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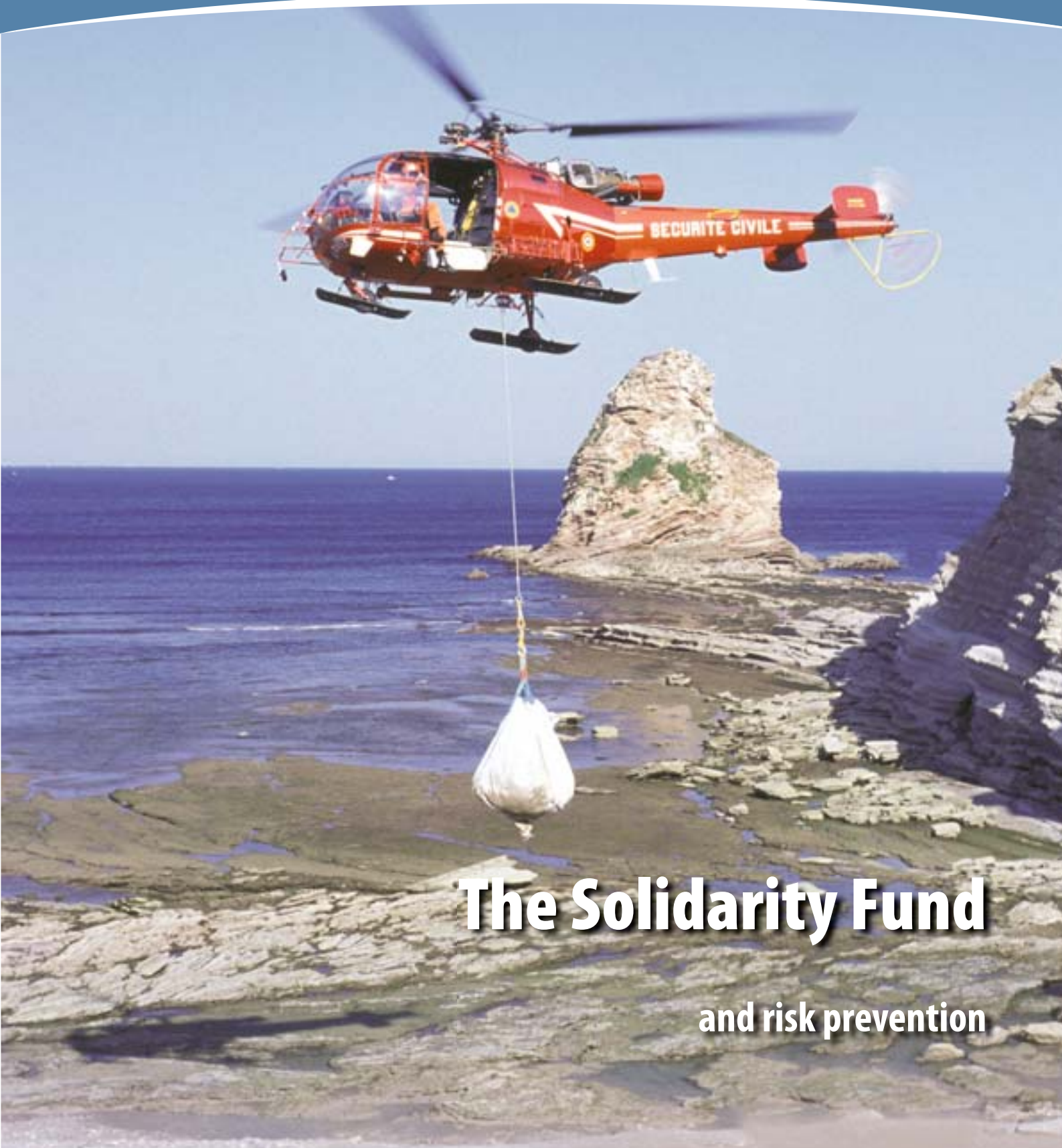


European Union
Regional policy

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panorama



The Solidarity Fund

and risk prevention

Contents

'Open Days 2004' — Making the case for a European cohesion policy

Jointly organised by the Committee of the Regions, the Directorate-General for Regional Policy and 12 groups of European regions and cities, 'Open Days 2004', which took place from 27 to 30 September in Brussels, was attended by over 2 000 regional development actors. The event reaffirmed the need for a European cohesion policy.

4



The Rovaniemi conference: a compass for the regions

The second 'Competitive regions: shaping best practice' conference was held in Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland.

6



The Solidarity Fund and risk prevention

United we help

In creating the Solidarity Fund in the wake of the dramatic flooding in the summer of 2002, the European Union sought to acquire an instrument with which to express its financial solidarity with Member States and candidate countries that fall victim to exceptional natural disasters.

7



The Solidarity Fund in Saxony (Germany) A rapid and flexible response to the August 2002 floods

Saxony's rapid recovery from the devastating effects of the August 2002 floods is a particularly good illustration of the European Union Solidarity Fund's fundamental aim of facilitating technical and social infrastructure reconstruction as quickly as possible following a natural disaster.

14



From the ground: the Czech Republic

16

The EUSF in action: Malta, France, Austria, Spain

17

From the ground: Portugal

18

Report: France — To the rescue of Gard

Hit twice by serious flooding, the French *département* of Gard received assistance from the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) to repair major damage, restore infrastructure, sanitation and socio-educational services, and also to improve future protection and risk prevention. A considerable feat of management saw a total of 115 actions implemented, all to the stated deadlines. *Inforegio Panorama* visits these EUSF pioneers.

19



From the ground: Italy

22

Risk prevention: a priority for the Structural Funds 2007–13

A global and integrated approach to risks is required at EU level.

23

Interreg in action: the Netherlands, North Sea, Atlantic area, Alpine space

25



Bringing Europe's cities together

26

The Third European City Summit was held in Noordwijk and Leiden (the Netherlands).

REGIO and networks

27



Online

28

Photographs: CEDRE (1, 25), European Commission (4, 6, 26, 27), project promoters (7, 8), Préfecture de Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (10, 17), European Space Agency (9), Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (11), AEIDL (11, 20), Ministerstvo financí (11, 16) Dipartimento della protezione civile (12, 22), Sächsische Staatskanzlei (14), Malta's Planning & Priorities Co-ordination Division (17), Österreichisches Bundesministerium für Inneres (17), Parque Nacional marítimo-terrestre de las islas atlánticas de Galicia (17), Câmara Municipal de Monchique (18), Institution Maintenon (19), Rijkswaterstaat-Directie Oost Nederland (23), Bulgarian Ministry of Energy and Energy Resources (24), IRMA (25), Interreg IIIB North Sea Programme Secretariat (25), Università degli Studi di Trieste (25).

Cover: A clean-up operation following the oil spill from the *Prestige* tanker.

Editor: Thierry Daman, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy.

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In brief

The added value of cohesion policy

I took up my duties as Commissioner responsible for regional policy on 22 November 2004. It gives me special pleasure to introduce this, the latest issue of *Inforegio Panorama* (“The quarterly magazine of the actors of regional development”) because it is a publication that makes a valuable contribution to the information mission which I have set myself during my mandate.

In my view it is politically essential to explain Community action and to show the added value of cohesion policy — in the interests of total transparency and out of a desire for dialogue with all the partners, right down to the grass roots.

This communication effort can only be facilitated by the indisputable fact that cohesion policy is the Union’s most visible presence on the ground. Without it, the Union would be an essentially abstract entity, a ‘machine’ turning out regulations and directives. I have already seen for myself just how sensitive the Union’s regions are to the concrete and additional contribution made by a cohesion policy of which they are the beneficiaries — whether it is helping them to correct development disparities, promote industrial conversion or encourage mutual co-operation.

I will always strive to ensure that Community intervention remains true to my idea of the Union’s added value, which is to do more and do it better by supplementing the action of the Member States and regions with funding that would not be possible without the Union. That is my responsibility to Europe’s taxpayers. Doing more and doing it better also means ensuring that regional policy contributes to the Union’s increased competitiveness and growth, in line with the Lisbon agenda.

The main theme of this issue of *Inforegio Panorama* is a little known — but highly significant — aspect of European intervention: the joint response to natural disasters through the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) and risk prevention. It is important to realize just how much the EUSF, together with the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund, constitutes a tangible symbol of that European solidarity which is the founding value of cohesion policy: that solidarity and that cohesion policy unite the citizens of Europe and encourage cooperation between them. As to risk prevention, already made tangible through various projects, this is fully integrated in the legislative proposals adopted by the Commission last July for the 2007—13 period, proposals that I have supported and that I will endeavour to defend throughout the current interinstitutional debate.

Danuta Hübner,
Member of the Commission responsible for regional policy

'Open Days 2004'

Making the case for a European cohesion policy



Jointly organised by the Committee of the Regions, the Directorate-General for

Regional Policy and 12 groups of European regions and cities, 'Open Days 2004', which took place from 27 to 30 September in Brussels, was attended by over 2 000 regional development actors. The event reaffirmed the need for a European cohesion policy.

Dutch Foreign Trade Minister, Karen Van Gennip, with Péter Balázs and Peter Straub at the Open Days 2004 opening session

The event involved around 100 regions and cities and was focused primarily on Structural Fund management and the future of cohesion policy.

Speaking on 17 September, Commissioner Jacques Barrot previewed 'Open Days 2004', declaring that: '2004 is a crucial year for the Union's cohesion policy May the open days facilitate Europe-wide exchange of best practices in order to strengthen administrative capacities and develop debates based on the concrete reality of the EU regions.'

Peter Straub, President of the Committee of the Regions, added that: 'Our regions and cities are the lifeblood of the European economy: make them strong and we make the European economy strong. "Open Days 2004" will enable us to remind Member States of that reality. It will also give local and regional authorities a better understanding of the practical impact of the Commission's reforms — reforms that we believe will result in a more decentralised, simplified and efficient funding system, which can only be good for the EU's competitiveness.'

'Open Days 2004' was a showcase for European regional development. The event consisted of more than 70 seminars and workshops on the theme 'The practice and reform of regional policy', and was held in the Brussels offices of Europe's regions and cities.

