Humanitarian aid: assessment and future of Community activities (Regulation (EC) No 1257 /96)

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The committee adopted the report by Renzo IMBENI (PES, I) on the Commission communication assessing Community humanitarian activities. The committee pointed out that the EU was now the world's biggest aid donor. The EU's humanitarian aid, as supplied by the EC Humanitarian Office (ECHO), was one of its strengths but the report said that the Commission must come up with a clear strategy to define and step up ECHO's role, with a better PR strategy to show the public what it does. The committee believed that, despite its bad press, ECHO had performed well since it was set up in 1992. It should be given a clear mandate and the necessary staffing and finance to expand its role to fill the gap in post-emergency ('grey zone') situations, where there are pressing needs after initial relief operations stop but before development projects start. At the same time, the committee demanded reforms to increase coordination with other Commission departments, implement quality control on the basis of clear targets and the monitoring of results, provide training programmes for staff and decentralise responsibility to staff out in the field. The committee also wanted disaster preparedness to be integrated into all European development and technical cooperation programmes and called for human rights, with emphasis on the rights of women and children, to be incorporated into the conception and implementation of humanitarian aid, without imposing conditionality.