

Resolution of the Committee of 'The Regions on the recent flood disasters in Europe and the establishment of the European Union Solidarity Fund'

(2003/C 66/06)

At its 46th plenary session (meeting of 10 October 2002) the Committee of the Regions adopted the following resolution by a unanimous vote:

having regard to the third paragraph of Article 159 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (COM(2002) 514 final);

having regard to the draft European Parliament report on the Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (PE 314.730);

- A. in the light of this summer's catastrophic floods that hit regions, towns and cities of the European Union and the candidate countries;
- B. in the light of the many lives lost in this disaster;
- C. given that the disaster has wrecked innumerable lives and livelihoods, and will have long-term social and economic repercussions;
- D. in view of the so-far incalculable damage amounting to billions of euros done to private property, public infrastructure and cultural monuments;
- E. given that the areas hit by the natural disasters are mainly limited in size and that, as a result, regional and local authorities must also be responsible for assessing the damage and the right to have recourse to the EU Solidarity Fund;

The Committee of the Regions

1. expresses its profound sympathy and solidarity with the families, friends and acquaintances of those who lost their lives;
2. is concerned about the fate of those who have been affected by the flood disaster and have suffered damage;
3. underlines its high esteem for the solidarity and tireless commitment shown by helpers — both private individuals and all the various private and public organisations who provided unhesitating and speedy assistance to the victims, rescued people in emergencies, comforted them and eased their suffering;
4. pays tribute to the determination, courage and resolve of those affected by the flood disaster to take charge of their own destiny and overcome the effects of the disaster as quickly as possible;
5. notes that the disaster has a European-wide impact, and that European solidarity with the flood victims is in evidence across all political divides;
6. welcomes the fact that the European institutions, and in the first place the European Commission, have adopted support measures without delay and have proposed long-term action to enable the European Union to make a contribution to collective solidarity in situations such as these;
7. fully supports the Commission's Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund;
8. considers that in exceptional circumstances, even when the quantitative criteria proposed by the European Commission are not met, any disaster affecting a substantial part of the population of the specific zones concerned can be considered eligible for funding;
9. notes the need for a speedy conclusion of the interinstitutional negotiations on the establishment of the fund;
10. recalls its opinion of 15 February 2001 on the structure and goals of European regional policy in the context of enlargement and globalisation, in which it advocated the creation of an intervention instrument for serious crises of this kind;
11. would stress that the Solidarity Fund differs from the Structural Funds and other existing Community instruments and that it should be used only for the most serious natural disasters;
12. would emphasise that, under the subsidiarity principle, such a fund supplements measures taken at national, regional and local level;

13. welcomes the fact that tripartite agreements — which are to include regional or local authorities — are to be concluded to implement the financial assistance, and calls on the Member States to use such agreements since, by comprehensively involving these authorities at an early stage, they ensure the efficient deployment of Community aid;
14. asks that the Member States and regions affected be given the widest possible responsibility in processing, administering and monitoring the aid, without prejudice to the supervisory powers of the Commission and the Court of Auditors;
15. stresses that this urgently needed financial aid must be disbursed quickly and transparently and in a way that is flexible, non-bureaucratic and fair;
16. welcomes the possibility given to the Member States, candidate countries and regions concerned to redirect some of the structural resources assigned for the period 2000-2006, and the special agricultural policy measures that have been proposed;
17. underscores the need for comprehensive and efficient coordination of all local, regional, national and European aid measures on the ground, in the cities, towns and regions directly affected;
18. notes that, as the main players involved, local and regional authorities are called upon — by means of a smoothly operating administration and the provision of all available public resources — to put in place the conditions and general framework necessary to repair the damage quickly and to rebuild and restore private and public buildings and installations as well as companies, businesses and infrastructure facilities;
19. stresses how important it is that European Union solidarity should also include the candidate countries affected;
20. calls on the Member States, the candidate countries and the regions to give high priority to their own disaster prevention schemes and to examine, review and, if necessary, update the measures and strategies currently in place, and endorses the Commission's announcement to work out a new European crisis prevention strategy;
21. considers it vital that a CoR opinion be drawn up on the experience and knowledge that the affected cities, towns and regions have acquired so far in handling the flood disaster and the effects thereof, and that this opinion be made available to all local and regional authorities in the EU and the candidate countries;
22. feels it is essential to pool the know-how available in Europe about flood and water management, and, building on this knowledge, intends to discuss the Member States' water and flood policy for the future;
23. instructs its president to forward this resolution to the Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the local authorities and regions concerned.

Brussels, 10 October 2002.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Albert BORE
