Humanitarian aid

1995/0119(SYN) - 08/06/2001

A visible reduction in the number of natural disasters in the year 2000 was off set by the considerable increase in man made crises. So noted the European Commission's Annual Report for the year 2000. The number of ongoing wars and violent crises at the end of 2000 had increased to 36 and include conflicts in the Northern Caucasus, Colombia, Israel/West Bank and Afghanistan. The Report estimates that the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) is currently 20-25 million world-wide. Although lower than equivalent numbers for the mid-1990's, they remain nevertheless unacceptably high, not least because they risk destabilising the host countries themselves. The EU's humanitarian assistance programme is channelled through ECHO which is responsible for distributing EU funds. In 2000, 121 funding decisions relating to ECHO were approved amounting to a total of EUR 491.7 million. The geographical distribution of funds reflects the improvement of the war situation in the Western Balkans. For example, in 1999 the ex-Yugoslav states were the recipient of 55% of the ECHO budget. In 2000 this figure dropped to 20% The three main type of partners working with ECHO in the year 2000 were: - EC-NGOs (they received 65% of ECHO funding); - the United Nations (which received 19% of funding) and - other international organisations (which received 10% of funding). Stemming from the 1999 "Article 20" evaluation a number of organisational and procedural changes to further enhance the effectiveness of ECHO are being introduced. Unfortunately however, a number of challenges, common to all humanitarian organisations, remain unsolved. Largely these relate to the increasing number of security incidents, denial of access to victims and the risk of negatively influencing fragile local communities through aid. As the report notes, humanitarian aid can only treat some of the symptoms, it cannot address the root causes of the problems, which need to be addressed through tools such as conflict prevention, environmental protection and sustainable development.