regulation, on the grounds that the disasters in question could not be deemed 'extraordinary', in spite of the fact that they caused serious damage and had direct repercussions for the economic and social development of the regions concerned, and welcomes, therefore, the clarifications made in this regard in the revised EUSF Regulation; suggests, nevertheless, with regard to future reforms, and taking into consideration the possibility of redefining regional natural disasters, that single applications be allowed to be submitted jointly by several eligible states affected by a natural disaster at cross-border level, whereby the cause of the disaster is the same and the effects occur at the same time, and that indirect damages be taken into consideration in the assessment of the applications;
17. Invites the Commission, in the light of future reforms, to take into account the possibility of increasing the advance payments threshold from 10 % to 15 %, as well as of shortening deadlines for the processing of applications from six to four weeks; invites as well the Commission to consider the possibility of setting the eligibility threshold for regional natural disasters at 1 % of regional GDP, and of taking into account, when assessing the requests, the level of socio-economic development of the regions affected;
18. Points to the need to consider whether new indicators may be used that go beyond GDP, such as the Human Development Index and the Regional Social Progress Index;

19. Welcomes the fact that the seven applications for assistance received within the framework of the revised rules were accepted by the Commission, including four that were approved at the end of 2014, but for which appropriations had to be carried over to 2015, as stated in the EUSF Annual Report 2015; recalls, in this context, that 2015 was the first full year of implementation under the revised rules, and that the analysis shows that the legal clarifications introduced with the reform ensured successful applications, which was not the case with the old provisions, in accordance with which about two thirds of regional disaster assistance requests were assessed ineligible;
20. Deplores the fact that the procedures for assessing implementation and closure reports took so long under the old regulation, and expects closures to be carried out more efficiently and transparently under the amended regulation, and in a manner which ensures that the Union's financial interests are protected;
21. Emphasises, furthermore, that Article 11 of the amended regulation gives the Commission and the ECA the power of audit, and allows the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) to conduct investigations whenever necessary;
22. Calls on the Commission and the ECA to evaluate the functioning of the EUSF before the end of the current multiannual financial period;
23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Member States, and to regional authorities.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Following the tragic flooding of 2002, the European Union introduced the European Union Solidarity Fund (Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002). It was an immediate demonstration of the Union's solidarity with countries affected by major natural disasters. It was established for both Member States and Accession Countries. In 2014, the original regulation was amended in order to provide a better response to the concerns of beneficiaries, respond more rapidly to the applications from countries affected and to include drought on the list of disasters covered (Regulation (EU) No 661/2014).

The EUSF may come to the aid of Member States if total direct damages caused by a natural disaster exceed EUR 3 billion (at 2011 prices) or 0.6 % of the country's gross national income (GNI). There are also provisions to respond to smaller regional disasters (1.5 % of the region's GDP or 1 % for outermost regions).

In October 2015, the European Commission presented its report on the use of the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) for 2014. This report focuses on the EUSF's special circumstances in 2014. It was also an opportunity to examine how well this solidarity instrument works. This is why the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development decided to produce an own-initiative report.

It is of course impossible to make provisions for all emergency situations and disasters. However, it is always possible to improve the management of their impact. There are always several stages in the management of a disaster. The first consists of sadness and a recognition of the forces of nature combined with a feeling of powerlessness. Next comes mutual aid between neighbours and aid from national and international rescue services. However, your rapporteur wishes to focus on the third and fourth stages, because after the immediate response, victims must repair the damage that has been caused and rebuild in a sustainable manner.

The rapporteur will address several aspects of the management of the European Union Solidarity Fund. He would like to focus on the response time of the EUSF and the need for a prevention policy, which goes hand in hand with the necessary complementarity between the EUSF and other European instruments, in particular cohesion policy. Your rapporteur also wishes to emphasise effective cooperation between authorities at national level and regional and local levels.

Speed of reaction

Due to their unpredictable nature, natural disasters not only cause distress to the people affected but also raise the issue of response times from governments that have to meet unforeseen costs.

When the European Union Solidarity Fund was established, the application deadline was set at 10 weeks by the legislator. This was designed to help local and regional authorities to initiate the process. However, the first years of the EUSF demonstrated that this period was too short. Under the regulation's revision in 2014, this application deadline was extended to 12 weeks. At first sight, this is not in line with your rapporteur's request. That being so, in many cases local authorities did not have enough time to get their applications ready properly. Therefore, this extension is not contradictory because it gives local officials more leeway to get applications ready.

The rapporteur wishes to emphasise that it is important to process applications quickly, especially from the moment a complete application is submitted (maximum 12 weeks). All

the decision-making levels then need to react efficiently, whether at the level of the Member State or the Commission services, to allow financial support to be released rapidly.

