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## REPORT

on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Assessment and future of Community humanitarian activities  
(Article 20 of Regulation (EC) 1257/1996)  
(COM(1999) 468 – C5-0044/2000 - 2000/2016(COS))

Committee on Development and Cooperation

Rapporteur: Renzo Imbeni



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## PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 27 October 1999, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication to the Council and the European Parliament: Assessment and future of Community humanitarian activities (Article 20 of Regulation (EC) 1257/1996) (COM(1999) 468 – 2000/2016(COS)).

At the sitting of 21 January 2000 the President of Parliament announced that she had referred the communication to the Committee on Development and Cooperation as the committee responsible and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy and the Committee on Budgetary Control for their opinions (C5-0044/2000).

At the sitting of 18 February 2000 the President of Parliament announced that this report was to be drawn up in accordance with the Hughes procedure by the Committee on Development and Cooperation, in cooperation with the Committee on Budgetary Control.

The Committee on Development and Cooperation appointed Renzo Imbeni rapporteur at its meeting of 23 February 2000.

The committee considered the Commission communication and the draft report at its meetings of 20 and 27 June 2000.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Joaquim Miranda, chairman; Lone Dybkjær, vice-chairman; Margrietus J. van den Berg, vice-chairman; Renzo Imbeni, rapporteur; Yasmine Boudjenah, Marie-Arlette Carlotti, Maria Carrilho, John Alexander Corrie, Niranjana Deva, Concepción Ferrer (for Pier Ferdinando Casini), Jean-Claude Fruteau, Michael Gahler (for Karsten Knolle), Richard Howitt, Bashir Khanbhai, Karin Junker, Glenys E. Kinnock, Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler, Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez, Luisa Morgantini (for Hans Modrow), Marco Pannella, Ulla Margrethe Sandbæk, Agnes Schierhuber (for Jürgen Zimmerling) and Anders Wijkman (for Vitalino Gemelli).

The opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy is attached. The Committee on Budgetary Control decided on 11 January 2000 not to deliver an opinion.

The report was tabled on 28 June 2000.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### **European Parliament resolution on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Assessment and future of Community humanitarian activities (Article 20 of Regulation (EC) 1257/1996) (COM(1999) 468 – C5-0044/2000 – 2000/2016(COS))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the communication from the Commission (COM(1999) 468 – C5-0044/2000<sup>1</sup>),
  - having regard to the evaluation report on Community humanitarian aid operations provided for by Article 20 of Regulation No 1257/96,
  - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Development and Cooperation and the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (A5-0191/2000),
- A. whereas the assistance and aid required by peoples in distress and victims of natural disasters or conflicts or other similar events represents an essential part of the European Union's identity as perceived from outside,
- B. whereas the profile of the European Union has shifted from that of 'donor' to 'responsive organisation' looking for a more direct involvement in disaster response,
- C. whereas in the 1990s serious crises – both natural and man-made disasters – have multiplied, and catastrophes have in particular affected the most vulnerable sections of the population, especially women, elderly people and the very young,
- D. whereas the European Union has increased its humanitarian aid significantly, and is currently the largest donor worldwide and the main provider of funds for United Nations organisations; whereas there is, however, a considerable imbalance in the distribution of resources to the disadvantage of countries outside Europe, particularly developing countries,
- E. whereas the European Union's humanitarian office (ECHO) is the only department in the Commission that is actually able to react flexibly to emergency needs,
- F. whereas, according to the summary and conclusions of the evaluation report drawn up pursuant to Article 20 of Regulation No 1257/96, ECHO's interventions have been relevant and useful; whereas ECHO can be proud of achievements which are quite satisfactory in the view of other bodies operating in the humanitarian and rehabilitation fields,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C not yet published.