The Directorate-General for Regional Policy directly organised 30 workshops attended by approximately 600 regional policy actors. All the workshops were fully booked more than a month in advance. The objective behind the core theme of 'Managing regional development' was to pro-

mote the transfer of Structural Fund know-how between the 'old' and the 'new' Member States. Sixty presentations by experts from throughout the European Union dealt with one or more of the following themes: programme management and project selection; Cohesion Fund management; cooperation between regions; urban development; specific development issues; management of regional partnerships; evaluation and monitoring; financial management and control; capacity building; information and transparency.

When regional development and cohesion policy make the difference

In addition to the direct contacts and exchanges of best practice in connection with the themes outlined above, 'Open Days 2004' was the occasion to reaffirm the absolute necessity of a European cohesion policy. Commissioner Péter Balázs devoted a large part of his opening speech to the subject, stressing how cohesion policy had made a major contribution to reducing disparities between levels of development in various regions and to tackling the backwardness of the least favoured regions.

'Nearly two out of three Objective 1 regions from the cohesion countries ⁽¹⁾ have strongly converged and largely outpaced the average level of growth in the 15 "old" Member States. The same applies at the national level in all four former cohesion countries,' stressed the Commissioner.

Structural instruments have also stimulated economic growth by increasing demand and strengthening supply. It is estimated that the gross domestic product (GDP) of Greece in 1999 was 2.2 % more in real terms than it would have been

⁽¹⁾ NB: Greece, Spain, Portugal and, until the end of 2003, Ireland.

without this intervention. The same trend is apparent in Spain (1.4 %), Ireland (2.8 %) and Portugal (4.7 %). 'This was made possible by helping to increase the stock of physical and human capital in these countries,' declared Mr Balázs, who also stressed that 'cohesion policy is not only about numbers'.

The Commissioner pointed out that assistance from the Structural Funds has helped increase European integration by favouring exchanges between the cohesion countries and the rest of the Union.

Cohesion policy has also made a notable contribution to the restructuring of and diversification in former industrial zones. This has created about half a million jobs outside the least developed regions and has financed half of the investments needed to create new jobs. In the old industrial areas, there has been a greater decline in unemployment than in the rest of the Union. At the same time, some 300 000 small and medium-sized businesses have received aid to improve their production methods, seek new markets and gain access to various services, thereby helping to improve the competitiveness of the regional economies concerned.

Some 10 % of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is used to support technological infrastructures, buildings and industrial equipment, universities and research centres. 'Expenditure on research, innovation and technology transfers is the best way of creating new jobs and of saving old ones,' said Péter Balázs, citing a number of practical examples. 'Crete, for example, has developed world-class facilities in biotechnology and laser science through the FORTH research centre in Heraklion. Work undertaken at a solar energy research facility in Germany's Gelsenkirchen Science Park recently contributed to the opening of the world's largest solar energy power station. A study by Cambridge Econometrics of technology clusters, or networks encouraged by Union finance, showed that

they had a significant effect on growth and competitiveness in the areas concerned.'

Cohesion policy has also helped to improve governance by introducing a culture of evaluation in public policy, fostering partnerships between various levels of government and the socioeconomic partners, and improving monitoring systems. 'We should not forget that cohesion policy also helps to implement Community legislation,' stressed the Commissioner.

Another benefit of cohesion policy — and not the least — is that it helps mobilise and concentrate national public and private resources on major Community priorities and the least favoured areas. 'Each euro of structural interventions leverages on average another euro in Objective 1 regions and three times more in Objective 2 regions.'

The Commissioner cited the Vasco de Gama bridge in Portugal and the Drogheda motorway in Ireland as notable examples of public/private partnership encouraging private sector investment and involvement. Both of these were designed, built and financed by the private sector, which continues to operate them, ultimately covering the costs through toll charges. In the United Kingdom, the Merseyside Special Investment Fund uses new sources of capital to provide equity, mezzanine finance and low interest loans to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in this Objective 1 region. Finally, thanks to the Octopus project in Finland, an enterprise and innovation centre has been set up as part of a public/private partnership, with the city of Oulu heading the cooperation network. In all these cases, the Structural Funds and instruments have played a major role in setting standards and transferring best practices.

To find out more:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/opendays/

A successful formula

The Directorate-General for Regional Policy has evaluated the programme of 30 workshops that it organised during 'Open Days 2004'.

The formula's success — as demonstrated by 600 workshop registrations — and the strong presence of the new Member States (20 % of registered participants) are testimony to the keen interest of the regional development actors in an event of this kind that is organised in the form of workshops encouraging the exchange of experiences.

This applies in equal measures to representatives of the new and old Member States. Many people see such an event as the best possible way of gathering useful information, establishing new contacts and generally 'seeing what is being done elsewhere'. On the basis of the interviews conducted during the survey and the analysis of the replies contained in around 250 completed evaluation questionnaires, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

- > Most respondents appreciated the fact that the regions were involved directly in organising these open days.
- > Newcomers to regional policy find this kind of event very useful in getting to know and in locating one another. Participants are particularly interested in establishing contacts and the exchange of practices and practical examples.
- > Although there was criticism of the choice of a single language (English) and the absence of simultaneous translation, the participants interviewed or who completed the online questionnaire appreciated the adherence to the programme, the general organisation, the time allowed for questions and debates, and the variety of themes. In all, 71 % of the respondents viewed the workshop organisation as 'good' or 'very good' whilst 90 % said that they would like to see an event of this kind held again in the future.

Building on the success and lessons of the 2004 event, there is already talk of an 'Open Days 2005', to focus on a subject of topical interest.

Competitive regions: shaping best practice II

The Rovaniemi conference: a compass for the regions

The managing authorities of Objectives 1 and 2 regional programmes in six Member States (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom), as well as representatives of other countries, gathered in Rovaniemi, in Finnish Lapland, from 13 to 15 October 2004, for a meeting that showed that while the routes to development may be many and varied, the experience acquired can be a good compass for all regions.

Rovaniemi (35 000 inhabitants), the regional capital of Finnish Lapland, lies on the Arctic Circle in an area that, according to tradition, is the home of Father Christmas. But it was for a discussion of the benefits of best practice, rather than a review of Christmas traditions, that 170 representatives gathered at the invitation of the joint organisers of the seminar, the Finnish Interior Ministry, the Lapland Regional Council and the European Commission.

Building on the success of the first meeting of this kind, in October 2003 in Sheffield (South Yorkshire, United Kingdom), the initiative's aim was to promote the exchange of experiences and dissemination of best practice between authorities responsible for implementing programmes under Objectives 1 and 2 of the Structural Funds. Underpinning the meeting were the strategic guidelines of the Lisbon and Gothenburg European Councils for a competitive, sustainable European economy that generates jobs.

The programme consisted of three sessions on three themes — 'Competitiveness', 'Cooperation and competitiveness' and 'Sustainable development'. Each was introduced by an expert and allowed a total of 10 projects to be presented. These were carried out in the six States participating in the seminar, and proved as interesting as they were varied.



Learning from one another

The projects presented and the ensuing debates demonstrated the diversity of Europe's regions. Each region is unique and must therefore find its own path in its own context. That means that re-

gions must not so much imitate as learn from one another. However, the challenges facing regions and the potential of those regions varied; the meeting showed that there is great scope for similar solutions to common problems.

Networks of confidence

One of the key words in the debate was networking. Networking is a vital factor for the transfer and growth of knowledge across national borders and between administrations, sectors of activity and the public/private sector. A common feature of the spotlighted projects is that they are all based on a close public/private partnership.

Many participants also stressed the importance of a good climate of cooperation favouring trust and confidence. It takes time to create this climate, but once trust has been won a great deal of progress can be made in developing competitiveness or setting up new enterprises.

Building bridges between research and business

Another very often highlighted element is the important role of Structural Fund programmes in building bridges between research and business and promoting a multidisciplinary approach. A number of the projects presented at the seminar illustrated this.

In short, the meeting served to highlight the importance of regional programmes as catalysts for change and development. This well-organised and greatly appreciated event promises to generate new contacts and better networking between the managing authorities. It was also of great interest to representatives of new and future Member States. The third seminar on best practice for competitiveness is already scheduled for 2005 in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.

A set of 52 factsheets summarising 52 projects, distributed at the Rovaniemi meeting, is available at the following address:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/document/pdf/rovaniemi1004.pdf

United we help

by Johannes Wachter ⁽¹⁾



Clearing up after the 2002 floods in Germany: a team effort.

In creating the Solidarity Fund in the wake of the dramatic flooding in the summer of 2002, the European Union sought to acquire an instrument with which to express its financial solidarity with Member States and candidate countries that fall victim to exceptional natural disasters.

In the summer of 2002, central Europe was hit by flooding on an unprecedented scale that disrupted the socio-economic infrastructure of entire regions and damaged their natural and cultural heritage. Direct damage caused in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany — and just a few weeks later in southern France — totalled over EUR 15 billion.

It was against this background that the leaders of the affected countries attended the 'flood summit' on 18 August, on which occasion the Danish Presidency and European Commission both took the view that the affected States should not be left alone in coping with the disaster. An act of European solidarity was called for. As a consequence,

within two weeks, the Commission presented a plan proposing the creation of a new emergency instrument specifically designed to respond to major disasters by rapidly mobilising financial assistance ⁽²⁾. Member States and candidate countries, i.e. countries with which accession negotiations are under way, would be equally eligible.

The Member States and European Parliament unanimously supported this idea and shared the determination to render the Fund rapidly operational so that sums could be released before the end of the year.

The Council regulation establishing the EUSF

Less than three weeks after the publication of the communication, the Commission presented its proposal for the creation of the new European Union Solidarity Fund ⁽³⁾ (EUSF).

The Council immediately began its debates on the proposal. Two major concerns soon emerged. There was a de-

⁽¹⁾ Principal Administrator, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy. The present article is based on the 'European Union Solidarity Fund – Annual report 2002–03' and 'Report on the experience gained after one year of applying the new instrument' (COM(2004) 397 final, 26.5.2004).

⁽²⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, 'The European Community response to the flooding in Austria, Germany and several applicant countries – A solidarity-based initiative' (COM(2002) 481 final).

⁽³⁾ Proposal for a Council regulation establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (COM(2002) 514 final, 18.9.2002).



Germany, summer 2002: when the Elbe broke its banks.

sire to adopt and use the new instrument rapidly, but this was balanced by the need to build in safeguards against frequent use as the new instrument should only be a last resort. As a result, the Commission's initial proposal was tightened up considerably on a number of points.

