



EU aid for disaster-stricken countries to arrive faster, with less red tape

Committees Committee on Regional Development
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EU aid to EU and EU candidate countries hit by flooding or other natural disasters should be delivered faster and more efficiently thanks to EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) rule changes approved on Wednesday. These changes, already agreed with EU ministers, include extending the deadline for applying for natural disaster aid from 10 to 12 weeks, paying 10% of the aid in advance, and simplifying aid approval criteria for smaller, "regional", disasters.

"The EUSF is one of the most visible and effective examples of EU solidarity. This reform will make the EU Solidarity Fund be an even more effective tool. It defines clearly, with a single criterion, when a region can obtain support from the fund. Newly available advance payments are also a very important success for the Parliament's negotiators because in a catastrophe rapid support is vital, and after tough negotiations we have been able to unblock this issue". said rapporteur Rosa Estaràs Ferragut (EPP, ES). Her text was approved by 525 votes to 12, with 41 abstentions.

The clause enabling advance payments of 10% (capped at €30 million) of the expected aid amount was retained thanks to MEPs' efforts, despite objections in the negotiations with the Council of Ministers.

Clearer and simpler rules for regional disasters

The EUSF normally focuses on major disasters, causing damage in excess of either €3 billion in 2011 prices or 0.6% of the affected country's gross national income. But support is available also for more limited "regional" disasters. For these, the new rules now stipulate a simple single eligibility criterion - a damage threshold of 1.5% of the region's gross domestic product - which will make it easier for the European Commission to assess applications and speed up aid payments.

MEPs also secured a lower threshold of 1% of GDP to apply to the EU's outermost regions of the EU, and ensured that the fund can now also be used for disasters that take longer to develop before their disastrous effects are felt, such as droughts.

Extended deadlines, faster procedures

MEPs won two more weeks (12 instead of 10) for disaster-stricken states to make their aid applications. They also obtained more time to for them to use the fund's contribution: 18 months instead of one year.

Time limits for administrative procedures have been reduced, so the Commission will now have to assess within 6 weeks of receiving the application whether the conditions for mobilising the Solidarity Fund are met and determine the amount of the financial help possible.

Background

The EU solidarity fund, with a maximum budget of €500 million per year for 2014-2020, was set up in 2002 following the severe floods in Central Europe in the summer of that year. Since then, it has been mobilised for 56 disasters including floods, storms, forest fires, earthquakes and drought. So far 23 countries have received aid from the fund totalling almost € 3.6 billion.

However, it has long been felt that the fund should be overhauled to make it more effective, faster and visible. In 2005, a first EUSF reform proposal was favourably received

Press release

by Parliament but rejected by the Council of Ministers.

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