- G. whereas, in the absence of sufficiently flexible alternative instruments within the Commission, in recent years ECHO has become more and more involved in post-emergency ('grey zone') interventions of a longer duration; whereas, without a restructuring and clarification of the duties of the departments involved, this type of intervention is likely to prove increasingly unsustainable for the Office,
- H. whereas, more generally, the powers and responsibilities of Commission departments for external affairs (including development and humanitarian aid) must be clarified as a matter of urgency, and there must be increased coordination between departments,
- I. whereas more consistency and coordination is required in ECHO's management and an adequate system for monitoring the quality of results is needed, specifically one that makes use of performance indicators,
- J. whereas ECHO has proportionately smaller staff numbers than other Commission departments and Member States, inadequate for the scale of the tasks it has to accomplish,
- K. whereas disaster preparedness and conflict prevention, indispensable elements of humanitarian policy, should play a more prominent role in ECHO's operations,
- L. whereas the humanitarian aid provided by ECHO is almost unknown among the general public in Europe and is not associated with the European Union by beneficiaries, particularly when used to fund programmes implemented via United Nations agencies,
1. Calls on the Commission to overcome confusion and uncertainty by unambiguously opting for a strategy for the future of stepping up the humanitarian aid policy entrusted to ECHO;
  2. Asks the Commission to submit to Parliament and the Council a clear strategy on the role that the humanitarian aid supplied by ECHO should play within external and development policies; stresses that this strategy should specifically include a general but not inflexible definition of ECHO's tasks and its framework of activities, as well as those of the Commission's development and external affairs departments, in order to ensure consistency, complementarity and coordination in the field of foreign policy and its implementation and to avoid duplication of effort and parallel structures;
  3. Requests in particular an increase in the administrative and financial capacities necessary for carrying out reorganisation and rehabilitation tasks in post-emergency situations, and immediate clarification of ECHO's responsibilities, bearing in mind the need both for flexible rapid reaction instruments and also long-term planning;
  4. Calls on the Commission and the Council to create a system for overall coordination of all the donors involved in humanitarian aid at an international level;
  5. Asks the Commission and the Council to give ECHO the function of a coordinating platform for all the Member States' emergency aid services at times of major natural disasters or other serious crises; similarly, asks the Commission and the Member States to endeavour to make their humanitarian aid more complementary;

6. Considers that disaster preparedness is a horizontal element which must be integrated into all European development and technical cooperation programmes; takes the view in this context that the Commission should give increased priority to encouraging capacity building in vulnerable countries;
7. Notes that the funds available for conflict prevention and disaster preparedness (DIPECHO) are inadequate to achieve their aim;
8. Asks the Commission and the Council to review the distribution of humanitarian aid funds in order to achieve a better balance in favour of developing countries;
9. Asks the Commission, with regard to the management of ECHO, to take the following specific steps:
  - increase internal coordination and coordination with the other Commission departments involved in crisis situations,
  - set clear and measurable objectives for all operations,
  - make systematic use of performance indicators in programming, planning and managing projects, and also in internal administration,
  - set up a systematic procedure for monitoring the quality of results,
  - carry out a restructuring of personnel using more flexible, ad hoc recruitment rules, enabling experienced staff to be taken on and more responsibility to be given to non-statutory staff,
  - introduce a training programme in humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation, making use of the lessons learnt to improve staff skills and enhance institutional memory,
  - decentralise responsibility towards staff located in the field;

calls on the Commission, in this context, to take account of gender-related factors, particularly in relation to the use of performance indicators, the assessment of project results and the knowledge required at recruitment and in professional training;

10. Considers that preference should be given to the NGO system and the associations of civil society which promote human rights and efforts towards a lasting peace when partners are chosen to carry out humanitarian intervention tasks, since these organisations have proved to be efficient and effective;
11. Considers that, with regard to cooperation with partners, ECHO must maintain a flexible approach, taking into account the relevant capacities of the organisations involved and avoiding encouraging cooperation with a limited number of major partners; supports the incorporation of international humanitarian law and human rights into the conception and implementation of humanitarian aid, placing particular emphasis on the fundamental rights of women and children; stresses, however, that incorporating this dimension by no means amounts to introducing any conditionality on humanitarian aid; asks the Commission to coordinate the activities of the humanitarian aid and human rights departments and to promote cooperation with NGOs in this field;
12. Urges the Commission to take the appropriate steps to put a stop to the increased politicisation of humanitarian assistance and the way this is taking the place of European Union foreign policy, because humanitarian assistance should essentially address the

effects of crisis, be they the result of a natural disaster or a conflict, and not its causes;

