

Hearings of European Commissioners-designate

Christos Stylianides

Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management

Hearing due to be held on Tuesday 30 September at 18.00 hours.



Christos Stylianides, Cyprus.

EP Committee responsible for the Hearing
Development (DEVE)

Biography

Born in 1958, Christos Stylianides is a dental surgeon, but did post-graduate studies in the United Kingdom and United States in political science, international relations and European studies. He was government spokesman in 1998 to 1999, and later elected to the Cypriot parliament in 2006 and re-elected in 2011. He had a second spell as government spokesman in 2013 and 2014, and was elected an MEP in May 2014, sitting in the EPP Group.

This is one of a set of Briefings designed to give Members of the European Parliament an overview of major issues of interest in the context of the hearings of the Commissioners-designate. A full set of such Briefings can be found at:

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Background on humanitarian aid

The European Union is by far the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world. Together, **European Institutions and Member States contribute more than half of official global humanitarian aid**. In 2013, global humanitarian aid amounted to €10.6 billion, of which €1.4 billion was provided by the European Commission, according to data from OCHA, the UN Office for Coordination of Human Affairs. The United Kingdom (€891 million) was the largest donor among the 28 Member States. Among third countries, the US provided almost one quarter of global humanitarian aid (€2.5 billion).

EU humanitarian assistance is based on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, founded on **international humanitarian principles**. These are the **principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence**, as established by the fourth 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War.

The above-mentioned principles have been enshrined in the **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**, signed in December 2007 by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council. It was complemented by a five-year Action Plan. The Consensus defines common objectives for EU humanitarian aid, confirms its scope, states common principles and good practice, and establishes a common framework to deliver it. It establishes the engagement to improve donor practice in the delivery of aid, stresses the need for better dialogue with other actors in response to emergencies and for increased EU support for the international humanitarian system.

European humanitarian assistance is provided and coordinated by **ECHO** (established in 1992 as the European Community Humanitarian Office). Since 2004, this has been a Directorate-General of the Commission. In 2010, civil protection was included in its mandate (transferred from DG Environment). ECHO promotes disaster risk reduction (DRR) as an integral part of humanitarian actions, including through the DIPECHO programme. ECHO employs 340 staff in Brussels, plus 140 humanitarian experts and 320 local staff working in 44 field offices located in 39 countries.

ECHO does not intervene directly on the ground, but funds projects proposed by around 200 partners with which ECHO has signed a Framework Partnership Agreement. These partners include European NGOs, UN agencies and other international organisations. ECHO verifies that EU finances are soundly managed and ensures that its partners' goods and services reach the affected populations effectively and rapidly.

The **2014-20 Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) has earmarked €6.62 billion for humanitarian aid and civil protection** (excluding the EU Aid Volunteers initiative) over the seven years in question. In addition to the initial budget, the EU Emergency Aid Reserve can be called upon to respond to unforeseen events and major crises.

The **2014 budget for humanitarian aid and civil protection** adopted by Parliament and the Council amounts to €980 million. Around one third will be used to provide emergency food and nutrition assistance, with almost half of this planned in favour of Sub-Saharan Africa.

There is **strong public support for the EU funding humanitarian aid** activities: 88% of EU citizens say that it is very or fairly important that the EU funds humanitarian aid - despite the pressure on public finances due to the economic crisis in Europe. 71% of EU citizens believe that it is more efficient if humanitarian aid is provided by the EU as a

whole and coordinated by the European Commission, rather than being provided by each Member State individually. (Special Eurobarometer 384, June 2012)

Treaty base and EP competence

Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) is the legal basis for humanitarian aid. The Union's operations in this field shall be conducted within the framework of the principles and objectives of the external action of the Union, as set by Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Humanitarian aid policy is subject to the ordinary legislative procedure – co-decision by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. In order to implement measures in this field, the European Commission adopts decisions, on which the EP has oversight powers.

Major recent developments

In 2009, for the first time, a European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response was appointed, with Kristalina Georgieva taking the post. Meanwhile, the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force, explicitly mentioning humanitarian aid as an EU policy in its own right.

The Commission's '**Humanitarian Food Assistance' Communication** of March 2010 set out the policy framework for EU humanitarian food aid, with a view to maximising its effectiveness and efficiency. It shifted the focus from mere distribution of food items to a wider 'toolbox' approach (cash, vouchers, cash for food programmes etc.).

As a follow up to the October 2012 **Communication on 'The EU approach to resilience: learning from food security crises'**, Council Conclusions were adopted in May 2013 and the **Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-20** issued in June 2013. 'Resilience is the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks.'