On 11 November 2002, the Council adopted the new regulation ⁽⁴⁾ which entered into force four days later. The following summarises the main points.

- > The European Union Solidarity Fund is limited 'mainly' to major natural disasters and covers Member States and candidate countries with which accession negotiations are under way. The Commission had initially proposed to also include technological and environmental disasters but — among other things — a concern to avoid conflicts with the 'polluter pays' principle and to not undermine legal liability for damages led to this more limited scope.
- > Disasters qualify for aid if estimated total damages exceed a certain threshold (so-called major disasters). This is set at EUR 3 billion at 2002 prices or 0.6 % of the country's gross national income (GNI), whichever is the lower (the Commission had initially proposed lower thresholds of EUR 1 billion or more than 0.5 % of the country's GNI). This double criterion also takes into account the relative prosperity and economic strength of the affected country when approving aid from the Fund. (The table on

page 9 shows the current mobilisation threshold in absolute terms per country.)

It should be noted that for this purpose the Commission considers direct damage only. Indirect damage linked to loss of income and production for which no generally recognised and comparable method of assessment exists is not taken into account.

- > Only exceptionally may the Fund be mobilised for disasters not reaching the damage threshold.
 1. In the event of a major disaster recognised for one country also affecting a neighbouring country (irrespective of the scale of damage there).
 2. For extraordinary regional disasters subject to particularly strict criteria (see below). However, the legislator clearly intended this to be the rare exception and obliged the Commission to assess such applications 'with the utmost rigour'. As an additional safeguard, the Council limited the total annual allocation for such grants to EUR 75 million.
- > Applications may only be introduced by the national government of the affected country (i.e. not by regional or local authorities) and must reach the Commission within 10 weeks of the first damage.

⁽⁴⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 (OJ L 311, 11.11.2002).

- > Aid from the Fund is limited to public expenditure and may be used only for immediate emergency operations of the following types:
 - (a) restoration to working order of infrastructures (energy, water, transport, etc., as well as for health and education);
 - (b) temporary accommodation and rescue services;
 - (c) securing of preventive infrastructures and protection of cultural heritage;
 - (d) cleaning-up of disaster-stricken areas, including natural zones.
- > Insured or insurable damages and purely preventive measures are excluded. The reason for introducing the concept of non-insurability was essentially so as not to undermine the 'polluter pays' principle and the obligation to take sufficient precautionary measures. Consequently, private damage, including to businesses, is not eligible for aid. Public assets, which most countries do not insure as a matter of principle, may be eligible, however, within the limits described above.
- > The Fund is designed to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. For this reason — and unlike the Structural Funds — there is no programming, no co-financing and no detailed monitoring or reporting mechanisms. The implementation of the aid, including the selection of projects, is left entirely to the beneficiary State. Nevertheless, the Commission decided to carry out visits on the ground which allows the beneficiaries to raise any issues where guidance is required, while the Commission is able to form an impression about the

adequacy of the implementation system and whether or not sufficient progress has been made so that full implementation of the grant within the year available can be expected.

- > However, an implementation agreement must be concluded between the Commission and the beneficiary State, setting a number of minimum requirements regarding the allocation of responsibilities, financial control, etc. This will also determine the types of eligible operations. Once the agreement is signed, the Commission pays the grant in full and the beneficiary State has one year to implement it. This one-year period may not be extended.
- > Six months after the end of the implementation year the beneficiary State has to present a final report to the Commission giving the assurance that the grant was used correctly. Unused or incorrectly spent money is recovered. The Commission then closes the operation.

Thresholds for major disasters by country in 2004

Country	Threshold (million EUR)	Country	Threshold (million EUR)
Belgium	1 596,775	United Kingdom	3 066,255
Denmark	1 083,705	Bulgaria	99,563
Germany	3 066,255	Cyprus	63,803
Greece	849,027	Czech Republic	424,259
Spain	3 066,255	Estonia	38,082
France	3 066,255	Hungary	373,017
Ireland	634,065	Lithuania	87,039
Italy	3 066,255	Latvia	55,426
Luxembourg	116,321	Malta	25,119
Netherlands	2 658,006	Poland	1 212,140
Austria	1 273,720	Romania	289,248
Portugal	757,625	Slovenia	132,975
Finland	837,714	Slovakia	152,626
Sweden	1 518,971		

NB: The thresholds applicable in 2004 represent the lower of either 0.6% of GNI (based on 2002 figures) or EUR 3 billion at 2002 prices, i.e. EUR 3,066,255 billion.



Satellite picture of the 2003 forest fires in Portugal and Spain.

Financing solidarity

A major problem in creating the Solidarity Fund was finding an appropriate means of financing. As the EU budget under the current financial perspective for the 2000–06 period does not allow for sufficient resources to be made readily available, it was decided to mobilise the Fund outside the normal budget and to provide it with 'fresh', additional money. In terms of budgetary technique, this was possible only through the creation of a new 'flexibility instrument' following revision of the interinstitutional agreement on budgetary discipline between the Council, Parliament and Commission. On this basis, the Fund may grant up to EUR 1 billion per year. However, only the amount deemed necessary for each case will be effectively mobilised, while unused resources cannot be transferred to subsequent budget years.

This means that the Commission alone cannot decide to mobilise the Fund. Indeed, based on an in-depth assessment of the application, the Commission can only propose its mobilisation, following which a full budgetary procedure is required to adopt an amending budget with the amount deemed necessary. Only once the Council and Parliament have given the green light can the Commission effectively grant the aid.

While this procedure may seem burdensome and time consuming, it has the advantage of fully involving the Parliament and Council in each case when European solidarity is at stake.

How much aid?

The regulation itself contains no specific rules on how to determine the amount of aid to be granted. It does, however, contain a number of indications, in particular the need to ensure equitable treatment of all applications. Also desiring to ensure transparency, solidarity and subsidiarity, the Commission adopted a progressive system in two brackets: a lower rate of aid of 2.5 % is granted for the part of the damage below the 'major disaster' threshold. To this a higher share of aid of 6 % is added for the part of the damage exceeding the threshold. For extraordinary regional disasters with damage below the threshold, the same method is applied so that they receive 2.5 % of the total direct damage in aid.

This method makes it possible to award grants in the course of a single year to a number of disasters of different size and occurring in countries with a different economic strength. The intensity of aid is higher for bigger disasters than for smaller ones and varies depending on the capability of the disaster-stricken country to face the situation using its own means.



France: cleaning up after the flooding of the Rhône valley in December 2003.

Applying the regulation

By September 2004, the Commission had received a somewhat surprising total of 17 applications to mobilise the Solidarity Fund.

Only five of these applications qualified as a 'major disaster', i.e. had damage above the threshold. In 2002, these were the flooding in Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany, and, in 2003, the forest fires in Portugal and the flooding and storm disaster in Malta. A sixth application relating to a series of extreme winter weather events in Greece was found not to meet the criteria. One application, relating to the 2003 forest fires in Spain, was accepted under the 'neighbouring country' criteria, while the remaining 10 applications, i.e. the majority of cases, were based on the 'regional disaster' criteria. Only one, the sinking of the *Prestige* tanker, was of

ANNEX 1: EU Solidarity Fund applications, November 2002 to September 2004

	Country	Nature of the disaster	Size	Aid granted
2002	Austria	Flooding	Major	134.000
	Czech Republic	Flooding	Major	129.000
	France (Gard)	Flooding	Regional	21.000
	Germany	Flooding	Major	444.000
2003	Spain	Oil spill (Prestige)	Regional	8.626
	Italy	Earthquake (Molise/Apulia)	Regional	30.826
	Italy	Volcanic eruption (Etna)	Regional	16.798
	Italy	Flooding (north Italy)		Rejection
	Greece	Adverse winter weather		Rejection
	Portugal	Forest fires	Major	48.539
	France	Forest fires (southern France)		Rejection
	Spain	Forest fires (Portuguese border)	Bordering country	1.331
	Malta	Flooding	Major	0.961
	Italy	Flooding (Friuli-Venezia Giulia)		Rejection
	France	Flooding	Regional	19.625
	Spain	Flooding (Málaga)		Rejection
	Spain	Forest fires		Pending
Total amount of aid granted				854.706

non-natural origin. (An overview of all applications received by September 2004 is given in the table on page 10.)

An analysis of the requests soon showed that certain key notions of the regulation required interpretation to be applicable in practice. In its report published earlier this year ⁽⁵⁾, the Commission gave a full account of the different issues and described the principles developed to guarantee equal and consistent treatment of applications.



Italy: Etna erupts during the autumn of 2002.

Most difficulties arose from requests for exceptional mobilisation of the Fund under the extraordinary regional disaster criterion, which is subject to three conditions: (i) disasters must be 'mainly' natural; (ii) the major part of the disaster-stricken region's population must be affected; and (iii) serious and lasting repercussions on living conditions and the economic stability of the region must be demonstrated.

Lastly, the regulation calls for particular focus to be placed on remote and isolated regions.

A number of issues arise from these criteria. The applicant must, in particular, provide a precise indication of the affected region, including the number of its resident population. It must show that at least 50 % of that population have suffered personal damage or serious disadvantages from the disaster. While there is no need to respect administrative boundaries (disasters do not do this either), the affected region must be contiguous. Cumulating several dispersed events is therefore not allowed. Also, given the underlying rationale of the Fund, the affected area or population must be significant in national terms. This excludes purely local events to which the criteria of economic stability cannot be applied in a meaningful manner. Lasting provisional housing, unavailability of infrastructures (water, energy, major transport infrastructures, telecommunications, etc.) or long-term health hazards must be demonstrated to show the negative effects on living conditions, with the expectation that these will last for close to one year. Isolation or remoteness of the affected region is not a condition in itself,

although disasters occurring in more central regions need particularly serious reasons to qualify.

Only if all these conditions are met are disasters considered to be extraordinary because they exceed by their nature or size in terms of damage or by their impact on the region concerned what could reasonably be expected to happen. The Commission found that only six of the relevant applications received between November 2002 and September 2004 met these criteria and consequently proposed the mobilisation of the Fund. Five others had to be rejected.



Rebuilding a bridge near Pilsen (Czech Republic).