13. Considers it necessary to carry out research on the interdependence between mankind's interference in the ecological system, military and civil conflicts, economic and social inequity on the one hand and the frequency, intensity and regional distribution of natural disasters, civil wars and military conflicts on the other hand;
14. Requests a review of ECHO's strategy for communicating with the outside; suggests that the Commission carry out an information campaign to ensure that the humanitarian aid supplied by ECHO is recognised by the general public as one of the European Union's strengths; urges that this campaign should not be financed by humanitarian aid funds;
15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to back the efforts made to ensure that the European Union's presence and influence in international organisations are more representative of its political strength and the extent of its contribution to humanitarian aid;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and Council.



## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The EC Humanitarian Office (ECHO) was set up in 1992. At that time, successive experiences (Kurds, Bangladesh, special programme to combat famine in Africa, Eastern European countries, Albania and Yugoslavia) had shown the need to improve the international community's ability to provide a humanitarian response to natural disasters and man-made crises. ECHO's global mandate was to fund humanitarian assistance and protection in a flexible and specialised way better adapted to emergency needs. Regulation 1257/96 now forms the legal basis to ECHO's activities.

ECHO's main tasks are as follows:

- to save and preserve life during emergencies and their immediate aftermath in the case of natural or man-made disasters;
- to provide the necessary assistance and relief to people affected by longer-lasting crises (e.g. civil wars);
- to help finance the transport of aid and to ensure that it actually benefits its intended recipients;
- to cope with the consequences of population movements, i.e. to provide support for refugees and displaced people and carry out schemes to assist repatriation to the country of origin and resettlement there;
- to carry out short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction work with a view to helping those affected regain a minimum level of self-sufficiency, taking long-term development objectives into account where possible;
- to ensure disaster preparedness by introducing rapid early-warning systems and funding prevention measures in high-risk areas.

(For the definition of food aid and further details on each of these points, see Articles 1 and 2 of Regulation 1257/96).

Since 1991 the humanitarian aid budget has rapidly increased and has remained at a high level, despite some significant fluctuations (1991: EUR 195.3 million, 1999: EUR 813 million). The funds managed by ECHO are drawn mainly from the Commission budget (Chapter B7-21) and, in the case of ACP countries, from the EDF. The Community is in fact, along with the Member States, the main supplier of humanitarian aid.

For the direct implementation of its aid, ECHO uses partners, in particular NGOs (56% of aid), most of whom have signed a framework partnership agreement, containing a number of criteria with which NGOs must comply in order to be eligible. It is worth noting, in this context, that UN agencies (which, themselves, often work via NGOs) receive 25% of ECHO's aid.

## **The Commission communication on the April 1999 evaluation report**

The communication refers to the conclusions of two independent evaluations conducted in 1999 on ECHO's activities. The first, which is extremely exhaustive, is based on Article 20 of the Regulation on humanitarian aid (1257/96) and covers the period 1996-1999. The other deals with overall EC aid during the period 1991-1996. According to the Commission, the results of the evaluations largely concur.

On the whole, the two evaluations (hereafter 'the evaluation') contain a positive appreciation of ECHO's work and strategy options, as well as of the cost-effectiveness of European humanitarian aid. Most of the operations funded by ECHO are considered to have been conducted efficiently despite constraints, even where these have extended into the post-emergency 'grey area' without adequate procedures or support ... (1996-1999 evaluation, final report, summary, p. 7).

The evaluation team (based on Article 20 of Regulation 1257/96) carried out a detailed examination of the implementation strategy and management of ECHO's humanitarian aid, the tools available, cooperation with its partners and the relevance of Regulation 1257/96 to the tasks entrusted to ECHO.

In its communication, the Commission has summarised **the results of the evaluation. Its most important remarks are given below:**

### *The 'grey zone' dilemma*

'Over the last decade, both thinking about and practice of humanitarian assistance have evolved substantially. At the same time, ECHO has established itself at cruising speed, budgets have expanded and remained high, and the Office has found itself increasingly managing programmes in the so-called 'grey' area between relief and development - mainly because of the absence of sufficiently flexible and rapid alternative instruments in other parts of the Commission and a growing awareness of the complexity and interrelatedness of aid instruments in responding to humanitarian needs in crisis<sup>2</sup>. While needs undeniably exist, humanitarian operations in the 'grey zone' are at increased risk of proving unsustainable, and in the view of both evaluations, this has unfortunately quite often been the case'.

