European Union and humanitarian aid

2007/2139(INI) - 14/11/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Thierry **CORNILLET** (ALDE, FR) on a European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid which aims to rationalising the efforts and the distribution of aid between the European Commission and the Member States. Whilst welcoming the Communication entitled 'Towards a European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid' Parliament insisted that the Consensus needed to be clearer and more specific in order to enhance European humanitarian policy and to ensure that the EU's potential as a humanitarian donor is fully exploited. It believed that the EU's commitment to securing cohesion between humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and development assistance must be reinforced by the Consensus, while acknowledging the distinct nature of the principles applied to each of them. The Consensus should clarify how the different assets of the EC and the Member States might best be combined and coordinated, in the light of their respective comparative advantages.

The EU vision of humanitarian aid

- ***Common objectives***: the Consensus should contain a detailed definition of the objectives of EU humanitarian aid, based on Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 concerning humanitarian aid and on the principles and good practice of humanitarian donorship (GHD) endorsed in Stockholm in June 2003. Amongst these objectives particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the disabled, the elderly and ethnic minorities, including refugees fleeing conflict zones. Parliament stressed that effective humanitarian action, including emergency food aid, should be situation- and needs-based, result-oriented and driven by the principle that saving livelihoods saves lives. Humanitarian aid was not a crisis management tool and should be allocated in transparent fashion solely on the basis of real needs and independently of all political considerations. Its main objective was to aim for self-development and self-sufficiency and must not be geared towards making the countries or regions to which the aid is given too dependent on further aid or external assistance.
- ***Common values, principles and good practice***: the EU's humanitarian action should be guided by the humanitarian principles enshrined by the Principles and Good Practice for Humanitarian Donorship (GHD): the principle of humanity; impartiality; neutrality and independence. In addition to which, humanitarian action should be implemented in accordance with two priorities: i) immediacy, meaning a stronger emphasis on the elimination of all unreasonable delays in the supply of humanitarian aid and on questioning any delays when appropriate; ii) effectiveness, meaning that there is a clear measurability of output against which democratic accountability can be properly directed. Parliament wanted to see the EU play a leading role in monitoring the defence and enforcement of respect for international humanitarian law in order to preserve the humanitarian space. It considered that more attention should be paid to the safety and **protection of aid workers**, who regularly ventured into dangerous areas. It deplored the fact that they were far too frequently the victims of senseless violence, imprisonment or hostage-taking, and condemned any action taken against aid workers. Parliament recognised the concept of the '**responsibility to protect**', a UN concept in response to the increase in violations of international humanitarian law and human rights and to the powerlessness or unwillingness of governments to protect their own citizens. It believed that the EU should develop initiatives to make the concept a reality, while giving precedence to preventive action, civilian means and support for third-country governments in fulfilling their obligations to protect their populations. Coercive measures might only be used as a last resort and strictly in accordance with international law. When considering the use of force, Parliament stated that the Security Council should always take into account the five criteria of legitimacy proposed by the report of 21 March 2005 by the UN Secretary-General and supported by Parliament: seriousness

of threat, proper purpose, last resort, proportional means and a reasonable chance of success. The principles relating to the use of force and its authorisation should be laid down in a resolution of the Security Council.

Translating Principles into Practice: a common framework for EU Humanitarian Aid

- ***EU coordination, coherence and complementarity***: EU coordination mechanisms must reinforce the international coordination efforts of the United Nations, particularly those of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) rather than duplicate them).
- ***Providing adequate and effective aid***: the Consensus should include a strong commitment by the EU to adequate provision of humanitarian aid as well as to adequate predictability and flexibility in funding, through adequate annual up-front budgetary provisions. The EU should prioritise those humanitarian crises which are under-funded. In emergency situations, and especially in the case of emergencies caused by natural disasters, the first 48 hours are crucial in order to save lives. Parliament felt that the EU should strengthen, on the one hand, local prevention, preparedness and response capacity and, on the other hand, improving coordination, early warning mechanisms and adequate pre-positioning of material and stocks at international level. The EU should also invest more in understanding and monitoring the vulnerability factors of the population.
- ***Diversity and quality in partnership***: the report welcomed the Commission's proposals to underline the EU's support for a plurality of implementing partners, in particular NGOs, the UN and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and supports its proposed criteria for partner selection. The EU should develop strategies to reach out to non-traditional donors whose funding is often earmarked and/or conditional, with the aim of promoting a model of needs-based aid, the principles of IHL and the concept of partnership. Parliament stressed, however, that these new sources of funding must not result in a reduction in the funds coming from the EU Member States and the Commission.
- ***Effectiveness, quality and accountability***: accountability to disaster-affected communities as primary beneficiaries lies at the heart of any evaluation of humanitarian aid effectiveness, and the Consensus should duly reflect this principle. Parliament considered that the EU should encourage voluntary accountability initiatives carried out by NGOs. The EU should promote the use of Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines and principles on humanitarian activities, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and the Humanitarian Charter (SPHERE).
- ***Use of civil protection and military assets and capabilities outside the territory of the EU***: these must be deployed in a way which complements and supports the work of humanitarian organisations and limited to those cases or areas where they can provide real added value, and after a thorough prior analysis of the situation. The EU should clearly define and ensure respect for the mandates of the civil protection and military actors in humanitarian operations, particularly in conflict situations where impartiality and independence are crucial to guarantee safe access to disaster victims and the efficient delivery of humanitarian aid.
- ***Promoting disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness***: faced with the growing number of natural disasters (in particular caused by climate change) and their devastating impact, Parliament called for a time-bound strategy to mainstream DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) into all EU development and humanitarian aid. The EU is called upon to allocate at least 10% of additional new funding to humanitarian assistance budgets for reducing disaster risks and to increase resources for DRR within development aid budgets. The report insisted on the need to change in the medium and long term the approach of international humanitarian aid to a marked reinforcement of DRR.
- ***Reinforcing the link to other aid instruments***: in collaboration with the international humanitarian actors, the EU should develop guidelines aimed at reinforcing the link between emergency relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) by basing this approach on the 'do no harm' principles and the 10 'build back better' principles. The report stressed the objective of filling the gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance by making best use of the full range of EU funding instruments. The EU must prioritise staff training programmes and clarify the relations between activities supported by the Commission via the stability instrument for crisis prevention,

management and resolution (such as disarmament, demobilisation, mine clearing, reintegration of displaced populations/refugees, etc.), and the concomitant activities carried out by DG ECHO.

- ***Implementation of the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid***: the report called for the inclusion in the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid of a concrete road map for its implementation, including timelines for major projects and initiatives to be undertaken by all EU donors over the next five years. Lastly, the report called for a regular assessment of the implementation and progress of the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, involving Parliament on an equal footing with the other institutions in this exercise. There must be an appropriate interinstitutional structure and a structured dialogue with Parliament.