P8_TA(2015)0049
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund – application EGF/2013/011 BE/Saint-Gobain Sekurit – Belgium


The European Parliament,


– having regard to Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1311/2013 of 2 December 2013 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020\(^2\), and in particular Article 12 thereof,

– having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management\(^3\) (IIA of 2 December 2013), and in particular point 13 thereof,

– having regard to the trilogue procedure provided for in point 13 of the IIA of 2 December 2013,

– having regard to the letter of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs,

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– having regard to the letter of the Committee on Regional Development,
– having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgets (A8-0034/2015),

A. whereas the Union has set up legislative and budgetary instruments to provide additional support to workers who are suffering from the consequences of major structural changes in world trade patterns, dramatically aggravated by the economic, financial and social crisis, and to assist their reintegration into the labour market;

B. whereas the Union’s financial assistance to workers made redundant should be adequate and made available as quickly and efficiently as possible, in accordance with the Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission adopted during the conciliation meeting on 17 July 2008, and having due regard to the IIA of 2 December 2013 in respect of the adoption of decisions to mobilise the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF);

C. whereas this is the last application to be treated under the 2006 Regulation;

D. welcomes the extension of the objectives and criteria of the EGF Regulation introduced in December 2013, in order to integrate and facilitate applications from regions and countries with a smaller demographic density;

E. welcomes the increase in efficiency for the treatment of EGF applications in the Commission and by the Parliament and the Council by shortening the time for assessment and approval, to widen eligible actions and beneficiaries by introducing self-employed persons and young people and to finance incentives for setting up own businesses;

F. whereas Belgium submitted application EGF/2013/011 BE/Saint-Gobain Sekurit for a financial contribution from the EGF following 257 redundancies linked to the closure of a plant of the Saint-Gobain Sekurit (SGS) group, located in Auvelais, which produced safety glass for the automotive industry; whereas the redundancies took place during and after the reference period from 31 August 2013 to 31 December 2013 and are linked to a decline in the production of automotive safety glass in the Union;

G. whereas the financial contribution requested from the EGF amounts to EUR 1 339 928 (50 % of the total budget);

H. whereas although the application does not fulfil the criteria laid down in Articles 2(a) and 2(b) of the EGF Regulation, it falls under the category of exceptional circumstances that nevertheless allow the mobilisation of the EGF;

1. Agrees with the Commission decision that the application for EGF financial contribution on 19 December 2013 submitted by Belgium is entitled to a financial contribution under Article 2(c), which requires exceptional circumstances to be demonstrated, despite the fact that the conditions set out in Articles 2(a) and 2(b) of the EGF Regulation are not met; underlines however that invoking Article 2(c) should be assessed on a case-by-case situation and should not become a general method for the mobilisation of the EGF when basic conditions are not met;

2. Stresses that the EGF is a special instrument that allows the Union to react to specified unforeseen circumstances and should maintain its main purpose, that is to provide
support in case where, during a reference period, a large number of workers (minimum 500) are made redundant as a result of major structural changes in world trade patterns due to globalisation and global financial and economic crises; stresses that the EGF must not become a substitute for other European Structural and Investment Funds, such as the European Social Fund, and must be used to complement such funds; emphasises that the exceptional circumstances which allow for the mobilisation of the EGF must not divert from the above-mentioned scope;

3. Notes that the Belgian authorities submitted the application for EGF financial contribution on 19 December 2013 under the EGF Regulation, which does not cap the time for instruction and that its assessment was made available by the Commission on 21 January 2014; regrets the insufficient information given in respect of the exceptional circumstances invoked; underlines that such exceptional circumstances must be duly assessed in order to obtain a derogation from the conditions set out in Articles 2(a) and 2(b) of the EGF Regulation;

4. Expresses concerns about the length of the procedure from the date of the first redundancies until the assessment of the application; recalls that the goal of the EGF is to offer help to redundant workers as quickly as possible;

5. Urges the Member States and all the institutions involved to make the necessary efforts to improve procedural and budgetary arrangements in order to accelerate the mobilisation of the EGF; notes in this sense, the improved procedure put in place by the Commission, following Parliament's request to accelerate the release of grants, aimed at presenting to the European Parliament and the Council the Commission's assessment on the eligibility of an EGF application together with the proposal to mobilise the EGF and takes note of the adoption of the new EGF Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1309/2013) which allows greater efficiency, transparency, accountability and visibility of the EGF;

6. Urges the Member States to profit from the exchange of best practices and to learn particularly from those Member States and regional and local authorities that have already put in place national information networks on the EGF involving the social partners and stakeholders at local and regional level with a view to having a good structure for assistance in place once any situation which falls under the scope of the EGF might occur;