We need to stop victims feeling abandoned between emergency intervention and the arrival of EUSF funds.

This call is all the more urgent in that very often, in recent years, the biggest natural disasters have affected countries in Southern and South-Eastern Europe, countries already seriously affected by the economic crisis. Just taking the example of Sardinia, after the floods of November 2013, 16 people died and 1 700 others suffered to a greater or lesser extent. The rescue services which intervene immediately help to combat the adverse effects of natural disasters as best they can. The legislator then lends legislative support to make procedures as appropriate as possible. The European Parliament also plays an important role here in preventing situations like the one in Croatia in 2013 from arising, where approval was given no less than seven months after the application was submitted. Emergency situations require emergency procedures. In this precise case, it took a year and a half for the funds to reach the beneficiaries.

All this requires good coordination as well as work upstream and downstream.

Prevention and complementarity

When a disaster occurs, it is often too late for prevention. However, it should often be an integral part of the next stage. Indeed, it is important to seize the opportunity to comply with standards when rebuilding structures that have been destroyed or carrying out repairs on infrastructure. Legislation already requires reports on how Member States intend to put a strategy for risk prevention and management in place.

This is also an area where complementarity between the EUSF and Cohesion Funds can be sought. These funds should take account of aspects related to risk prevention, particularly when it comes to infrastructure projects. This could reduce costs related to necessary repairs following a disaster.

Transparency and cooperation between the different levels of decision-making

The European Court of Auditors has been producing a report on the use of the EUSF since it was established. This report has highlighted several possible improvements in the management of the Fund. These recommendations were taken into account during the revision of the EUSF in 2014. Greater transparency could nevertheless be introduced, in particular with respect to different funds allocated for the repair of damage caused by a disaster. In order to achieve this goal, your rapporteur suggests introducing greater cooperation between the different levels of decision-making. The relationships between beneficiaries and the European Commission, which receives funding requests under the European Union Solidarity Fund, do not seem to be in doubt. Instead, the focus should be on mechanisms for cooperation between the different local and regional authorities and the central services of each Member State.

Your rapporteur also suggests improving communication with the general public throughout the process, helping beneficiaries or people concerned to follow the process for each individual application. This could be organised through the European Commission, on the condition that there is a good flow of information between the different operational levels.

1.9.2016

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETS

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the European Union Solidarity Fund: an assessment
(2016/2045(INI))

Rapporteur: Lefteris Christoforou

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Budgets calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas since its creation in 2002 the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) has served a very useful purpose and has responded to 69 disasters across Europe; whereas 24 countries have been assisted, receiving disaster relief funds amounting to a total of EUR 3.7 billion;
- B. whereas the 2014 revision of Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the EU Solidarity Fund improves and simplifies the procedures; whereas the deadline for the request for aid has been extended, leaving the Member States 18 months to use the contribution from the date of disbursement, advance payments have been introduced and certain provisions have been made clearer, in line with the numerous requests made over the years by the European Parliament and local authorities;
- C. whereas until the revision almost all the rejections concerned regional disasters, while the new regulation clarifies rules on eligibility with one single criterion for regional disasters based on a threshold of 1.5 % of regional gross domestic product or 1 % for outermost regions set at NUTS 2 level;
- D. whereas under the provisions of the revised EUSF regulation the Commission received seven new applications in 2014 and three applications in 2015;
- E. whereas while the EUSF already existed in the previous programming period of the MFF regulation, its annual appropriations have decreased; whereas in order to compensate for such a decrease (justified by the overall level of implementation), a carry-over of one year (N+1) has been introduced into the new regulation;
- F. whereas exceptionally, in the event of insufficient funds available in a given year, the

following year's funds may be used, taking into consideration the annual budgetary ceiling of the fund for both the year when the disaster occurred and the following year;