The Gard Bridge (France): the protective wall built with assistance from the EUSF can be seen in the foreground.

⁽⁵⁾ See footnote 1.

Lessons learned

The purpose and concept behind the Solidarity Fund was the desire for the Union to create an instrument demonstrating financial solidarity with Member States and candidate countries should they become the victims of disasters of such unusual proportions that their own capacity to cope with them is stretched to the limit. It is under these circumstances — reflecting the principle of subsidiarity — that the Member States were prepared to raise financial resources over and above the normal Community budget.

The five cases since 2002 where the Solidarity Fund was mobilised for major disasters have demonstrated that it is effective and fulfils its purpose. Nevertheless, a number of administrative improvements and further streamlining of the budgetary procedure might allow actual payments of the aid to be made even more quickly.

For those cases that did not fall within the main scope of the Fund, the judgment is less clear-cut.

Applications to mobilise the Fund for disasters below the 'major disaster' threshold proved to be the majority rather than the exception and assessing the specific criteria for such cases was sometimes difficult and time consuming. In spite of these weaknesses and certain criticisms from the Council that the criteria were not applied sufficiently strictly, it can still be concluded that also for the exceptional cases the Fund has worked satisfactorily overall. However, the most recent applications point towards a growing tendency to apply for aid even for very small disasters in spite of the clear messages about the limits of the Fund. Whether this will require any legislative consequences remains to be seen.

Where do we go from here?

In its report of 26 May 2004, the Commission concluded that after not even two years of experience it was too early to make a final judgment about the functioning of the Fund. It was therefore, and notwithstanding a number of issues that have already been identified, too early to propose any substantial modifications to the regulation at this stage.

On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Solidarity Fund and a number of other Community instruments currently available may not suffice for the Union to respond in an appropriate way to all possible major crisis situations where action at European level might be desirable. Such situations could, for example, include terrorist attacks, major technological accidents or public health threats.

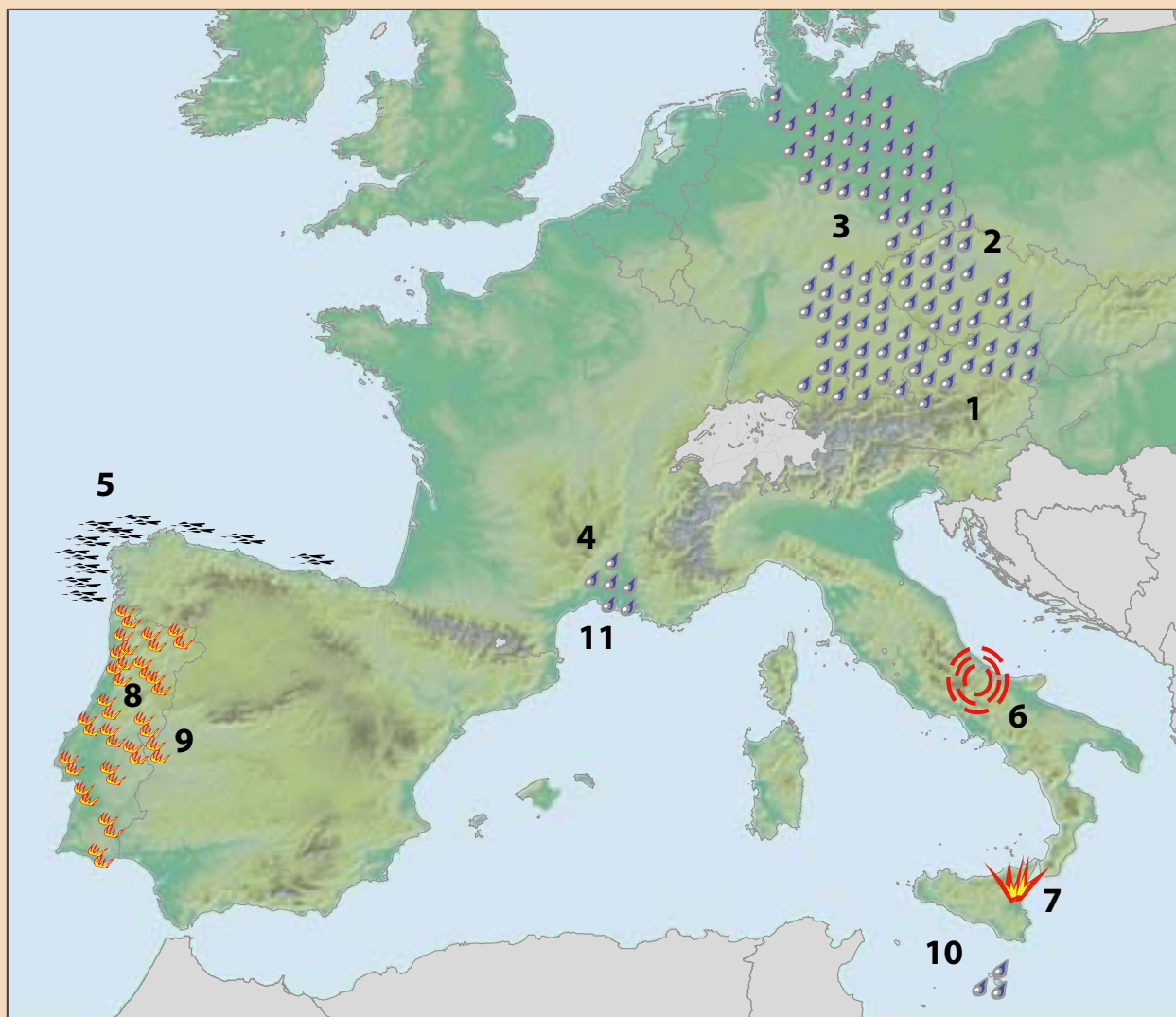
Reflections of this nature have led the Commission to include in its communication on the financial perspectives for the 2007–13 period ⁽⁶⁾ a proposal to bring together the various existing actions and instruments at European level with a number of new or complementary initiatives under a single solidarity and rapid reaction instrument. This will permit a common approach to emergency situations and will provide citizens with a European response in the event of major disasters. The instrument would provide funding to give support to victims of terrorism, address civil protection requirements, and react to public health crises, as well as the effects of other natural disasters. The work has just begun ...



Temporary school building financed by the ELISF for the people displaced by the earthquake that struck San Giuliano di Puglia (Italy).

⁽⁶⁾ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 'Financial perspectives 2007–13' (COM(2004) 487 final, 14.7.2004).

The European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF)



EUSF aid granted between November 2002 and September 2004

2002		Million EUR	2003		Million EUR	2004		Million EUR
1 Austria	Flooding	134.000	5 Spain	Oil spill	8.626	11 France (Rhône)	Flooding	19.625
2 Czech Republic	Flooding	129.000	6 Italy	Earthquake	30.826			
3 Germany	Flooding	444.000	7 Italy (Etna)	Volcanic eruption	16.798			
4 France (Gard)	Flooding	21.000	8 Portugal	Forest fires	48.539			
			9 Spain	Forest fires	1.331			
			10 Malta	Flooding	0.961			

The Solidarity Fund in Saxony (Germany)

A rapid and flexible response to the August 2002 floods

by Ulrich Kraus ⁽¹⁾

Saxony's rapid recovery from the devastating effects of the August 2002 floods is a particularly good illustration of the European Union Solidarity Fund's fundamental aim of facilitating technical and social infrastructure reconstruction as quickly as possible following a natural disaster.



Suspended bidge in Grimma before and after EUSF intervention.

Very heavy rainfall between 10 and 19 August 2002 in the upper basin of the River Elbe and its tributaries triggered floods on a devastating scale, unlike anything Germany had ever seen before. The *Land* of Saxony was hit particularly hard. On 12 August, vast quantities of water — in places reaching volumes of over 400 ml per m² in the space of 24 hours — swelled the tributaries of the Elbe flowing through the Erzgebirge mountains. Violent torrents then raced through the narrow mountain valleys picking up everything in their wake. Five days later, the waters of the Elbe rose again due to the build-up of water gushing into it from Czech and German tributaries. On 17 August, in the capital of Saxony, Dresden, it reached a record height of 9.4 m — some 70 cm above the previous highest recorded level. Dresden was the town hardest hit by the floods.

The most dramatic consequence of this disaster in Saxony was the death of 20 people who drowned in the raging waters. About two thirds of Saxony was flooded and some 25 000 homes were damaged, with 400 totally destroyed; 740 km of roads, 466 bridges and 20 % of the rail network were damaged or destroyed. About 10 % of Saxony's hospitals had to be evacuated due to flooding. Also affected were 280 care institutes, including homes for the elderly and the disabled. The waters caused serious damage to many monuments and cultural buildings, such as Dresden's famous Zwinger or Semperoper. Finally, nearly 12 000



businesses employing some 100 000 people suffered water damage that in some cases caused serious and long-lasting problems.

In all, there were more than 100 000 declared losses in Saxony, the total amount of declared damage amounting to approximately EUR 8.7 billion. Under the criteria of the aid programmes implemented, about EUR 6.7 billion of this damage was eligible for compensation. Approximately EUR 1 billion was financed by private means, such as compensation from insurance companies, a number of charities and the private funds of the people affected. The remaining EUR 5.75 billion was financed from public coffers: some EUR 4.8 billion from the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) and Germany's own Aid for Reconstruction Fund. Over the next few years, Saxony and the municipalities affected will have to provide about EUR 950 million just for the repair of damaged infrastructures, in order to remove all trace of the disaster.

A reconstruction unit was set up during the disaster to coordinate the necessary aid programmes. The main aim

⁽¹⁾ Director of the Reconstruction Unit, Chancellery of the *Land* of Saxony.

was to assist the populations in the most seriously affected areas and reopen roads to them. Initially, this required the provisional reconstruction of many roads that had been literally swept away by the floods, as well as bridges and water and gas pipelines.

It was also important to determine accurately the extent of the destruction. This required establishing common criteria to serve as a basis for assessing the damage caused and the cost of permanent reconstruction. Only damage caused directly by the flooding, such as the destruction of homes, companies and infrastructure, was included in these calculations. Indirect damage, such as loss of earnings by a company, was excluded as it was extremely difficult to quantify. A wide range of experts from throughout Germany and beyond were recruited to assess the direct damage.