### *Human resources*

'The consultants pay tribute to the commitment and professionalism of ECHO staff both in the field and at HQ, but note that there is a shortfall, especially at HQ [...]. The level of staffing at ECHO is very low at around two members of staff at HQ per € 10 million of financial decisions, including secretarial and other support staff: this is a lower figure than characterises most other Commission departments and less still than most national administrations'.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the evaluations, background information and statistics on ECHO's operations are available in its Annual Reports, the latest, covering 1998, being COM(1999) 367 of 26 July 1999, and on its website (address [europa.eu.int/comm/echo](http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo)).

### *Disaster preparedness*

‘The consultant report confirms that individual disaster preparedness projects have usually been effective. The new regional approach of the DIPECHO programme is also confirmed as relevant, but the funds available are considered to be greatly insufficient compared to the needs and in order to achieve full impact. Outside ECHO, the consultants note that the Commission pays very little attention to disaster preparedness in its development assistance or in its research programmes’.

### *Visibility*

‘While noting that the concept has evolved positively, the consultants still criticise ECHO’s “visibility” as not having had a clear focus or endearing ECHO to many humanitarian actors’.

### *Emergency response*

‘The consultants also highlight the specific challenges posed by situations requiring genuine, operational emergency response capacity, most notably natural disasters. Presently, the EU as such has no capacity of this kind. It has also been able to do little to build capacity elsewhere. The report recommends that such efforts be stepped up. It suggests specifically developing capacity to dispatch expert missions to the field and suggests ECHO might function as a “coordinating platform” for EU response instruments [...]’.

### *Assessment of results*

‘Both evaluations stress again and again that ECHO expends enormous and unnecessary efforts on controlling inputs, while it neglects to control results. These efforts tie up resources, hamper rapid response, and needlessly complicate relations with partners’.

### *Relationship to the field*

‘The consultant report [...] recommends that greater responsibilities be divested to the field. It notes the problem that ECHO is mostly represented in the field by staff on short-term contracts, and notes additional weaknesses in the management of this staff in areas such as training, support and security. It also criticises ECHO’s remoteness from the normal network of Commission delegations’.

(The Commission notes that ECHO is unique in the humanitarian world in having 70-80 staff permanently in the field. 80% of this contract staff is located within delegations).

### *The Commission's intentions for the coming years*

In its 'general performance strategy', the Commission proposes the introduction of 'a new administrative culture and set of values which over time will substantially enhance accountability and performance'.

It intends to establish best-practice benchmarks and overall performance targets, based on ECHO's and other donors' experience. As regards the overhauling of management procedures, it takes up again the idea of introducing performance indicators, project monitoring, a review of the FPA and a commitment to retraining staff.

The text then lists a number of measures that seem appropriate: the opening of a wide-ranging debate with beneficiaries and European civil society, importance of cost-effectiveness of operations and participation of victims, intensifying relations with partners and assistance to the community of NGOs to increase its capacities and coordination. A specific reference is made to VOICE (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies).

### **What type of organisational and operational framework for Community humanitarian aid?**

The aim of this document is not to submit detailed proposals to the Commission on all the organisational and administrative measures that might be needed to implement Community humanitarian aid, but to give it an initial response to its communication and make a few important political remarks on the subject.

### **The role of ECHO and the 'grey zone'**

The evaluation explicitly recommends that ECHO's current status be maintained i.e. that the Office be kept as a separate service within the Commission in order to preserve and protect its capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to humanitarian crises. This is a valid argument. However, without wishing to question ECHO's actual existence, we need to reconsider its action framework. Any decision concerning ECHO's organisation, tools, human resources, etc. will depend on the decisions taken with regard to its budget and the nature of the tasks entrusted to it. In this connection, it is important to remember that ECHO is a financing and not an operational body. This should be a fundamental consideration with regard to ECHO's organisational arrangements, recruitment and institutional set-up.