The 'resilience agenda' set out in the Commission's communication and the Resilience Action Plan are now streamlined and integrated into ECHO's programming, as is the goal of better Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD). **Increasing resilience** is at the heart of two flagship programmes, one in the Sahel (the AGIR programme) and another in the Horn of Africa (the SHARE programme), which aim to improve the coordination between short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term development aid and to break the vicious cycle of drought, hunger and poverty.

When the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2012, the Commission decided to use the €930 000 it received for emergency education projects across the globe. This initiative is called **Children of Peace**. The initial amount of €2 million in 2012 was increased to €4 million in 2013, and to €6.71 million for 2014.

Article 214(5) TFEU introduced the mandatory establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps. After inter-institutional negotiations, in March 2014 an **EU Aid Volunteers initiative** was established, with a €147.9 million seven-year budget. In the period 2014-20, the initiative will create opportunities for some 4 000 Europeans to be trained and deployed to the field, and also for some 4 400 third-country volunteers and staff to participate in capacity-building experiences. In addition, 10 000 interested citizens will have the possibility to contribute to specific projects as online volunteers. While pilot projects have been run since 2011, the roll-out of the fully-fledged EU Aid Volunteers initiative will begin in 2015.

European Parliament

The **Committee on Development** (DEVE) is responsible for humanitarian aid within the European Parliament. Since 2006, DEVE has had a **standing rapporteur for Humanitarian Aid**, each appointed for a two and a half year mandate.

The Parliament has been a strong defender of **an adequate budget for humanitarian aid**, including the Emergency Aid Reserve. Frequent topping up of ECHO's budget has become a structural need. Top-up funds usually come from the Emergency Aid Reserve or through transfers from other budget lines. In the last two years, the increasing gap between commitments and payments has undermined the EU's ability to pay its implementing partners even after committing to certain operations. In April this year, four on-going humanitarian emergencies of the highest level, in Syria, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Philippines, required the EP to approve an extra €150 million for urgent humanitarian aid and food assistance. A further €250 million top-up in payments is likely to be necessary after the summer.

In its resolution of 18 January 2011 on the **mid-term review of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**, the Parliament regretted the insufficient awareness among Member States' diplomats, military personnel and European External Action Service (EEAS) staff of the Consensus.

In its resolution of 2 February 2012 on **the budgetary control of EU humanitarian aid**, MEPs voiced concern over cooperation with UN agencies and asked for:

- the European Parliament to have access to all the UN audit reports, in due time, both in order to enhance transparency and to perform discharge;
- the reports drafted by the UN agencies to contain sufficient information concerning the results of projects; and
- Member States to exert pressure for UN reform in matters of transparency and accountability.

In December 2013, the Parliament adopted a **resolution on 'the EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises'**. MEPs invited the Council to place more emphasis on resilience and more specifically DRR in the conclusions on 'The overarching post-2015 agenda'.

The Parliament strongly supported the **EU Aid Volunteers initiative**. Its amendments adopted on 25 February 2014 aimed at improving the initiative's visibility, reinforcing security of the volunteers as a priority (for that reason, deployment of EU aid volunteers in theatres of armed conflict has been excluded) and promoting the gender dimension.

The main priorities and challenges ahead

Humanitarian needs keep increasing, due to climate change, population growth, and rapid and unplanned urbanisation. Projections for climate-related natural disasters alone, excluding events such as earthquakes, show that the number of people affected may rise to as many as 375 million by 2015 (Oxfam International, 'The right to survive', 2009).

Moreover, **many millions of people are affected by conflict and violence.** UNHCR reported that by the end of 2013 the number of forcibly displaced people (FDP) had reached more than 50 million. This figure includes 33 million internally displaced people (IDP). Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia together accounted for more than half of all refugees.

Respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is decreasing in most of the highly politicised crisis situations, leading to targeting of civilians and aid workers. Examples are the three-year civil war in Syria, the consequences of the March 2013 coup d'état in the Central African Republic, and Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip.

Further progress on **Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)** is required in order to harmonise short-term relief and long-term development through effective political and financial coordination mechanisms. The EU needs to enhance the flexibility of its funding instruments to close the gap between humanitarian and development action, thus preventing interruption of operations once humanitarian assistance comes to an end.

The Commission has already started to prepare the EU position for the third **UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** scheduled for March 2015 in Sendai, Japan. In April this year it issued a Communication entitled, '**The post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action: Managing risks to achieve resilience**'. The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 'Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters' is a 10-year voluntary action plan adopted by 168 UN Member States in 2005. A second Action Plan is expected to be adopted following the expiry of the current Framework in 2015.