On 11 December 2002, the European Commission decided to grant Germany total aid of EUR 444 million from the EUSF to co-finance emergency aid measures implemented during the August 2002 floods. The agreement to apply this decision was signed the next day by the European Commission and Member State.

Under Germany's federal structure, the federal authorities as well as the affected *Länder* are responsible for using EUSF aid. In the *Land* of Saxony itself, three administrative levels were involved in implementing the Solidarity Fund, coordinated by the Reconstruction Unit of the Saxony Chancellery. The main tasks of this unit were:

- > to sort out practical details with the federal State and European Commission;
- > to define procedures;
- > to resolve problems of implementation with the specific departments responsible and services charged with granting the aid.

Actual implementation fell to the various ministries, the task of which consisted mainly of organising the technical aspects of the measures financed and ensuring the administration and financial control of the EUSF intervention.

An independent body appointed by the Saxony Ministry of Finance audited the use of funds, checking that both the allocating agencies and the aid beneficiaries had used the funds in accordance with the set objectives. The long experience acquired by the agencies concerned in managing the Structural Funds ensured that this was done very efficiently.

Of the EUR 265 million granted to Saxony from the EUSF, about 60 % helped to finance protection and flood-fighting measures during the disaster itself. These were mainly emergency measures. The EUSF also made it possible to cover the costs linked to evacuating and providing temporary accommodation for the stricken population, and provided them with food and

shelter during and after the disaster. Finally, the EUSF financed immediate action designed to remove the damage caused by the waters: cleaning up, clearing of debris, removal of earth deposited by the waters. These are all vital for an initial repair of destroyed infrastructures.

The remaining 40 % of European financial aid granted to Saxony was allocated to immediate measures to remove all imminent danger, to restore totally destroyed infrastructures — road and river as well as social and sanitary — and to protect the cultural heritage. The salvage operations on Dresden's Theaterplatz, the site of such prestigious buildings as the Semperoper, the Zwinger and the Taschenberg Palace, are a good example of this. On 12 August, this magnificent riverfront had fallen victim to the waters of the Weißeritz that submerged it in an instant.

By taking extremely rapid protective, clearing and repair measures, sometimes during the disaster itself and mostly financed by the EUSF, Saxony was able to limit the damage. In particular, the diligence shown in the clean-up operations prevented the outbreak of disease. This prompt action also meant that within just a few days access was restored by road and other public routes to the stricken areas, most of them lying at the heart of valleys lying deep in the Erzgebirge mountains through which the tributaries of the Elbe flow. Connections to the public water and gas networks were restored within a few weeks and within a few months signs of damage to cultural and historic buildings had also disappeared, enabling them to once again open their doors to the public.

The Saxony Government had set itself a goal of repairing as much as possible of the damage caused by the 2002 floods by the end of 2004. The repair work also had to be designed in order to reduce to a minimum any damage in the event of future flooding. Regional regulations, such as the law on water, were amended to this end. Today, two years after the terrible events of August 2002, one can safely say that this objective will be achieved. Given the scale of the damage, this was certainly not a foregone conclusion. The support of the EUSF played a decisive role, in material terms and in terms of the speed at which the repairs were carried out. Above all, the rule that requires EUSF aid to be taken up within one year promoted — in Saxony as elsewhere — the speedy implementation of the reconstruction measures.

Czech Republic

The implementation of the European Union Solidarity Fund in the Czech Republic



Dominika Heřtová, Programme Manager, Centre for Foreign Assistance, Ministry of Finance, Czech Republic

In August 2002, the Czech Republic was affected by an extreme hydrometeorological situation which resulted in devastating floods. Of the country's 14 regions, nine were affected with 6 % of the Czech territory completely flooded. In all, 200 000 citizens had to be evacuated and 17 lost their lives. The total cost of the damage was evaluated at over EUR 2.3 billion.

Thanks to the prompt response of the European Commission in immediately setting up the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), the Czech Republic's stricken regions were able to benefit almost immediately from a grant of EUR 129 million, awarded in December 2002. The Finance Ministry's Foreign Aid Centre was charged with distributing the aid, but it was the final recipients (municipalities, regions and national bodies, associations, private energy production and distribution companies, etc.) that bore primary responsibility for estimating the costs eligible for an EUSF grant.

The aid was initially directed at emergency and sanitation works, as it was necessary to cover the costs of temporary accommodation for evacuated people and the renewal of energy and water supplies. In urban areas, the funds were used for cleaning and drying operations in municipal buildings and the removal of mud and waste. In rural areas, the aid financed clearing up and repair works as well as the temporary strengthening of riverbanks.

In addition to these emergency measures, a large part of the EUSF grant was allocated to the renewal of transport infrastructure, especially local communications, bridges, pavements and railways. Considerable support was also given to restoring urban districts and water and wastewater treatment.

As the nature of the damage caused was similar across all the regions hit by the 2002 floods, the abovementioned actions were carried out in all of them. However, the EUSF also financed a number of specific actions. A grant of EUR 3 169 371 was awarded to save the Terezin war memorial, for example. This involved protecting the unique historical fortress system, cleaning up the historical drainage system and basic repairs. Similarly, EUR 466 099 was allocated to save historical archives and valuable documents affected by the

flooding. Archives had to be immediately frozen after the floods to avoid further damage. The subsequent defrosting, disinfecting and drying operations had to be carried out very gradually and thus proved very costly. The EUSF grant served to cover a part of these costs.

The most serious damage caused by the floods affected the Czech capital, Prague, including the historic centre and the Central Bohemia region. The city of Prague received a total of EUR 60 197 314.50 that was used for measures related to housing facilities and public transport infrastructure, mainly for the cleaning-up and drying-out of flooded metro stations. However, the greater part was used for restoring the city's cultural heritage and health services. The remaining funds were used for education and the restoration of the city's green areas, including Prague Zoo. A specific amount was earmarked for the cleaning-up and repair of the Karlín district of Prague, which was hardest hit of all.

Prevention

The August 2002 floods were extreme. The return period for the major watercourses affected is estimated at between 500 and 1 000 years. In such cases, it is impossible to take sufficient precautions to prevent damage completely. Nevertheless, following the 2002 floods, the current anti-flood measures were analysed and the results are now being integrated into the anti-flood protection system at national and regional level. Furthermore, the possibility of the Structural Fund financing preventive measures against floods was taken into account in the Community support framework for the Czech Republic and in the single programming document for Prague.

Implementation of the EUSF in the Czech Republic ended in January 2004. The contribution of the EUSF played a considerable role in helping the Czech regions to cope with the consequences of the August 2002 floods. All parties concerned perceived the EUSF as an example of solidarity and rapid action on the part of the European Union.

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MALTA

Intervention in Malta and Gozo



Total cost: EUR 30 172 291

EU contribution: EUR 961 220

'Heavy rain fell throughout the Maltese islands between 15 and 17 September 2003 causing severe damage that cost the economy millions of lira. A grant was awarded by the Commission through the European Union Solidarity Fund in order to cover some of the emergency costs incurred as a result of the storms and subsequent flooding. The grant from the European Union Solidarity Fund will contribute mainly to: cleaning up and repairing the sewage networks; repairs to the energy distribution network; repairs to the road network infrastructure; emergency structural work to public buildings; excavation and clearing of the accumulated debris from the watercourse bed; rescue services; and protection and consolidation of cultural heritage sites.'

Marlene Bonnici, *Director-General, Planning and Priorities Coordination Division*
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FRANCE

Rhône: aid for victims and flood prevention



Total cost: EUR 870 000 000

EU contribution: EUR 19 625 000

'In March 2004, the European Union Solidarity Fund released emergency aid to meet the costs of repairing uninsured damage caused by the December 2003 flooding in the Rhône delta, in the regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. At the time, the river had risen to its highest level since records began. As soon as it was received in June 2004, the European contribution was used to meet the costs of emergency action (help for the flood victims) and to repair flood protection devices in accordance with a coherent global plan aimed at flood management throughout the Rhône delta, from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean. These works are still in progress and will make it possible to restore the necessary protection against the increased risk of flooding that comes with the onset of winter.'

Frédéric Dohet, *Assistant Secretary-General for Regional Affairs, Prefecture of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region*
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AUSTRIA

Infrastructure repair



Total cost: EUR 194 000 000

EU contribution: EUR 134 000 000

'The August 2002 floods caused major damage to public infrastructure, estimated at EUR 2.9 billion. The most severely affected regions were Upper Austria, Lower Austria and the *Land* of Salzburg. Of the Solidarity Fund contribution, 60 % was used for emergency repairs to transport infrastructure — railways, waterways and roads — while 35 % was used to strengthen riverbanks. The remainder helped to finance the cleaning-up of natural areas and the repair of water and power networks, telecommunications and schools.'

Siegfried Jachs, *Austrian Interior Minister*
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SPAIN

Cleaning up the *Prestige* oil spill



Total cost: EUR 12 600 000

EU contribution: EUR 8 626 000

'The National Maritime Atlantic Islands Park in Galicia includes a number of islands (Ons, Cies and Salvora) as well as the surrounding seabed and continental shelf. This extremely rich and diverse natural environment, a haven for birdlife and underwater species, suffered directly from the oil that spilled from the wreck of the *Prestige* oil tanker in November 2002. An emergency mobilisation of all the staff of the Spanish national parks network to recover the hydrocarbons and clean up the affected areas took place. About 10 000 ha of coastline and seabed were cleaned by hand. Experimental methods, such as hydrocleaning and bioremediation, were tried out first in limited areas and then extended to the whole of the affected coastline. On 15 December 2003, the European Commission decided to grant Solidarity Fund aid of EUR 8 626 000 to compensate for the efforts made.'

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Portugal

The EUSF and the summer 2003 forest fires in Monchique

Carlos Tuta, *President of the Municipality of Monchique, Member of the Committee of the Regions*



Monchique (5 400 inhabitants) is unlike most of the other municipalities in the Algarve in that it does not have beaches but extensive forests. It is also a mountainous area rising to Mount Fóia which, at 903 m, is the highest peak in southern Portugal. As such, it offers

a distinctive landscape for the visitor to the Algarve and tourism is the municipality's principal economic activity, as indeed it is for the Algarve as a whole. Other resources are linked to livestock farming, especially pigs, and forestry, especially eucalyptus.