1. Points out that use of the yearly threshold proves that the annual level of appropriations, after the new MFF programming period, is adequate;
2. Points out that, as far as the public is concerned, the EUSF is one of the most concrete and tangible manifestations of the support that the EU can give to local communities;
3. Welcomes in the new regulation the possibility of making advance payments of up to 10 % of the likely amount of aid, capped at EUR 30 million; deplores, however, the substantial time taken between the application and payment; recommends further improvements in the assessment phase and subsequent phases that will facilitate the execution of payments; recommends establishing a legal framework defining the length of the evaluation period;
4. Regrets that, contrary to Articles 8(1) and (3) of the EUSF regulation, the closing procedure for assistance from the fund is remarkably long in some cases: in 2014 the Commission was still closing files from 2005, 2007 and 2010; underlines, therefore, the need to expedite procedures, given that the timely receipt of all aid requested and approved is of the utmost importance;
5. Calls for clear criteria concerning the monitoring visit to the beneficiary states to evaluate the implementation system put in place, and for the proper use of resources to be monitored;
6. For the sake of facilitating transparent use of funds, calls for a special report from the European Court of Auditors on the functioning of the EUSF, especially as the latest report available is from before the revised EUSF regulation; calls in particular for a study on the possible overlaps in the use of EUSF funds with structural funds and with national schemes;
7. Points out that, despite built-in flexibility (carry-over N+1), substantial funds are at risk of going unused each year; further proposes reflecting on how to limit the non-use of these amounts in the future, taking full account of the inherently variable nature of the subject matter (dependent on the fluctuating number of applications received and/or the financial needs in any given year);
8. Welcomes the fact that provisions were introduced in 2014 with a view to strengthening natural disaster risk prevention; recalls that the number of extreme weather cases leading to natural disasters has increased as a consequence of climate change; underlines therefore that efforts must be stepped up to invest in climate change mitigation and adaptation, while giving priority to preventive measures when supporting reconstruction and reforestation under the EUSF.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	31.8.2016
Result of final vote	+: 37 -: 1 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Nedzhmi Ali, Jean Arthuis, Lefteris Christoforou, Jean-Paul Denanot, Gérard Deprez, José Manuel Fernandes, Eider Gardiazabal Rubial, Jens Geier, Esteban González Pons, Iris Hoffmann, Monika Hohlmeier, Bernd Kölmel, Zbigniew Kuźmiuk, Vladimír Maňka, Ernest Maragall, Clare Moody, Siegfried Mureşan, Victor Negrescu, Jan Olbrycht, Urmas Paet, Paul Rübig, Petri Sarvamaa, Patricija Šulin, Eleftherios Synadinos, Paul Tang, Isabelle Thomas, Monika Vana, Daniele Viotti, Marco Zanni, Auke Zijlstra
Substitutes present for the final vote	Giovanni La Via, Stanisław Ożóg, Pavel Poc, Ivan Štefanec, Tomáš Zdechovský
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	David Coburn, Estefanía Torres Martínez

13.7.2016

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETARY CONTROL

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the European Union Solidarity Fund: an assessment
(2016/2045(INI))

Rapporteur: Marco Valli

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Budgetary Control calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- having regard to Articles 175, third paragraph, and 212(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund¹ and to Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2013 on the European Union Solidarity Fund, implementation and application³,
- A. whereas the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was set up under Regulation 2012/2002 in response to the disastrous flooding that affected central Europe in the summer of 2002;
- B. whereas the EUSF serves mainly to provide assistance in the event of a major natural disaster with serious repercussions for living conditions, the natural environment or the economy in one or more regions of a Member State or of a country applying for accession;
- C. whereas since 2002, 63 disasters – including floods, forest fires, earthquakes, storms and drought – in 24 different European countries have given rise to the provision of support

¹ OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3.

² OJ L 189, 27.6.2014, p. 143.

³ OJ C 440, 30.12.2015, p. 13.

through the EUSF to a total value of more than EUR 3.7 billion;

- D. whereas in June 2008 the European Court of Auditors (ECA) presented the results of a performance audit, concluding that, while it had achieved its goal of demonstrating solidarity with Member States in times of disaster, the conditions governing approval of applications were rather vague, especially in the case of regional disasters; whereas the Court was also critical of the slow pace of the allocation process;
- E. whereas in December 2012 the ECA adopted a performance audit: ‘The European Union Solidarity Fund’s Response to the 2009 Abruzzi Earthquake: Relevance and Cost of Operations’;
1. Draws attention to its resolution of 3 April 2014 on the Court of Auditors’ special reports in the context of the 2012 Commission discharge, which expressed support for the ECA’s finding that ‘around 30 % (EUR 144 million) of the EUSF contributions was earmarked for operations which were fully eligible under the EUSF Regulation; however, some projects, while relevant to the actual needs, did not comply with specific provisions of the EUSF Regulation – for example, one project did not respond in a timely manner and with sufficient capacity to the actual needs of the population; asks the Commission to explain how, in the revised Regulation on the European Union Solidarity Fund that entered into force on 28 June 2014, the shortcomings identified by the Court of Auditors have been solved;
 2. Reiterates that, at the time, the Commission’s 2012 audit report revealed irregularities which did not come to bear financially because payment claims exceeded the entitlements and irregular payment claims were not honoured;
 3. Understands that disasters and the desire to help people in distress as swiftly as possible may put strain on national administrations; believes, however, that Member States should implement EU legislation on disaster risk prevention and management and establish programmes to deal with emergencies and natural disasters which enable the authorities concerned to receive rapid EU assistance while respecting sound financial management; recalls the need to determine whether EUSF subsidies have been used in compliance with the principles of sound financial management, in order to identify, develop and share best practices and lessons learned with respect to economic affordability;
 4. Takes the view that the EUSF requires a certain amount of flexibility to enable it to respond to disasters more quickly and effectively; welcomes, therefore, the fact that countries are able to apply for advance payment of funds;
 5. Acknowledges that the revision of the EUSF Regulation introduced important improvements in line with Parliament’s demands¹;
 6. Highlights and welcomes the improvements made in respect of sound financial management², in particular insofar as beneficiary states are obliged to:

