Humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia: prospects and guidelines

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OBJECTIVE: to define the main guidelines and prospects for EU humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia during the emergency phase (1995-1996 winter) and for the period following that phase.
SUBSTANCE: the Commission stresses that the Community is the principal financial backer of humanitarian aid in this region, having provided ECU 1 600 million (with ECHO contributing more than ECU 1 000 million), in other words 66% of the total aid provided since the beginning of the crisis, and points out that this aid will have to continue well beyond 1996, due in particular to the extremely large number of displaced persons and refugees. Nevertheless, humanitarian measures will have to be adapted to meet the urgent priorities that have arisen due to the winter conditions and the movements of the population as well as changes resulting from the peace process. In the short term (1995-1996 winter), the priority is to ensure the survival of the people: continuing to provide food aid, pursuing essential programmes in the health and medical fields and psycho-social programmes, winter clothing, fuel and support for minimum emergency rehabilitation activities (shelters for refugees). In the medium term, it is important to reduce people's dependence on humanitarian aid: there must be a "continuum" between the emergency phase and the rehabilitation/reconstruction phase so as to assist displaced persons as best possible: social reintegration, water and electricity rehabilitation, providing primary healthcare. As regards the repatriation of displaced persons, the Commission emphasises that repatriation must be voluntary but that no methodical repatriation operation can be planned at this stage given the many problems that are yet to be solved (priority law, application of the Geneva Convention on voluntary returns, and so on). Furthermore, although humanitarian aid must not be subjected to political conditions, the Commission points out that aid must firstly be allocated to those most in need of it in accordance with each region's requirements. In this respect, the Union should continue to demand complete freedom of access to humanitarian aid. With regard to the coordination of aid, the Commission points to the role of the High Commissioner for Refugees, whose commitment is vital. It also states that the Community's existing task force, based in Zagreb, should be restructured (simplification and rationalisation of aid structures) but that ECHO should continue to monitor on the ground. Finally, as regards funding, the Commission points out that allocations for 1996 appear to be insufficient: the 1996 budget sets aside ECU 112 million whilst a total of ECU 230 million was allocated in 1995. Given the large number of refugees/displaced persons requiring assistance, the appropriations set aside for humanitarian aid should at the very least be equivalent to those allocated in 1995.