During the summer of 2003, the municipality suffered greatly from the forest fires that affected 82.5 % of its surface area, reducing crops and forests to ashes and destroying homes, equipment and infrastructure. A total of 79 homes were destroyed, 44 of which were principal residences. Many livestock farms were also destroyed, often along with the livestock.

In terms of the natural heritage, fires devastated major plantations of eucalyptus, cork oaks, pine trees and chestnut trees as well as vast areas of brushwood and strawberry trees. In other areas, the flames mainly destroyed plots given over to horticulture and fruit trees.

In addition to the immediate damage to the municipality's natural heritage and buildings, the disaster also had very damaging long-term effects on the Algarve's mountain economy, in some areas destabilising the population.

Public infrastructures suffered major damage, especially road and hydrographic networks, water supply and treatment, etc. Road verge and surface signs were destroyed and rivulets, channels and other watercourses were blocked by debris.

With access roads cut, water pipelines and hydraulic works blocked, and signalling damaged or destroyed, the municipal authorities had to take action to restore the living environment to residents and avert future risks.

Lacking sufficient funds to carry out these repairs, however, the municipal authorities applied to the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) for aid in implementing a number of projects for clearing and unblocking waterways, repairing and cleaning farm tracks and forest paths, restoring road signs on the major roads and repairing other damaged infrastructure.

The total cost of the actions proposed came to an estimated EUR 2 714 102.84. They were all approved. By October 2004, approximately 60 % of the works were completed, the other projects being either at the adjudication or start-up stage.

Implementation of the actions financed by the EUSF will permit a return to normal life for the inhabitants, not only by repairing material damage but also because this aid encourages the region to turn the page on the effects of the disaster, reducing the difficulties and easing the losses suffered.

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France: a timely intervention from the EUSF

To the rescue of Gard

Hit twice by serious flooding, the *département* of Gard received assistance from the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) to repair major damage, restore infrastructure, sanitation and socio-educational services, and also to improve future protection and risk prevention. A considerable feat of management saw a total of 115 actions implemented, all to the stated deadlines. *Inforegio Panorama* visits these EUSF pioneers.



In Sommières, the ground floors of shops and houses were almost totally submerged when the Vidourle rose.

‘The EUSF is a real boost,’ exclaims Jean-Pierre Hugues. ‘EUR 21 million injected into the economy in the space of eight months provides real impetus.’ The prefect ⁽¹⁾ knows what he is talking about as he has had to coordinate implementation of the Solidarity Fund in his *département* on two occasions in the past two years.

Lying between the Massif Central, the Mediterranean and the Rhône, and crossed by swirling rivers and fast-flowing streams, the *département* of Gard (Languedoc-Roussillon) is particularly prone to flooding. On 8 and 9 September 2002, the area experienced torrential rain due to what French meteorologists call a ‘cévenol episode’: violent storms erupted in the mountains of the Cévennes on the *département’s* northern border, with the water quickly gushing down to the coastal plains. The rains are sometimes so sudden and heavy that neither the riverbeds nor the embankments and dykes built over

the centuries are enough to contain the vast volumes of water. Although this is a common phenomenon at the end of the summer, in September 2002 precipitation reached the highest level since records began, causing floods with particularly dramatic consequences: 23 deaths, 300 municipalities (out of 353) affected to varying degrees, and material damage estimated at EUR 830 million.

‘It was in Alès that I first understood the vital importance of communications,’ explains Samuel Glairon-Rappaz of the Gard Prefecture’s Town Planning and Local Development Department. ‘It is really quite something to see a town of 50 000 inhabitants completely cut off from the world in 21st century France.’ Indeed, after the River Gardon suddenly and violently burst its banks, all communication infrastructures were damaged, including roads and mobile phone antennas, leaving the town of Alès totally isolated for 24 hours.

⁽¹⁾ In France, the State is represented by a ‘prefect’ in each of the country’s 100 *départements*.

'It happened on 9 September at 6.30 in the morning ... The Gardon rose to 6 m above the parapet,' remembers François Saix, Director of the 200-bed Bonnefon Clinic in the town centre. 'A gigantic wave of water suddenly burst into the lobby. It was fortunate that there were no patients in the operating theatre in the basement when it happened. They wouldn't have stood a chance. The few members of staff who were there at the time managed to flee just before the water engulfed everything.'

The victim of disastrous flooding just a few weeks after Germany, the Czech Republic and Austria, Gard was among the first regions to benefit from the EUSF set up on 11 November 2002. Exactly one month later, on 11 December 2002, the European Commission decided to grant France aid of EUR 21 million from the EUSF to finance emergency measures in the *département*. A total of 115 operations received aid from the Fund, the amounts ranging from EUR 2 000 to over EUR 2 million.



The operating theatre has been relocated to a new unit installed on the roof of the Bonnefon clinic.

Survival

In accordance with the EUSF regulations, the aid was first used for infrastructure repairs. In Gard, restoring water and transport systems cost EUR 4.5 million with a further EUR 6.5 million allocated to health and education equipment.

In Alès, for example, the Bonnefon Clinic suffered damage estimated at EUR 5.4 million. Although insurers met four fifths of the amount, that still left an uncompensated loss of EUR 1 million. The EUR 783 382 allocated from the EUSF could not have been more welcome. An immediate instalment of 15 % released at the beginning of 2003 made it possible to restore care structures in temporary buildings and to transfer the surgical services — including the operating theatre — to the upper floors.

The Solidarity Fund supplements other public aid, makes up for shortfalls in private compensation and also provides those little 'extras' that make all the difference, especially in terms of prevention. 'The EUR 311 000 from the EUSF enabled us to quickly repair the damage and also to take preventive measures, such as installing waterproof panels and a device to ensure the continuous functioning of generators,' stresses Jean-Louis Tetu, Deputy Director

of Alès Hospital (600 beds), which was also seriously affected by flooding. 'These were all investments that we could not have made without the Fund,' says Michel Gil, Financial Manager of the hospital that serves a population of 120 000.

Gard's education sector received EUR 2.8 million, distributed among countless crèches, schools, colleges and other socio-educational establishments. In Bagnols, for example, Les Hamelines, a medico-educational institute for young people in severe difficulty, received almost EUR 270 000 to repair its premises, much of which was flooded when the River Cèze burst its banks. 'Without Europe's intervention, we would have had to close this wonderful building for good and move elsewhere. God knows where and when,' say the institute's Director, Yves Abad, and President, Jean-Claude Tichadou.

Speaking to the beneficiaries on the ground, one quickly understands how the Solidarity Fund makes it possible to save structures that are both useful and necessary, but which lack the financial resources to survive such a disaster. Without the EUSF, years of community work, for example, would be reduced to nothing. Far from being a kind of 'humanitarian fund for the rich', the Solidarity Fund is a genuine tool for redevelopment.

The Gard bridge

'Were it not for the EUSF, the bridge would have long remained in the state the Gardon left it,' says Bernard Pouverel, Director of the Gard Bridge Managing Authority. 'We would have done the most urgent jobs and the bridge would have remained fragile, despite the fact that floods are bound to recur.' As the fourth most visited archaeological site in France, attracting 1.4 million visitors a year, there could be no question of cutting corners. With an investment of EUR 2.2 million, it is the single most ambitious operation financed by the Solidarity Fund in Gard.

As the highest Roman aqueduct bridge in existence, the Gard bridge is an internationally renowned heritage site as well as a popular destination for local walkers and bathers. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) had earlier allocated EUR 9.833 million to better protect and improve the site, with a museum, cafeteria and 'controlled' shopping area, complete with car parks placed a discreet distance away. 'And just when all that was starting up, the Gardon decides to burst its banks!' exclaims Bernard Pouverel.

The Solidarity Fund intervened on two fronts. It allocated EUR 1.36 million to shore up 460 m of the Gardon riverfront, and a further EUR 840 000 for a compact leisure area to replace the former terraces that were swept away by the flooding river. 'We had to strike whilst the iron was hot,' continues the Director. 'If we had left it, it would have been difficult at a later date to quickly find the EUR 1.3 million needed to rebuild the embankments. Conveniently as it happened, construction teams were still in place putting the finishing touches to the works financed by the ERDF. The EUSF also speeded up the cleaning-up operations.'

Another key role of the Fund is to secure prevention infrastructures and the 'immediate protection of the cultural heritage'. In Gard, EUR 5 million was allocated to clearing the debris obstructing the rivers and cleaning major riverbeds, with EUR 2.1 million allocated to an ecological repair of the dykes and dams. This aspect of the EUSF was greatly facilitated by the presence of river basin planning management committees charged with managing the whole issue of rivers flowing from the same basin.

Laboratory

'One could say that the EUSF benefited two groups,' says Chantal Dumontel, Director of State Actions at the Gard Prefecture. 'The "official" final beneficiaries, of course, but also all the State services that were forced to adopt original solutions to ensure flexible management and even sometimes revolutionary new practices. In this respect, the Solidarity Fund was a laboratory of best practice.'

The EUR 21 million the EUSF made available for Gard on 26 December 2002 was used in full between March and December 2003, in accordance with the obligation to use EUSF aid within a single budgetary year. This very tight management schedule requires efficient and responsible partners. The EUSF thus forced not only the various public partners (State, region, General Council, municipalities) to work closely together but also the contracting authorities and private entrepreneurs.

The restoration to its original state of the Saint-Nicolas bridge, which lies a dozen kilometres upstream of the Gard bridge, is a remarkable example of the synergies that were imposed by implementation of the Solidarity Fund. Although its arches rise to 19 m, this 13th century bridge spanning the Gardon gorges was submerged under 2.7 m of water in September 2002, the river having reached a height of almost 22 m at this point. The whole upper section of the bridge was destroyed. As this is a strategic road bridge and a very symbolic site for the population of Gard, it was decided to repair the bridge in a way that would do justice to the priceless heritage. 'We hesitated about turning to the EUSF due to the time constraint,' explains Michel Ravet, Head of the Gard Prefecture's Town Planning and Local Development Office. 'Everything had to be completed before November 2003, which meant eight months at the most. It was a real challenge but we pulled it off.' In the course of five months, all the financiers, protectors and contractors involved in the Saint-Nicolas bridge restoration project consulted, negotiated, awarded contracts and completed works that involved 'cutting hundreds of stones, none of which had the same dimensions, to size,' stresses engineer Claude Cap, who managed the works, as he shows the plans.

