EU humanitarian aid: period 1992-1995. Special report 2/97 Court of Auditors

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The EU and its Member States, which have been the world's largest providers of humanitarian aid in recent years, should devise an overall strategy for this policy area. This was the message of the report by Juan Manuel FABRA VALLES (EPP, E), which the Committee adopted unanimously. The committee backs the recommendation of the Court of Auditors that the EU should have a humanitarian aid charter in which the existing priorities and principles of EU policy are enshrined. However, it also stresses that it should not be forgotten that emergency aid, rehabilitation and development are inextricably linked. The report calls on the Commission to replace aid geared towards individual operations by a long-term, programme-based approach. The EU humanitarian aid office (ECHO) should, the committee believes, establish strategic relations with key partners (larger NGOs and the UN) and devise a common overall approach to chronic and complex emergencies (e.g. ex-Yugoslavia, the African Great Lakes region, the Caucasus, northern Iraq). Clearer criteria for the type of operation to be funded should be drawn up. ECHO and its partners should develop an analysis and assessment capacity with a view to adopting appropriate measures which take due account of local circumstances. Cooperation with other donors to set up suitable control procedures would improve efficiency and transparency. The Commission should ensure a better balance in the allocation of EU humanitarian aid among NGOs and set up a central unit for evaluating its development and aid programmes, including ECHO, MEDA, PHARE and TACIS. As to the future of ECHO, which was expressly established by the Commission in 1991 for a limited seven-year period, the report says that the Commission should consult Parliament and the Council in good time and in due form before reaching a decision. Over Ecu 3.2 billion was set aside for humanitarian aid in the EU budget over the period 1991-1996. In 1996 alone, the EU and its Member States provided more than half the funds given by the main international donors (Ecu 1646 million out of a total of Ecu 3066 million).