The key question in defining ECHO's operational framework concerns post-emergency aid, i.e. the aforementioned 'grey zone'.

Given ECHO's difficulty in providing adequate aid in the 'grey zone', three options have been envisaged by the evaluation team and the Commission:

- limiting its tasks more strictly to emergency assistance
- explicitly extending ECHO's tasks to cover the necessary actions in the 'grey zone'
- creating a new long-term planning structure within the Commission, outside ECHO, responsible for actions in the 'grey zone'.

The evaluation team recommends strengthening ECHO's structural capacity with a view to longer-term intervention. This course of action is apparently the one preferred by NGOs and other operators in this sector, who believe that ECHO should be given an enlarged 'crisis management' mandate. The third option, which would avoid a restructuring of ECHO, is (understandably) not considered achievable in the short-term. Without taking a stance on the issue, the Commission states in its communication that it intends 'to inform the Council and Parliament further on how it will implement a coherent and effective strategy in the framework of linking relief, rehabilitation and development, thereby clarifying responsibilities in the "grey zone"'. In a more recent discussion paper, an interdepartmental group from the Commission's RELEX services advocated restricting ECHO's actions to emergency measures, in the strict sense of the term. The rapporteur does not subscribe to this viewpoint.

The establishment of a planning structure within ECHO to cover the 'grey zone' is an achievable and appropriate option provided that the nature and implementation of the tasks required in the 'grey zone' are linked more closely to emergency aid than to development aid, which is the responsibility of DGs specialising in this area. As the 'grey zone' represents an extremely critical phase occurring after a humanitarian disaster, especially in the aftermath of a war, often characterised by random action in fits and starts, including constant relapses into emergency situations, considerable flexibility and extremely rapid decisions are needed. The administrative structure that is best suited to such needs is ECHO, rather than the Commission's DGs. The other aspect of aid in the 'grey zone' is longer-term action to support the efforts of the persons concerned to rebuild and reorganise their lives after disasters. The administrative structures within the DGs would, in principle, be adequate for this type of long-term planning (over several years). However, in situations or areas where there are no government or administrative representatives on the spot, ECHO's pragmatic approach is probably more appropriate.

On the other hand, a stricter limitation of ECHO's tasks to emergency assistance would provide the Commission with a clearer definition of responsibilities with regard to measures to be taken in the 'grey zone'. This would also prevent ECHO from focusing unduly on rehabilitation aspects and ignoring emergency requirements, as some NGOs fear. This option clearly calls for extremely close cooperation and coordination between the relevant services.

In any case, administrative and financial capacities need to be stepped up as a matter of urgency so as to carry out reorganisation and rehabilitation tasks in post-emergency situations. The Commission should therefore as soon as possible submit an outline of the organisation of Community aid in this field so as to put an end to the current unacceptable administrative situation in the 'grey zone', also avoiding duplication of effort and parallel (personnel and infrastructure) structures (ECHO and other Commission services). It should, in this connection, clarify the role of the new rapid-reaction mechanism which it intends to set up and which would seek to restore the social structures required to ensure political, social and economic stability in crisis situations. The responsibilities of the services concerned should be clearly defined as part of the overall reorganisation of powers and responsibilities with regard to external affairs within the Commission.

## **Prevention and disaster preparedness**

Alongside the problems relating to the 'grey zone', consideration must be given to the role which ECHO can play in synergy with other instruments used by the Commission to respond to crises. In its communication, the Commission states that it is 'very keen to launch a debate on the following priority issues:

- conflict prevention/early warning and peace-building,
- disaster preparedness and its place within development assistance,
- operational emergency response,
- how to ensure that humanitarian aid operations are planned and carried out in such a way as to ensure as much as possible the protection of people's basic human rights'.

The floods which took place in Mozambique in February and March 2000 have shown that, although the Community was able to respond rapidly in terms of providing financial assistance, it did not have the operational tools (in particular helicopters) to guarantee the necessary emergency aid in time. The appropriate and realistic solution to this problem is to improve cooperation between Member States, the Community and NGOs and the coordination of their efforts. This coordination work could be the responsibility of ECHO.