Marshall Plan

'We chose project promoters with the ability to take up the grants within one year,' explains Prefect Jean-Pierre



The Saint Nicolas bridge destroyed by the Gardon (above) and rebuilt to its original state (below).



Hugues. 'We then operated as a "one-stop shop" with a partnership management style, based on a reconstruction unit, weekly programming committees, monthly follow-up committees, etc. Things were made easier by the fact that the EUSF regulations are much simpler and more flexible than the ERDF regulations. The "Marshall Plan" aspect of the EUSF is very effective. Having a very tight deadline with a fixed cut-off date is particularly motivating for everyone to make a maximum effort.'

In December 2003, Gard was again hit by flooding, although of a very different kind as this time it was the Rhône which flooded. The river burst its banks for about two weeks on the borders of the *départements* of Gard, Vaucluse and Bouches-du-Rhône. Twenty-six municipalities were affected. The excellent management of the 2002 EUSF grants certainly argued in favour of granting further funds in 2003 following this second wave of flooding. The total amount was EUR 19.625 million, to be spread between the three *départements*.

'We have not taken out a subscription to the Solidarity Fund', stresses the Prefect. 'In return for Europe's valuable help, there must be risk prevention and that is primarily a question of spatial planning and sustainable development: people must be encouraged to return to town centre locations rather than continuing to build new housing estates. It is not easy to win acceptance for this. The fact that every application for a new construction will now be refused if flooding of more than 50 cm is possible is not a particularly popular measure, but we are making progress.'

Italy

The Solidarity Fund to overcome the terrible 2002 earthquake

Corrado Seller, General Director, Italian Civil Protection



On 31 October and 1 November 2002, the southern Italian regions of Molise and Apulia were hit by a series of earthquakes reaching 5.4 on the Richter

scale. The tremors struck many municipalities in the provinces of Campobasso and Foggia, placing a large proportion of the population in difficulty. Most places lying inside the vast earthquake zone suffered material damage. The area of San Giuliano di Puglia was most seriously affected, the tremors totally destroying the small town, including a school in which 27 pupils and one teacher lost their lives.

The disaster prompted immediate action by all of Italy's civil protection units. Around 5 000 men — firefighters, police, troops and voluntary workers — were mobilised to respond to a dramatic situation made even worse by difficult access and poor weather conditions.

The scene after the earthquake was one of utter desolation. About 12 000 people had to be evacuated from their homes and transferred to make-shift accommodation: 2 737 tents, 518 caravans and 14 meal distribution services were provided. Over and above these initial emergency measures,

it soon became clear that large numbers of people had been made homeless and lacked the resources to find alternative accommodation. Temporary housing therefore had to be erected to enable these people to return to a semblance of normal life while awaiting completion of the reconstruction work.

The first task was to find the right site. It proved necessary, for example, to transfer most of the inhabitants from San Giuliano di Puglia to a small hill located a few kilometres outside the town. The choice of site was a compromise between the need for security and a need to restore socioeconomic links. Schools, shops, offices and a church were all set up alongside accommodation facilities for 1 000 residents. A village of wooden cabins was quickly constructed and will remain until such time as San Giuliano di Puglia is rebuilt.

The total cost of the damage caused by the 2002 earthquake was estimated at EUR 1 500 million. On 8 December 2003, the European Commission awarded Solidarity Fund aid of approximately EUR 31 million to Molise and Apulia. About EUR 9 million was earmarked for immediate repairs to the infrastructure and equipment necessary to restore electricity and water supplies, wastewater treatment, telecommunication, transport and sanitation services, and also for schools. EUR 11 million was allocated to erecting temporary accommodation and organising emergency services for the populations in the stricken areas. Finally, a third allocation of close to EUR 11 million financed a number of actions designed to guarantee the security of infrastructures and the protection of cultural heritage. The earthquake had, in fact, damaged many of the churches, monuments and historic buildings that grace the Molise and Apulia landscape.

Much of the Community aid has now been used up and work has progressed well on implementing the approved measures. The importance of the European Union's financial contribution to the effort and the key role of the Solidarity Fund is beyond question.

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Temporary cabins to house the disaster-stricken population.

Risk prevention: a priority for the Structural Funds 2007–13

A global and integrated approach to risks is required at EU level.



The 'SDF' Interreg IIIB project support flood prevention measures on the Rhine.



A total of 7 million people affected and EUR 60 billion in insured losses — that is the result of the natural and technological disasters that hit the 31 Member States of the European Environment Agency (EEA) between 1998 and 2002. It is a situation that is set to worsen in the future with insurance companies forecasting the cost of natural disasters alone to rise to USD 150 billion a year over the coming decade.

Over recent years, the impact of disasters on the economic fabric of the regions affected has exceeded the capacity of existing compensation mechanisms. As a result, the efforts by Member States — sometimes with the support of the Structural Funds — to revitalise their economies and regenerate their territories risk being thwarted. Furthermore, a natural or technological disaster often affects more than one State. For all these reasons, a global and integrated approach to risks is required at EU level.

Prevention takes many forms: measures designed to reduce the risk by correcting the root cause (e.g. reduction of CO₂ emissions, obligation to build in flood-free areas) and measures designed to 'live with the risk' (e.g. changes to building regulations, construction of dams and dykes). European cohesion policy as well as environmental, rural development, transport and research policy finance both types of action.

Through its successive research programmes, the Commission also supports actions to improve knowledge of risks. Measures relating to natural or technological risks are also laid down in numerous directives and other Community regulations.

Risk prevention: from a financing possibility to a priority

Present cohesion policy finances many risk prevention measures. The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) ⁽¹⁾ and the communication from the Commission on the Interreg III ⁽²⁾ Community initiative for trans-European cooperation both include direct provisions for preventive actions.

Following the disasters that hit a number of EU Member States in 2002, the Commission recommended, in its revised indicative guidelines setting the priorities for Structural Fund implementation ⁽³⁾, that it should be possible for risk prevention actions to be financed in the framework of the 2004 mid-term programme review and the allocation of the performance reserve under which EUR 8.246 billion was granted to programmes showing the best performance.

The proposal for a regulation concerning the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), adopted by the Commission in mid-July 2004, states that risk prevention will be one of the three priorities for the 2007–13 period. The regulation on the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) as well as the European Fisheries Fund also include risk provisions (see table overleaf).

Defining the pertinent zones

There is not necessarily an overlap between regions benefiting from Structural Fund intervention on the basis of socioeconomic criteria, and the need for preventive action. The proposal for an ERDF regulation states that the choice of eligible zones will be a matter for the Member State.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999.

⁽²⁾ Document C(2000)1101, 28.4.2000.

⁽³⁾ COM(2003) 499 final, 25.8.2003.

As regards the EAFRD, preventive measures for forest fires will apply to zones classed as being at risk by the Member State. The Member State will also decide which zones would benefit from reforestation.

The proposal for increased intervention for areas suffering from natural handicaps should facilitate preventive actions in those zones where financing difficulties can present barriers to effective implementation of actions for the prevention of certain risks such as fires and avalanches.

Strategic directions

Proposals for regulations for the 2007–13 period are likely to be adopted during 2005. Upstream reflection in the Member States on defining the geographical areas where the proposals will apply and on the thematic, geographical and financial aspects will be a determining element in the success of the strategies implemented.

When establishing these strategies, it will be necessary to take into account natural and technological risks, especially in the most exposed areas. Risk assessment tools that can examine human, monetary and environmental factors will be essential for establishing effective strategies for adaptation and risk reduction.

In terms of risk prevention, cohesion policy takes a two-pronged approach. It not only provides **financial aid for the least favoured regions** in the Union but also for other regions whose competitiveness must be supported for their development efforts to prove **sustainable**. Also, as the action — or inaction — of certain regions risks cancelling the development efforts of others, **regional cooperation** support makes it possible to strengthen inter-region solidarity. By concentrating its efforts on risk prevention, Community cohesion policy enables environment, transport and rural development policy to be implemented more effectively in the regions of the 25 Member States.



Air quality: the ISPA Programme finances the reduction of polluting emissions from the Maritsa East II power plant in Bulgaria.

Cohesion policy and risk prevention

	Period 2000–06	Period 2007–13
Regional development	<p>Revised strategic guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Realisation of geological or stabilisation studies > Prevention plans for natural risks <p>Interreg III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Joint planning and guidelines for the improvement and management of border areas > Highlighting sustainable development and conservation of cross-border forestry resources; disaster prevention > Development of joint risk management strategies 	<p>‘Convergence’ and ‘Competitiveness’ objectives</p> <p>Plans aimed at preventing and managing natural and technological risks</p> <p>‘Territorial cooperation’ objective</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Promotion of maritime security > Protection against flooding and protection of internal maritime waters > Prevention of and protection against erosion, earthquakes and avalanches <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Supply of equipment > Development of infrastructures > Drawing-up and implementation of transnational assistance plans > Risk mapping systems > Development of joint instruments for preventing, monitoring and combating risks
Rural development	<p>EAGGF</p> <p>Prevention and repair of natural risks and forest fires affecting agricultural and forestry production</p>	<p>EAFRD</p> <p>Prevention and repair of natural risks and forest fires affecting agricultural production and forestry production</p> <p>Development of forestry resources and improvement of their quality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Initial forestation of agricultural and non-agricultural land > Strengthening of the protective role of forests in combating soil erosion > Management of water resources and water quality
Fisheries policy		<p>Reconstitution of the production potential of the fisheries sector damaged by natural or industrial disasters</p>

THE NETHERLANDS

Widening the Rhine riverbed



Total cost: EUR 6 591 385

EU contribution: EUR 2 962 986

'IRMA, the programme for flood prevention in the Rhine and Maas (Meuse) basins, supported many often innovative projects between 1997 and 2003. The setting-back of the Bakenhof dyke near Arnhem is a good example of IRMA's integrated approach. This involved widening the Rhine riverbed by 200 m over a distance of several kilometres. The first step was to relocate a number of allotment gardens. A side channel was then dug in the winterbed which, thus widened, became a new area for nature and recreation for the local population. The project, which combined spatial planning and water management in a very urban environment, enabled the maximum water level of the Rhine to be reduced by 7 cm at this point, thereby adding to the safety of the people of Arnhem.'