¹ See its resolution of 15 January 2013 on the European Union Solidarity Fund, implementation and application, OJ C 440, 30.12.2015, p. 13.

² Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending Council Regulation No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund, OJ L 189, 27.6.2014,

- verify that management and control arrangements have been set up and are being implemented in such a way as to ensure that Union funds are being used efficiently and correctly, in accordance with the principles of sound financial management,
 - verify that the financed actions have been properly carried out,
 - ensure that expenditure funded is based on verifiable supporting documents, and is correct and regular,
 - prevent, detect and correct irregularities and recover amounts unduly paid together with interest on late payments where appropriate, to notify any such irregularities to the Commission and to keep it informed of the progress of administrative and legal proceedings;
7. Regrets the persisting difficulties in assessing whether the applications associated with regional disasters meet the exceptional criteria set out in the regulation; calls on the Commission to simplify and improve administrative procedures on the occasion of the next EUSF revision;
 8. Regrets the fact that in some cases a serious lack of transparency has been noted regarding the use and the destination of the EUSF; asks for an improvement in the ex post monitoring system for spending, and for accurate and coherent justification of that spending, and strongly believes that the final reports provided by Member States should be public and accessible;
 9. Stresses the importance of the public procurement procedures followed by Member States in response to natural disasters with a view to identifying and disseminating best practice and lessons learned with regard to contracts in emergency situations;
 10. Believes that necessary improvements to the regulation could include a request for mandatory updated national plans for disaster management, the introduction of a concrete action plan and the preparation of agreements on emergency contracts;
 11. Stresses that the Member States too must look at their own administrative procedures with a view to accelerating the mobilisation of aid for affected regions;
 12. Emphasises, furthermore, that Article 11 of the amended regulation gives the Commission and the ECA the power of audit and allows the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) to conduct investigations whenever necessary;
 13. Is of the opinion that the EUSF should, wherever possible, create synergies with other sources of financial assistance, in particular with the European Structural and Investment Funds; calls, therefore, with a view to ensuring the proper implementation of the EUSF, on the Member States to set out clearly what damage is to be covered by the EUSF and what action will be undertaken with the support of other funds;
 14. Believes that there should be additional requirements for higher visibility of EUSF assistance in supported areas in order to demonstrate its European added value;

p. 143, Articles 5 and 11.

15. Calls on the Commission and the ECA to evaluate the functioning of the EUSF before the end of the current multiannual financial period.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	13.7.2016
Result of final vote	+: 22 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Nedzhmi Ali, Louis Aliot, Inés Ayala Sender, Zigmantas Balčytis, Dennis de Jong, Martina Dlabajová, Luke Ming Flanagan, Jens Geier, Ingeborg Gräßle, Bogusław Liberadzki, Georgi Pirinski, Petri Sarvamaa, Claudia Schmidt, Igor Šoltes, Michael Theurer, Marco Valli, Derek Vaughan, Joachim Zeller
Substitutes present for the final vote	Benedek Jávor, Marian-Jean Marinescu, Julia Pitera, Miroslav Poche

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	9.11.2016
Result of final vote	+: 31 -: 4 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Franc Bogovič, Victor Boștinaru, Mercedes Bresso, Steeve Briois, Rosa D'Amato, Iratxe García Pérez, Michela Giuffrida, Krzysztof Hetman, Ivan Jakovčić, Marc Joulaud, Constanze Krehl, Sławomir Kłosowski, Andrew Lewer, Iskra Mihaylova, Jens Nilsson, Andrey Novakov, Mirosław Piotrowski, Stanislav Polčák, Julia Reid, Liliana Rodrigues, Fernando Ruas, Monika Smolková, Olaf Stuger, Ruža Tomašić, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, Monika Vana, Matthijs van Miltenburg, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Derek Vaughan, Kerstin Westphal, Joachim Zeller
Substitutes present for the final vote	Daniel Buda, James Carver, Miroslav Mikolášik, Bronis Ropè, Damiano Zoffoli