7. Welcomes the fact that, in order to provide workers with speedy assistance, the Belgian authorities decided to initiate the implementation of the personalised services to the affected workers on 31 August 2013, well ahead of the decision and even the application on granting the EGF support for the proposed coordinated package;

8. Notes that the sector of the manufacture of safety glass for the automotive industry has undergone serious economic disruption as a result of several factors, such as a decrease in the production of automotive safety glass in the Union, an increase in the market shares of competitors from non-Member States and an increase in imports of these products into the Union; notes that SGS Benelux's activities were closely linked to production trends in the automotive industry, which saw the production of passenger cars decrease from 21,9 million units to 19,5 million units between 2007 and 2012, whereas, in the rest of the world, it increased from 47,5 million units to 60,6 million units during the same period; observes moreover that there has been a general trend by manufacturers
and suppliers in the automotive industry to transfer production within the Union, from Western Europe (in particular, France, Belgium and Spain) to Eastern Europe;

9. Notes that while there have been no other EGF applications relating specifically to the automotive glass sector\(^1\), there have been a series of applications relating to motor vehicle manufacturers or suppliers of automotive equipment\(^2\);

10. Notes that the redundancies at SGS mainly concern production-line workers (83% of staff concerned have ‘ouvrier’ status); considers that in the context of the labour market situation in the affected region, the dismissed workers will have to be retrained to find jobs in other occupations and/or other sectors;

11. Deplores that given the socioeconomic situation of the area concerned and of its neighbouring areas (Charleroi, Namur), the workers made redundant by SGS Benelux have limited employment possibilities in these areas as they are likely to be in competition with many other workers with similar qualifications and experience for a limited number of jobs in the glass sector; recalls that the region is characterised by a relatively high level of structural unemployment, with a relatively high proportion of long-term unemployment and low qualification levels and skills; highlights that the redundancies at SGS Benelux are therefore set against a difficult local socioeconomic context;

12. Notes that the personalised services listed in the application consist of several measures aimed at promoting the workers’ return to the labour market and helping them with administrative procedures, most of which are expected to support all the dismissed workers;

13. Notes that the coordinated package of personalised services to be co-funded includes the following measures for the reintegration of the 257 redundant workers into employment (grouped by category): (1) individual job-search assistance, case management and general information services, (2) training and retraining and (3) promotion of entrepreneurship;

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14. Welcomes the fact that various social partners and organisations were involved in the general coordination and implementation of the measures including: trade unions (FGTB, CSC), FOREM (the public employment and training service of the Walloon Region), the sectorial vocational and technological training centres active in the Walloon region, the European Social Fund Agency of the French Community of Belgium and the Walloon Government; appreciates furthermore that trade unions are directly involved in the management of the specifically set up two Redeployment Units for each separate company;

15. Insists on the need to enhance and encourage assistance with autonomy and ease of access at regional level to implement a bottom up ethos, empowering local solutions at a regional level where any situation which falls under the scope of the EGF might occur;

16. Takes note of the measures proposed to improve the employability of redundant workers; recalls that allowances are not listed among the personalised services to be supported by the EGF;

17. Notes that measures which are mandatory under collective redundancy procedures under Belgian federal legislation and which are carried out as part of the standard activities of the Redeployment Units (e.g. outplacement support, training, job-search assistance and careers advice, etc.) are not included in this EGF application;

18. Recalls the importance of improving the employability of all workers by means of adapted training and the recognition of skills and competences gained throughout a worker's professional career; expects the training on offer in the coordinated package to be adapted not only to the needs of the dismissed workers but also to the actual business environment;

19. Welcomes the fact that the principle of equality between women and men as well as of non-discrimination has been, and will continue to be, applied during the various stages of implementation of and access to the EGF measures;

20. Welcomes that the social partners were involved in the preparation of the social plan as well as in the implementation of the measures;

21. Stresses that EGF assistance can co-finance only active labour market measures which lead to durable, long-term employment; reiterates that assistance from the EGF must not replace actions which are the responsibility of companies by virtue of national law or collective agreements nor measures restructuring companies or sectors;

22. Approves the decision annexed to this resolution;

23. Instructs its President to sign the decision with the President of the Council and arrange for its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union;

24. Instructs its President to forward this resolution, including its annex, to the Council and the Commission.
ANNEX

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on the mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund in accordance with Point 13 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management (application EGF/2013/011 BE/Saint-Gobain Sekurit, from Belgium)

(The text of this annex is not reproduced here since it corresponds to the final act, Decision (EU) 2015/470.)