Jacqueline Laman, Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, former IRMA Programme Manager

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NORTH SEA

Flood prevention



Total cost: EUR 9 847 575

EU contribution: EUR 4 923 788

'Flooding is a risk shared by most maritime regions. The FLOWS project is harnessing the expertise of many parties within the Interreg IIIB "North Sea" cooperation area who are involved in the protection and sustainable development of zones prone to flooding. The project covers both the social and the technical dimensions of flood prevention in order to better integrate this prevention into the spatial planning process. The project will produce improved mapping and modelling systems for flooding and land use, develop flood-risk symbols and work to raise awareness of flood risk among the public, policy-makers and businesses. In the United Kingdom, three demonstration buildings have been selected to test processes able to reduce flood damage.'

Helen Elliott, Project manager, Cambridgeshire County Council

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ATLANTIC AREA

Maritime security in the Atlantic



Total cost: EUR 84 350

EU contribution: EUR 48 920

'The Monitoring Committee of the Interreg IIIB 'Atlantic area' programme, in which many regions of Spain, France, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom participate, commissioned a study on transnational cooperation in the field of maritime security. Experts representing the Union's various maritime basins worked on: the priority themes of the network to be built; the criteria projects which should be met to ensure coherence and complementarity with the missions of international bodies; and partnerships to be built for projects to bring a genuine added value to maritime security policy. This initiative was launched in the context of preparations for the future programming period during which risk prevention and the maritime dimension will be priorities.'

Ronan McAdam, Coordinator of the Interreg IIIB 'Atlantic area' programme

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ALPINE SPACE

Geodetics in the service of risk prevention



Total cost: EUR 1 988 334

EU contribution: EUR 974 167

'The aim of the ALPS-GPSQUAKENET project is to build up a high-performance transnational geodetic network based on GPS (global positioning system) receivers. The network will cover the Alpine space. This GPS array, with precision in the millimetre per year range, will represent the first ever trans-Alpine geodetic network. This will permit the use of the full range of GPS applications: determination of seismic risk, meteorology, territorial monitoring, navigation, transport, mapping, etc. Based on a partnership comprising both geoscientists and end-users, the project will provide an excellent means for cross-training of regional employees and young scientists.'

Abdelkrim Aoudia, Project Manager, University of Trieste
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Third European City Summit

Bringing Europe's cities together

Mayors, heads of urban regeneration programmes and representatives of local communities: more than 600 representatives of cities from all the Member States responded to the invitation from the European Commission and Dutch Presidency of the Union, organisers of the third European City Summit on 18 and 19 October 2004 in Noordwijk and Leiden (the Netherlands).

Following the summits in London in 2002 and in Milan in 2003, the agenda of the Noordwijk and Leiden summit focused on a number of key subjects: urban aspects of European regional policy after 2006; ways and means of closer cooperation for urban development at Community level; the presentation of new data on Europe's cities ('Urban 2004 audit'); and the 'best practices' of the URBAN and Urbact programmes.



Elisabeth Helander (Regional Policy DG)

Urban paradoxes

Cities are a paradox. Centres of economic growth and the creation of wealth, knowledge, culture and technologies, they also pose major challenges for today's society in the form of traffic congestion, pollution, deteriorating living environment, social exclusion, urban violence and loss of a sense of community.

The Structural and Cohesion Funds support sustainable urban development in order to meet these challenges and make the most of the potential of cities. In particular, the Community URBAN initiative is designed to promote the economic and social regeneration of neighbourhoods in crisis by means of an integrated approach to urban problems, a broad partnership and the participation of local residents. Seventy cities throughout the Union currently benefit from the URBAN II programme while the Urbact programme disseminates the URBAN experience in more than 200 cities participating in some 15 networks.

The political and territorial dimension

As Commissioner Jacques Barrot stressed at the summit, 'this attention to urban issues also reveals the political dimension'. Mayors and locally elected representatives are 'the first link in our democracies and the first contact with our fellow citizens. ... It is in this spirit that the third cohesion report introduced for the first time the notion that, in addition to its social and economic dimensions, cohesion policy must also include a territorial dimension.' The Commission's proposals for after 2006 are to draw on the URBAN experience to highlight the role of the cities in development programmes and to delegate to them more direct responsibility for drawing up and managing these programmes.

The Commissioner inaugurated a new Internet site, dedicated to the 'Urban audit' programme, at the summit: <http://www.urbanaudit.org>.

Also consult the URBAN network site (<http://urbact.org>) and for URBAN II and the other urban structural actions: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/themes/urban_en.htm.

'Urban audit': taking the pulse of Europe's cities

The 'Urban audit' programme, which runs from 2002–05, concerns 258 towns and cities in the EU-25, Bulgaria and Romania, of which 123 have a population of over 250 000 and 135 have a population of between 50 000 and 250 000. The data are currently available for the 189 of these municipalities that are in the EU-15, but in 2005 the data will be extended to include the new Member States. The aim is to provide citizens, authorities and other urban development actors with a statistical tool with which to compare the situation in different towns, to facilitate the exchange of experience, and to assess the quality of life and improve urban policy.

'Urban audit' covers nine fields: demography (age, sex, nationality, households); social aspects (housing, health, crime); economic aspects (jobs and wages); civic involvement (elections and local administration); training and education; environment (climate, air, water, waste); travel and transport (including accidents); the information society (installation and use of technologies); culture and recreation (including tourism). In addition to the 'objective' statistics, perception surveys allow decision-makers to listen to citizens and show variations in opinion from one city to another.

REGIO and networks

The Structural Funds in your country and your region

The InfoREGIO site now enables users to rapidly find information on the Structural Funds in their country or region via a 'clickable' map offering coverage from the European to the national and regional levels. At each level, two-page factsheets can be printed out providing a summary of the Funds in action as well as examples of projects and useful contacts. The national and regional levels are available in English and French as well as the official language(s) of the country concerned. The European factsheet is available in all the Community languages plus Bulgarian and Romanian.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/atlas/index_en.htm

Managing Interreg IIIA

Cross-border programme managers face many difficulties due to the many different regulations and procedures that they must respect. To help them with their task, Interact was set up as a trans-European programme to promote cooperation between the players. In this connection, the Interact Point for Qualification organised two practical seminars on Interreg IIIA management on 22 and 23 November in Brussels. Documentation is available in English and French.

<http://www.interact-eu.net>

ESPON report on territorial development

ESPON, the European Spatial Planning Observation Network, has published a report — 'ESPON in progress' — presenting current trends and debates in the field of European territorial development. The report is based on extracts from interim reports from 16 transnational project groups. It covers 29 European countries, including the 25 EU States, Bulgaria and Romania, as well as Norway and Switzerland. The initial results obtained by these ESPON projects provide more specific information on Europe's territorial diversity, territorial imbalances and potential for development.

<http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/publications>

Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions

A total of 160 representatives of Europe's regions and Member States, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Dutch Presidency of the Union met in Taormina, Italy, on 21 and 22 October, at the invitation of the Sicily region. The member regions of the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and the Association of Europe's Border Regions (AEBR) presented their proposals for the new Community territorial cooperation instruments. 'The European Commission's proposals for the 2007–13 period mark a new ambition in practice and in spirit,' declared the regions, welcoming, in particular, the fact that all the border regions, both land and sea, are eligible independently of national choices and the delimitation of the area.

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REGIO agenda

Dates	Event	Place
2005	The EU Solidarity Fund and the immediate response to disasters	Brussels (Belgium)
3 and 4 March 2005	Cohesion and the Lisbon agenda: the role of the regions	Brussels (Belgium)
9 to 11 June 2005	The Biennial of Towns and Town Planners 2005	Copenhagen (Denmark)

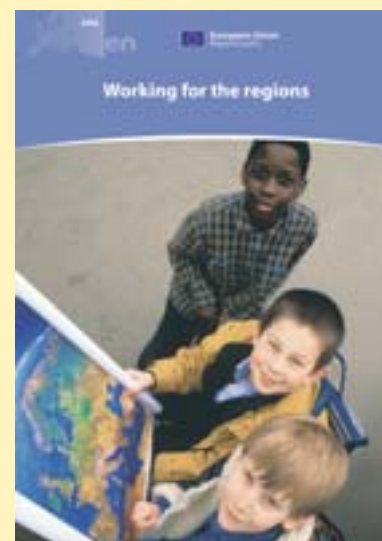
Latest publications

Cohesion policy: the 2007 watershed



Summary of European Commission proposals for after 2007.

Working for the regions



Revised and corrected 2004 edition.

Regional policy, its implications and its tools explained to all, 'developers' and citizens alike.

Available in 21 languages.

<http://www.urbact.org>

Urbact networks towns and neighbourhoods that are characterised by high unemployment, crime and poverty, on the one hand, and insufficient public services, on the other. Its website (in English and French) provides a forum for exchanges between towns and cities throughout the Union and is the principal tool for disseminating and drawing on the results of experiences under the URBAN initiative.



<http://www.eira.org>

The European Industrial Regions Association (EIRA) was created in May 2002 following the merger of RETI (European Regions of Industrial Technology) and CASTer (Conference and Association of Steel Territories). EIRA currently has 29 member regions in nine European countries. These regions have sought to diversify their economies by encouraging local initiatives and attracting new investments. Their website (in English, French, Italian and Spanish) is aimed at sharing their experience of industrial change and cooperation through networking.



<http://www.ecoport.com>

The EcoPorts network aims to encourage environmental management of ports and to facilitate the implementation of Community directives on port areas. EcoPorts includes a specific Interreg IIIC project, 'EcoNET 2006', to stimulate exchanges, cooperation, the dissemination of results and the building of common tools.



<http://www.managenergy.net>

The Managenergy initiative seeks to promote cooperation between local and regional actors in the energy and transport sectors by facilitating the exchange of good practices on renewable energy, energy efficiency and 'clean' transport. Its website (in 4 and — in part — in 20 languages) also provides detailed information on legislation linked to the two sectors, financing programmes and opportunities, the latest events and debates, plus the particulars of many potential partners in some 50 countries worldwide.



Inforegio website

Consult the Inforegio website for an overview of European regional policy. For the latest news, go to the 'Newsroom' section at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/index_en.htm

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