Humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia: prospects and guidelines

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The committee unanimously adopted the report by Mr Alexandros ALAVANOS on this subject. This report will be debated in plenary in Strasbourg on Wednesday 19 June 1996. Humanitarian aid should facilitate the reconstruction of the zones ravaged by war and contribute towards reconciliation between the countries of former Yugoslavia and their respective populations. This aid is indispensable to the people who were the victims of war and should continue until they were able to organize their own lives using their own resources. The question was all the more fundamental in that the Dayton agreements had given rise to a new wave of refugees "from regions changing administrative authorities" and there were "3.6 million" refugees and displaced persons within former Yugoslavia and 850,000 refugees elsewhere in Europe. The committee stated that: - humanitarian aid should be allocated to all the people without any political conditions attached and the former warring factions must undertake to ensure that there is free access to it; - aid should reach those in distress and must not be diverted to local authorities or granted for projects subject to reconstruction aid; - it was not, under any circumstances, an alternative to political commitment on the part of the European Union vis-à-vis former Yugoslavia. Consequently, the European Union should undertake, over and above the mandate granted to IFOR, to "safeguard minorities, protect refugees wishing to return home and develop the civil society"; - the European Union should use its influence to ensure that the former warring factions "grant refugee status to all persons who had been forced by the war to leave their homes"; - the Member States of the European Union which had received refugees from former Yugoslavia should implement a plan of gradual voluntary repatriation taking account of refugees' wishes, bearing in mind that mixed couples often do not wish to settle down in states in which multi-ethnicity is less prominent than before. Given these difficulties, repatriation should not be hurried and should take place in consultation with the HCR. The committee believed that the European Union should not contribute to "new ethnic segregation" but, on the contrary, should help to "safeguard security and the protection of multi-cultural communities". - the European Union, the international community and the former warring factions should cooperate properly; - local militia and paramilitary units should be disarmed. Humanitarian aid should: - in the short term: ensure that people survive in conditions of security and dignity; - in the medium term: enable the people concerned to regain a certain degree of self-sufficiency; - facilitate the transition from emergency aid to reconstruction aid; - make a positive contribution to the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons to their place of origin; - finance programmes in the health, medical and surgical sectors and encourage the return of medical personnel; - set up aid programmes for people with war wounds and supply them with prostheses so that, where possible, they can resume their professional activities; - provide psychological support and reintegration programmes for victims of ethnic cleansing; - provide programmes of social aid, psychological support and training for war orphans, single parent families and women who have been victim to violence; - pay special attention to the 300,000 soldiers and young people in need of psychological support and counselling in order to prepare for normal life in the new multi-cultural society. Finally, with regard to the fate of the 27,000 missing persons, the committee called for immediate, coordinated, transparent action to obtain information and to find them or locate their graves. The European Union should help to finance this action. It emphasized the prime importance of the role of NGOs in managing humanitarian aid and called for proper coordination of their action. The Commission should support the creation of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina which reflect the views of the three communities, so that a "multi-ethnic society based on tolerance and secular European values can re-emerge". In addition, the European Union should contribute to emergency action to remove mines so that normal life could resume in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This work had already been partly accomplished by UNPROFOR and IFOR.