

Implementation of the European consensus on humanitarian aid: the mid-term review of its action plan and the way forward

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The Committee on Development adopted the own-initiative report by Michèle STRIFFLER (EPP, FR) on implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: the mid-term review of its action plan and the way forward.

It considers it regrettable that, outside the humanitarian partners, there is insufficient awareness of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The committee calls for the introduction of specific training about the Consensus, particularly for the European External Action Service (EEAS), for diplomats from the Member States and for military bodies. Members also consider it regrettable that Member States are not more involved in implementing the Consensus and consider that the role of the Council's Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) should be reinforced with a view to monitoring better how the Consensus is implemented and more active pursuit of the remit to argue the case for humanitarian aid with other Council Working Groups and with the Political and Security Committee (PSC). The committee calls on the Commission to explore the possibility of a yearly exchange of best practices with EU national Parliaments about their implementation of the Consensus commitments.

Members note that there has been a dramatic increase in the number and severity of natural disasters, that the incidence of complex crises is rising and that the provision of aid is becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous. They advocate increased funding for humanitarian aid to reflect the growing number of humanitarian interventions, and call on the budgetary authority to transfer all or part of the emergency reserve allocation to DG ECHO's initial budget, underlining the importance of achieving the OECD/DAC target of 0.7% of GNI by 2015. Realistic budgets should be drawn up, allocating appropriations for natural disasters or humanitarian action on the basis of repeated experience with spending in previous years. In addition, the report calls for additional efforts to be made to speed up the funding of operations following disasters and the simplification of procedures for budgetary implementation. Commission services must work in close collaboration with the EEAS, so as to make rapid initial funding of the operations possible.

Noting that the increasing involvement of non-humanitarian bodies in responding to humanitarian crises carries with it a major risk of confusion between the military and humanitarian roles and blurs the boundaries of impartial and independent humanitarian aid, Members call for an increase in funding and the development of capabilities and resources in order to ensure that humanitarian aid and civil protection remain purely civilian tasks.

Humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law (IHL): the report emphasises that EU humanitarian aid is not a crisis-management tool and deplores the increasing politicisation of humanitarian aid and its consequences in terms of respect for the 'humanitarian space'. It calls for military and civilian personnel, and humanitarian workers involved in disaster response or humanitarian operations, to act in accordance with the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, and hopes that specific training in international humanitarian law will be provided at the EEAS. The Commission is asked to ensure that additional funding is earmarked for promoting IHL among those who bear arms, among young people and among politicians and civil society.

A joint framework for the delivery of aid: Members make several observations on the issues of quality, coordination and consistency in the delivery of EU humanitarian aid. They point out that the provision of

aid must be based solely on identified need and the degree of vulnerability. More specific attention ought to be directed at the most vulnerable groups of people, such as women, children and forcibly displaced persons. The evaluation process needs to be further improved, particularly with regard to the application of vulnerability criteria, especially regarding women, children and disabled groups. The committee encourages the Commission to pursue its work in specific fields such as nutrition, protection, gender and sexual violence, refugees, returnees and IDPs and calls for the issues of gender and reproductive health to be systematically integrated into the emergency healthcare aspect of humanitarian response. Members note that the worsening incidence of sexual violence is a major problem in humanitarian contexts, with systematic rape being used in some cases as a weapon of war.

Use of military and civil protection capabilities: the committee reaffirms that a very clear distinction needs to be maintained between the remits of military and humanitarian bodies, particularly in areas affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts, and that it is essential for military resources and capabilities to be used only in a very limited number of cases and as a last resort in support of humanitarian aid operations, in accordance with UN guidelines. It calls on the Commission to undertake awareness-raising activities about the specificity of humanitarian aid as part of EU foreign policy and calls on Member States to ensure that their armed forces apply the UN guidelines.

The report notes that the recent tragedies in Haiti and Pakistan demonstrated that the tools available to the EU for responding to disasters (humanitarian aid and the Community Civil Protection Mechanism) need to be improved in terms of effectiveness, speed, coordination and visibility. These disasters have highlighted the need to create a European rapid reaction capacity. Members call on the Commission to bring forward ambitious legislative proposals for the establishment of a European civil protection force, based on optimising the existing Community Civil Protection Mechanism and pooling existing national resources. Civil protection force financing has to be additional to funding for humanitarian emergencies. The European civil protection force could comprise a commitment by certain Member States voluntarily to make available predetermined essential civil protection modules, which would be ready to intervene immediately for EU operations coordinated by the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC). Most of these modules, which are already available at national level, would remain under control of Member States and the deployment of these modules on a standby basis would form the nucleus of the EU's civil protection to respond to disasters outside and inside the EU.

Continuity of aid: Members call for swift implementation of the new European strategy to support disaster risk reduction in developing countries. They advocate a substantial increase in the funding allocated to this aspect of policy. They go on to deplore the fact that there has still been little practical progress on linking emergency aid, rehabilitation and development, in spite of the numerous political undertakings given in that regard in recent years. The report calls for more resources with the aim of assuring the continuity of aid and a focus on flexibility and complementarity among existing financial arrangements in the phases of transition from emergency to development.