To deal with disaster and conflict prevention as well as operational preparedness for disasters (two areas which undoubtedly require quite separate forms of expertise), ECHO has set up the DIPECHO service (Disaster Preparedness ECHO).

According to the evaluation, DIPECHO's resources are totally inadequate. The political response to this problem must be a decision to expand ECHO in this sector on the basis of a more structural and long-term approach. In view of DIPECHO's extremely limited funds (EUR 7.5 million in 2000!), the budgetary authority should at the same time provide resources to match the requirements in terms of operational disaster preparedness.

In the field of conflict prevention, the Commission should also draw up a strategy to ensure that ECHO's activities are consistent and coordinated with policy in the fields of development, foreign affairs and security while maintaining ECHO's image as an impartial body. ECHO should, as proposed in the evaluation, be involved in meetings of the CFSP pillar II Committee and working groups on Africa, the Balkans and Central Asia.

Human rights should also be incorporated in humanitarian aid policy and the implementation of such aid. Clearly, humanitarian aid should be supplied to victims of a crisis irrespective of the human rights record of the government of the country concerned. There is no question of introducing a form of conditionality for humanitarian aid. What is important is that, in specific situations, humanitarian aid should not contribute to prolonging conflicts or serious violations of fundamental rights. ECHO can also step up its coordination and cooperation efforts with human rights NGOs/experts during emergency aid operations while maintaining its impartiality.

In this context, mention should be made of the humanitarian disaster currently taking place in Eastern Africa. As early as October 1999, the Ethiopian Government warned the international community of the danger of famine which would pose a threat to large sections of the population over the next few months as a result of the on-going drought. It is now (April 2000) clear that the organisational arrangements and contacts with political authorities in the region to respond to this eminently predictable emergency situation were inadequate. This is partly due to the Ethiopian authorities' practice of insisting that responsibility for distribution

be left to the Disaster and Preparedness Commission, which has been accused of using some of the aid deliveries to supply the army. Moreover, the Ethiopian Government allows itself the luxury of purchasing military equipment to continue the war with Eritrea while relying on international solidarity to assist those sections of the population threatened by the famine. This is a further example of the dilemma raised by emergency aid operations in a country at war. The aid does not necessarily reach the intended beneficiaries and indirectly contributes to prolonging the war. On the other hand, it is totally unacceptable that tens of thousands of people, including many children, should be dying in Ethiopian camps because food supplies have not been delivered in time.

One possible response to this dilemma would be for the international community significantly to step up political pressure and to identify the personal responsibility of the authorities concerned through the international criminal court.

### **Improved management**

The Commission should set itself the main objective of establishing a clear definition of the strategy, policy and principles governing decisions on financing and human resources.

Within ECHO, priority must be given to dealing with problems of internal coherence, coordination and management. ECHO should also establish, with respect to all operations, specific and measurable objectives and introduce a quality control system. In this context, performance indicators are absolutely essential with regard to both project planning and the administration of ECHO itself. The work done by a group of international humanitarian agencies, including VOICE (a consortium of European agencies), which is supported by the Commission, as part of the SPHERE project, has led to the drafting of a humanitarian Charter and standards. The results could provide a reference point for the indicators to be established by ECHO.

The principles of project cycle management (PCM) also need to be introduced in a way which is appropriate and geared to ECHO's activities and resources.

As regards human resources, ECHO's needs have been taken into account in the 2000 budget. In this context, it is important to emphasise the need for supplementary staff specialised in humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation and to provide for a structured professional training programme in this area.

### **Cooperation with partners**

On the basis of the criticisms made in the evaluation, the Commission intends to review ECHO's main instrument of cooperation with partners, namely the Framework Partnership agreement. The FPA's approach has been considered questionable when it comes to major players (United Nations, ICRC, etc.) which pursue a programme rather than project approach. It is also worth questioning the relevance of ECHO's tendency to encourage cooperation with a limited number of 'major' partners. It is also important, as pointed out by the evaluation, to establish a partnership culture, i.e. for ECHO to define common objectives with its partners

and to show a flexible attitude to project planning and operational cooperation, taking account of the different capacities of the NGOs involved.