The Commission is to closely follow the preparation of the **World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul, Turkey in May 2016**. The WHS will focus on four themes, namely humanitarian effectiveness, reducing vulnerability and managing risk, transformation through innovation and serving the needs of people in conflict.

Background on civil protection

While humanitarian aid can be provided by a variety of actors – both governmental and non-governmental – mostly to third countries, civil protection assistance consists of governmental aid mainly delivered in the immediate aftermath of natural or man-made disasters hitting a MS, or a third country. While the primary responsibility in this field remains with the MS, the **Union Civil Protection Mechanism**, created in 2001 and enhanced under the 2014-20 MFF, aims to strengthen cooperation between the Union and MS, and to facilitate coordination in the field of civil protection. The three pillars under the Mechanism are prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters. Today, as well as the 28 MS, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland and Norway also participate in the Mechanism.

Its operational hub is the **Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)**, functioning within ECHO and on alert to monitor emergencies around the globe 24/7, making interventions by ERCC teams possible at short notice both within and outside the EU. Therefore **any country in the world can call on the EU Civil Protection Mechanism for help**. The Mechanism has recently intervened in some of the most devastating disasters: e.g. hurricane Katrina in the USA (2005), the earthquake in Haiti (2010), the earthquake and tsunami in Japan (2011), typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (2013).

In case of **marine pollution emergencies**, the Mechanism works closely with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). Should a crisis occur in developing countries, civil protection assistance goes hand in hand with EU humanitarian aid.

Most participating states offer assistance free of charge as a gesture of solidarity. In addition, up to 55% of the costs of **transporting assistance** (up to 85% in certain circumstances) **can be co-financed by the Commission**.

Resources for the Mechanism are pooled via the **European Emergency Response Capacity** (EERC). The 31 participating states are asked to voluntarily pre-commit response capacities and experts available for immediate deployment as part of an EU intervention pool.

The Mechanism provides emergency communications and monitoring tools, overseen by the ERCC through the **Common Emergency and Information System** (CECIS), a web-based alert and notification application.

The **financial envelope** for the implementation of the Mechanism for the period **2014-20** is **€368 million**, partly from the MMF's Heading 3, "Security and Citizenship", and partly from Heading 4, "Global Europe".

Treaty base and EP competence

Article 196 TFEU is the specific legal basis for civil protection. The EP and Council, acting in co-decision, can adopt measures necessary to help achieve civil-protection objectives, without any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States (MS). The 'solidarity clause' contained in Article 222 refers to civil protection too. In this field, as stated by Article 6 TFEU, the EU just supports MS' action.

Major recent developments

The European Civil Protection Mechanism was transferred to ECHO in 2010. In October 2010, the Commission's Communication entitled '**Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance**' pointed out the difficulties of planning for emergency operations, as the system was based on *ad hoc* offers of assistance from MS.

In May 2013, the Commission launched its **Emergency Response Coordination Centre** (ERCC) which replaced and upgraded the functions of the previous Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC), active since 2001, merging it with ECHO's humanitarian aid crisis room.

The **EU civil protection legislation** was revised with a **Decision of the European Parliament and Council** adopted in December 2013. The Decision creates the European Emergency Response Capacity (EERC). MS are asked to share regularly with the Commission a summary of their risk assessments, to participate on a voluntary basis in peer reviews on the assessment of risk management capability, to share best practices, and to help each other identify where additional efforts are needed to reduce the disaster risks.

European Parliament

The **Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety** (ENVI) is the main committee responsible for EU civil protection, with DEVE following closely civil protection policy and operations in developing countries, as well as its relations with humanitarian assistance.

Through the resolution '**European disaster response: role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance**' adopted on 27 September 2011, the EP encouraged all Member States to voluntarily contribute to European solidarity, by providing resources and expertise.

The main priorities and challenges ahead

The past two decades have witnessed a very clear increase in the frequency and intensity of disasters here in Europe. Around 100 000 EU citizens died due to summer heat, to floods, and to summer and winter storms, while the Union's economy suffered a cumulative cost of over €150 billion. Climate change is expected to trigger even more extreme future disasters.

While it is true that the Treaty of Lisbon introduced a new legal base for civil protection (Article 196 TFEU), the notion of 'civil protection' is not defined at EU level and can be interpreted differently in various MS.

Further reading

Linking relief, rehabilitation and development: Towards more effective aid / V. Ramet, DG EXPO Policy Department, September 2012

Evaluation of the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: Final Report / Analysis for Economic Decisions (ADE) and King's College London, June 2014

Humanitarian Aid: Crises, Trends, Challenges / J. Barna, DG EXPO Policy Department, August 2014

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