European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (‘EU Aid Volunteers initiative')

2012/0245(COD) - 30/04/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on Development unanimously adopted the report by Michèle STRIFFLER (EPP, FR) on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps - EU Aid Volunteers.

The parliamentary committee recommended that the European Parliament’s position adopted at first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure should amend the Commission’s proposal as follows:

Objective of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative: Members recalled that the specific objective of volunteering was to contribute to strengthening the Union's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and to build the capacity and resilience of vulnerable or disaster-affected communities in third countries, in response to man-made or natural disasters.

This should also contribute to **European citizenship** and seek to enhance the link between relief, rehabilitation and development.

Protection of volunteers and their exclusions from situations of armed conflict: Members considered volunteers should not be deployed on projects where their safety and security could be of concern. It is therefore stipulated that volunteers may be deployed in humanitarian aid activities and operations, **except in the context of armed conflicts and internal disturbances**.

Improving the visibility of European aid: Members were of the opinion that there is a need to raise both awareness levels and **visibility of humanitarian aid among the Union's citizens** because Union humanitarian aid is often overshadowed by that of other international organisations.

Deployment of volunteers: Members insisted that deployments shall meet the **real needs expressed at local level by the hosting organisations**. The contract shall either specify the rights and obligations of the volunteer or indicate where the rights and obligations are documented.

Standards for volunteers: Members stipulated the standards that should apply to candidate volunteers wishing to participate in the initiative: the Commission should draw up standards concerning the **identification, selection, preparation and deployment of volunteers**.

Candidate volunteers shall be identified and selected on the basis of specific skills and knowledge. Identification and selection shall be so performed as to ensure diversity of profiles and skills among the young people and experts, while always responding to practical needs identified on the ground.

On the basis of existing standards and in partnership with specialised institutions, the Commission shall establish a training programme in order to prepare the candidate volunteers.

The context of the deployment shall take into account the **skills and language knowledge** of volunteers.

Recognition and acknowledgement of the experience of volunteers: Members urged the Commission to support actions to **acknowledge the experience** and the commitment of volunteers with a view to **recognition of their experience** and acknowledgement in a professional environment and in society of what they have attained.

EU Aid Volunteers could thus be recognised – after their first deployment, as **certified EU aid volunteers** . These certified volunteers would be entered in the register provided for and administered by the Commission.

Limitation on the period for which candidates may shall be considered eligible to be volunteers: Members believed that candidate volunteers who have successfully passed the assessment covered in this proposal may be included in the Register of EU Aid Volunteers and should be eligible for deployment for a period of **no more than two years**, after which they should be reassessed.

Mentoring of volunteers: Members called for each volunteers to have a **designated mentor from the hosting organisation** to supervise and support the volunteer during deployment.

Indicators: in its proposal, the Commission proposed operational objectives. Progress towards their achievement was to be assessed on the basis of indicators. The proposed indicators were purely **quantitative**. Members asked that **qualitative** indicators should also be envisaged for each operational objective.

Consistency of the initiative with other relevant European policies: Members asked that

in implementing the initiative, coordination, complementarity and coherence shall be ensured with other relevant Union policies, in particular humanitarian aid, development aid and the civil protection mechanism, in order to ensure the added value of actions under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

When setting up projects, the Commission should make use of the existing European networks, which are efficient.

Forum for consultation: in order to pursue the objectives of the initiative, Members called for a forum for consultation and dialogue, bringing together representatives of the Commission, Member States and the sending and hosting organisations, to be established as soon as the programme is launched.

Financial reference amount: Members called for a financial reference amount to figure in the measure, in accordance with the 2014-2020 financial framework. Members underlined that such voluntary aid corps should be **cost effective, compliment existing national and international voluntary schemes** without duplicating them.

Cooperation with other countries: Members proposed not permitting citizens and organisations from partner countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy to participate in the activities of the EU aid volunteers. They considered the programme to be a European one, which advances the idea of European citizenship.

Organisations sending volunteers: in the context of the initiative, it was envisaged that the Commission would draw up a certification scheme for sending and hosting organisations. Members were of the view that in designing the certification scheme, the Commission should seek synergies with the its partnership instruments in the humanitarian field and existing humanitarian standards, with the aim of administrative simplification.

Multiannual work programmes: Members wanted the Commission to adopt two consecutive multiannual indicative work programmes jointly covering the period 2014-2020, in accordance with the general principles of the future Regulation. They should constitute the basis for annual programming in the framework of the initiative (objectives pursued, the priorities, the expected results, the method of implementation, the financial allocations in broad terms and, for grants, the priorities, the essential evaluation criteria and the maximum rate of cofinancing).

Annual work programmes: likewise, Members proposed that the Commission should adopt annual indicative work programmes, which would be based on and in line with the multiannual work programme. The annual work programmes should contain the description of the actions to be financed, an indication of the amount allocated to each action and the indicative implementation timetable.

Delegated acts: Members considered that the delegation of power to the Commission to adopt acts should be in respect of the provisions relating to the **standards** for management and deployment of EU Aid Volunteers, the **amendment of the performance indicators** and the **adoption of the multiannual work programmes that define the objectives, priorities, expected results, method of implementation and financial allocations** in broad terms.

In the event that an EU Trust Fund were to be created by the Commission, the adoption of the multiannual or annual working programme of that trust fund would be subject to the delegated acts procedure.

Annual work programmes would be adopted under the committee procedure (an observer from the European Parliament would take part in the committee's proceedings).

Report: lastly, Members proposed that an interim evaluation report on the results obtained and the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the initiative, including on the impact of EU Aid Volunteers in the humanitarian aid sector and the cost-effectiveness of the programme, during the first three years of its implementation no later than 30 June 2017.