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

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OBJECTIVE: submission of the Court of Auditors' Special Report concerning humanitarian aid from the European Union between 1992 and 1995. SUBSTANCE: In 1994 the Court of Auditors carried out an audit with the object of: 1) assessing the clarity of the Union's humanitarian aid policy (its aims and the resources to be utilized), 2) examining the consistency and complementarity of the various instruments being used, 3) establishing whether the Commission was adequately equipped to implement the aid effectively, 4) verifying that appropriate procedures were in place for reporting under satisfactory conditions on the measures implemented and the results obtained. 1) As regards the clarity of the Union's humanitarian aid policy: the Court of Auditors considered that the Commission had financial weight and solid experience of humanitarian aid, but had adopted a piecemeal approach to problems. Until the end of 1995, humanitarian aid (emergency, refugees, rehabilitation, reconstruction, coordination with Member States, cooperation with the United Nations, channelling of the aid, etc.) was not integrated into any overall strategy. There was no one strategic document linking the various humanitarian aid strands more or less closely together. The Court therefore suggested that a general policy document, a kind of 'charter for humanitarian aid', be adopted, which would strengthen the internal cohesion of the measures taken by the various Commission departments and lay the groundwork for greater consistency between the aid measures of the Union and those of its Member States. 2) As regards the consistency and complementarity of the Union's aid measures and those of its Member States, the Court considered that these far from satisfied the provisions of the Treaty and the various Council resolutions on the subject. This lack of consistency might be due to the excessive caution displayed by the national administrations responsible, whose measures on the ground had often failed to have much tangible effect. 3) As regards the appropriateness of the means employed, the Court recalled that ECHO (the European Community Humanitarian Office) had been set up to respond effectively to the ever-growing number of humanitarian crises. The mandate given to it had four main objectives: to concentrate administrative responsibilities for managing the aid, to develop the Union's capacity for intervention, to improve coordination with other public or private donors in the Union, and to facilitate the mobilization of resources in the event of large-scale crises. - As regards concentrating administrative responsibilities, the Court noted that in 1995 ECHO's internal organization was still suffering from being surrounded by departments with which it was difficult to coordinate, and was financing measures which in some cases overlapped with those of other departments. The administrative procedures followed by the various departments of the Commission were not unified, and ECHO was the only department which systematically applied the provisions of the framework partnership agreement (a system of structured collaboration with humanitarian aid partners, based on an agreement laying down detailed provisions on the allocation of ECHO funds and the operational and financial procedures to be adhered to). - As regards developing intervention capacity, the Court observed that the Commission had not been able to staff ECHO with an adequate number of qualified personnel to cope with its tasks properly (particularly staff on the ground responsible for closely monitoring the global plans). - As regards improving coordination with other donors, the Court stated that the practical arrangements for cooperation between the Commission and the United Nations were still fragile and unstable. It suggested that a global agreement be concluded between the Community agency and that of the United Nations to ensure that their relations were consistent, stable and clear. ECHO's framework partnership agreement should also take better account of the operational realities of this type of organization. - Lastly, on the subject of the mobilization of large-scale resources, the Court said that in a particularly strained situation, the Commission had been able to mobilize more than ECU 2 billion in collaboration with a large number of partners and in a relatively short time (e.g. the Great Lakes crisis). 4) As regards evaluation, the Court said that the Commission had never given the evaluators a mandate to examine the way in which its departments worked. Furthermore, the evaluations were not carried out with a view to an overall appraisal of the implementation of the global plans. It was therefore up to the

Commission to set up a mechanism for appraising the real substance and impact of humanitarian aid measures. In conclusion, the Court of Auditors said that the institutional organization of humanitarian aid ought to be reviewed, particularly by laying down the main principles governing European humanitarian aid policy in the broad sense. The Court wondered, in particular, whether the question of sources of finance ought not to be dissociated from that of the implementation of measures. In this respect, it proposed a new division of responsibilities whereby: - the Commission would be responsible for analysing the crises, approving the aid plans and managing the appropriations (budgetary or from the EDFs), - another body, of an operational character, would be responsible for implementation, monitoring and evaluating the projects. This office, which would need to be set up specially, would be governed by operating rules laid down by its statutes and would have to be answerable for its tasks to a supervisory board which had genuine power to criticize the management bodies.