## **Visibility**

The evaluation points out that ECHO's name is largely unknown among the general public in Europe and among beneficiaries and is not associated with the European Community. The level of public awareness of funding by the Community is particularly low for the vast programmes implemented via UN agencies. The Commission also acknowledges that the concept of 'communication' might be better than simply 'visibility', though it would continue to stress the accountability dimension.

Whether we use the terms 'visibility' or 'communication', the aim here must be to place far greater emphasis on the aims and needs of emergency assistance provided by the European Community, the actual financial contribution and the results achieved. Greater visibility and more awareness of the volume of European emergency aid could also strengthen Europe's position in the international organisations concerned. ECHO should therefore step up its relations with the general public, via television and the press, and ensure that a European Union logo (instead of ECHO's own logo, which has not brought added value) is used so that the general public and beneficiaries clearly associate aid financed by ECHO with the European Union.



23 June 2000

**Opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security  
and Defence Policy**

for the Committee on Development and Cooperation

on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European  
Parliament: Assessment and future of Community humanitarian activities  
(Article 20 of Regulation (EC) 1257/1996)  
(COM(1999) 468 – C5-0044/2000 – 2000/2016(COS))

Draftsman: Andreas Brie

## PROCEDURE

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy appointed Andreas Brie draftsman at its meeting of 25 January 2000.

It considered the draft opinion at its meeting of 22 June 2000.

At the latter meeting it adopted the amendments below unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, acting chairman; Catherine Lalumière, vice-chairman; Andreas Brie, draftsman; Danielle Auroi (for Per Gahrton), Alexandros Baltas, Gunilla Carlsson, Daniel Marc Cohn-Bendit, John Walls Cushman, Rosa M. Díez González, Olivier Dupuis (for Emma Bonino), Pere Esteve, Monica Frassoni (for Jan Joost Lagendijk), Jas Gawronski, Alfred Gomolka, Klaus Hänsch, Renzo Imbeni (for Jannis Sakellariou), Efstratios Korakas, Hanja Maij-Weggen (for José Pacheco Pereira), Cecilia Malmström (for Paavo Väyrynen), Philippe Morillon, Hans-Gert Poettering, Jacques F. Poos, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Jürgen Schröder, Elisabeth Schroedter, Ioannis Souladakis, Francesco Enrico Speroni, Ursula Stenzel, Hannes Swoboda, Gary Titley and Matti Wuori.

## SHORT JUSTIFICATION

It is frightening to observe the extent of the regions in crisis throughout the world, and the decline in the number of so-called peaceful regions, where traditional development action can be implemented. As a result of these developments the concept of crisis management – preventive, reactive and applicable to emergence from crisis – must be integrated into development policies.

The last century has seen two world wars, countless civil conflicts and an increasing number of natural disasters which all have framed the humanitarian agenda. The world is becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters, and mankind is ever more threatened by the forces of nature. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC (the United Nations' scientific advisers), has reported we can already see a "*discernible human influence on global climate*". The poor, forced to live on marginal land in urban and coastal areas where jobs are concentrated, will suffer most as the planet warms and disaster strikes – 96 per cent of all deaths from natural disasters already happen in developing countries.

Crises and conflicts, just like natural disasters, cannot really be described as unforeseeable, and it has to be recognised that it is not so much the early warning system that is missing but the political will to respond to warnings.

Civil conflicts as well as natural disasters have a political dimension involving, among others, issues such as social justice, the distribution of resources, access to land and capital, and mankind's exploitation of the environment. Thus, the deadly combination of environmental change, economic inequity and political inaction will dominate the future of the humanitarian scene.

Externally-driven aid can save lives only in the aftermath of conflict, and therefore humanitarian action has to be seen in the long-term, and must be embedded in the wider context of development policies. Humanitarian action is a complex operational mix: life-saving and dignity-preserving activities on the one hand, with protection and hope-restoration goals on the other. NGOs that had previously specialised in humanitarian relief are today involved in long-term development work, while specialist development agencies are increasingly involved in environmental crisis. Humanitarian action has thus become an ongoing process rather than a succession of sporadic emergency operations.

