Humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia: prospects and guidelines

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Adopting the report by Mr Alexandros ALAVANOS (GUE/NGL, EL) on humanitarian aid to former Yugoslavia, the European Parliament noted that the European Union was the most important provider of aid in this region and it therefore felt that the Community should be more widely responsible for the deployment of funds. While insisting that, where humanitarian aid was concerned, emphasis needed to be placed on emergency help (supplies of food, medical equipment etc.), it stressed that action was also needed to remove mines. While considering that this aid was indispensable to the people who were the victims of war and should continue until they were able to organize their own lives using their own resources, it drew attention to the waves of refugees from regions changing administrative authorities under the Dayton agreements (3.6 million refugees and displaced persons within former Yugoslavia and 850,000 refugees elsewhere in Europe). Parliament stressed in particular that: - this humanitarian aid must reach those in distress and must not be diverted to local authorities or granted for projects subject to reconstruction aid; - aid was not, under any circumstances, an alternative to political commitment on the part of the European Union vis-à-vis former Yugoslavia. Consequently, the European Union should undertake, over and above the mandate granted to IFOR, to safeguard minorities, protect refugees wishing to return home and develop the civil society; - the European Union should use its influence to ensure that the former warring factions grant refugee status to all persons who had been forced to leave their homes; - the Member States of the European Union which had received refugees from former Yugoslavia should implement a plan of gradual repatriation, bearing in mind that mixed couples often do not wish to settle down in states in which multi-ethnicity is less prominent than before. Given these difficulties, repatriation should not be hurried and should take place in consultation with the HCR. Parliament believed that the European Union should not contribute to new ethnic segregation but, on the contrary, should help to safeguard security and the protection of multi-cultural communities. Humanitarian aid should also: - in the short term: ensure that people survive in conditions of security and dignity; - in the medium term: enable the people concerned to regain a certain degree of self-sufficiency (supplies of seed, fertilizer, machinery, aid for SMEs, restoration of school and hospital services); - facilitate the transition from emergency aid to reconstruction aid, mainly by restoring physical infrastructures; - make a positive contribution to the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons to their place of origin; - finance programmes in the health, medical and surgical sectors and encourage the return of medical personnel; - set up aid programmes for people with war wounds and supply them with prostheses so that, where possible, they can resume their professional activities; - provide psychological support and reintegration programmes for victims of ethnic cleansing; - provide programmes of social aid, psychological support and training for war orphans, single parent families and women who have been victim to violence; - pay special attention to the 300,000 soldiers and young people in need of psychological support and counselling in order to prepare for normal life in the new multi-cultural society. Finally, with regard to the fate of the 27,000 missing persons, the European Parliament called for immediate, coordinated, transparent action to obtain information. It also called for an independent inquiry to be started without delay on events which took place during the fall of Srebenica and the disappearance of the citizens of the region. It emphasized the prime importance of the role of NGOs in managing humanitarian aid and called for proper coordination of their action. The Commission should, in particular, support the creation of NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina which reflect the views of the three communities, so that a multi-ethnic society based on tolerance and secular European values can re-emerge.