For humanitarian actions the real challenge remains access to victims which is often refused, over-regulated, or made extremely dangerous. At the heart of a crisis, the protection of civil populations remains one of the most complex areas, and their protection is governed by International Humanitarian Law and the different conventions that enshrine it. Thus, humanitarian action must be based on a set of clear rules and the rule of law (Articles 1 and 3 common to the Geneva Conventions can be considered as the basic principles).

The ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the election of a new European Parliament and the nomination of a new Commission, accompanied by the important re-structuring of most EC Departments, plus the evaluation of humanitarian aid provided by the European Union since the creation of ECHO, are all events, which provide an ample opportunity for the European Union to address the challenges in the humanitarian field at the beginning of the new

Millennium.

The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) was established in 1992 with the aim of providing effective humanitarian aid in response to natural disasters and armed conflict in countries outside the Union. The bulk of ECHO assistance is channelled through its partners - UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other international bodies. A key stage in the development of the relationship between the European Commission and the NGOs was the negotiation of the new Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) which came into force on the first of January 1999. Consequently the European Commission has recognised the specific entity and position of the individual NGOs, whereas the latter have recognised the *General Conditions* for implementing humanitarian actions.

The European Commission entered into a dialogue with the NGOs by presenting a discussion paper and organising a conference on "ECHO 2000 - the future of EC humanitarian aid". The issues on the agenda presented a blueprint of the complex and rapidly evolving conditions in which humanitarian response is currently being undertaken, both in policy and operational terms.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy calls on the Committee on Development and Co-operation, as the Committee responsible, to incorporate the following paragraphs into its draft resolution:

### **The European Parliament**

- Welcomes the shift in the profile of the European Union from that of ‘donor’ to ‘responsive organisation’ looking for a more direct involvement in disaster response;

Is convinced that the best disaster response is based on quick local action and pre-preparedness, and therefore the Commission should give increased priority to encouraging capacity building in vulnerable countries since well trained and equipped local organisations and networks can do much to prevent or mitigate humanitarian crises;

- Asks the Commission to develop better instruments to give material support in post-emergency situations like the after-effects of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus.
- Stresses the importance of the *International Humanitarian Law* in implementing humanitarian actions, and urges the Commission to give higher priority to the development and implementation of human rights policies and the support of activities aimed at preventing human rights violations;
- Urges the Commission to take the appropriate steps to put a stop to the increased politicisation of humanitarian assistance and the way this is European Union foreign policy, because humanitarian assistance should essentially address the effects of crisis, be they the result of a natural disaster or a conflict, and not its causes;
- Considers it necessary to carry out research on the interdependence between mankind's interference in the ecological system, military and civil conflicts, economic and social inequity on the one hand and the frequency, intensity, regional distribution of natural disasters, civil wars, and military conflicts on the other hand;
- Considers that the use of foreign military force to directly and explicitly assist in humanitarian assistance should proceed on specific terms and conditions which must be laid down by the Commission in consultation with the Parliament because, while involving military forces in humanitarian actions might have certain advantages, experience to date has shown that it also carries great risks, particularly with regard to the role and mission of the military forces who are sent to regions in conflict and crisis. Whatever the circumstances, the military assistance provided must not create problems but must contribute to their peaceful and democratic solution;
- Reminds the Commission of a closer co-operation with the authorities and the relevant local organisations in areas receiving humanitarian aid, the appropriate UN bodies, and all other donors, governmental and non governmental, bilateral and multilateral, to ensure that European humanitarian aid forms part of a coherent overall humanitarian aid effort;

- Calls on the Commission to improve the co-ordination between Brussels-based and field units by introducing revised procedures and practises, and by clarifying the respective areas of responsibility;
- Believes that increased openness and transparency within ECHO's decision-making processes, and timely information on availability of funds, procedures, criteria and field management responsibilities have a positive impact on the strengthening of the partnership between ECHO and the NGOs;
- Stresses the valuable and indispensable contribution of non-governmental organisations, and reminds the Commission to develop the relations with humanitarian aid NGOs on the basis of specific frameworks which will lay down the basis for cooperation and action, together with criteria for verifying their democratic legitimacy and the transparency of their management, both in respect of resources provided and goals pursued;
- Stresses the need for a greater accountability of the European Commission in this area, and urges for an enhanced role of the European Parliament.