

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999



2004

Session document

FINAL
A5-0433/2002

10 December 2002

REPORT

on the Commission communication on the annual report on humanitarian aid 2000
(COM(2001) 307 – C5-0397/2001 – 2001/2155(COS))

Committee on Development and Cooperation

Rapporteur: Marie-Arlette Carlotti

CONTENTS

	Page
PROCEDURAL PAGE	4
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION.....	5
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	11
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY	18

PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 8 June 2001, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication on the annual report on humanitarian aid 2000 (COM(2001) 307 – 2001/2155(COS)).

At the sitting of 3 September 2001 the President of Parliament announced that she had referred the communication to the Committee on Development and Cooperation as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy and the Committee on Budgetary Control for their opinions (C5-0397/2001).

The Committee on Development and Cooperation had appointed Marie-Arlette Carlotti rapporteur at its meeting of 10 July 2001.

It considered the Commission communications and the draft report at its meetings of 11 November 2002 and 3 December 2002.

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

The following were present for the vote: Margrietus J. van den Berg (vice-chairman, acting chairman), Marie-Arlette Carlotti (rapporteur), Yasmine Boudjenah, John Bowis, Nirj Deva, Robert J.E. Evans (for Richard Howitt), Concepció Ferrer (for Fernando Fernández Martín), Bashir Khanbhai (for John Alexander Corrie), Glenys Kinnock, Paul A.A.J.G. Lannoye, Francisca Sauquillo Pérez del Arco, Michel-Ange Scarbonchi (for Luisa Morgantini), Maj Britt Theorin and Bob van den Bos (for Marieke Sanders-ten Holte).

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 September 2001 not to deliver an opinion.

The report was tabled on 10 December 2002.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

European Parliament resolution on the Commission communication on the annual report on humanitarian aid 2000 (COM(2001) 307 – C5-0297/2001 – 2001/2155(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2001) 307 – C5-0397/2001)¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2002) 322)²,
- having regard to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 relative to the protection of civilian persons in times of war and the additional Protocols of 8 June 1977,
- having regard to the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees,
- having regard to the Vienna Conventions of 18 April 1961 on diplomatic relations,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1257/96³,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1605/2002⁴,
- having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 6 May 1999⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 5 September 2000 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) No 1257/96)⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 5 February 2002 on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on linking relief, rehabilitation and development – an assessment⁷,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on topical and urgent subjects of major importance, pursuant to former Rule 50 of the Rules of Procedure, relating to humanitarian aid,
- having regard to the annual report of the European Court of Auditors concerning the financial year 2000, adopted on 10 October 2001⁸,
- having regard to the contributions made at the public hearing held by the Committee on Development and Cooperation on 'Aid to the Afghans' on 7 November 2001,

¹ Not yet published in the OJ.

² Not yet published in the OJ.

³ OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, pp. 1-6.

⁴ OJ L 248, 16.9.2002, pp. 1-48.

⁵ OJ C 172, 18.6.1999, pp. 1-22.

⁶ OJ C 135, 7.5.2001, pp. 72-75.

⁷ T5-0033/2002.

⁸ OJ C 359, 15.12.2001, p. 272.

- 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 (A5-0433/2002),
- A. whereas the number of victims of natural and man-made humanitarian disasters is constantly rising, whereas the number of refugees in 2001 was 11.7 million and the number of persons displaced in their own country 21 million, and whereas disasters mainly affect the most vulnerable sections of the population, especially young children, old people and women,
 - B. having regard to the support given by European citizens to EU humanitarian action, as shown in the Eurobarometer 2001 survey,
 - C. whereas long-term crises are becoming more and more widespread are liable to become forgotten crises,
 - D. whereas the combined aid provided by the European Union and its Member States makes it - by far - the world's largest donor,
 - E. having regard to the excessively disparate nature of Category 4 of the budget and the inclusion in this category of pre-accession expenditure for Turkey, Cyprus and Malta while expenditure for the other countries appears in Category 7,
 - F. whereas the request for utilisation of the reserve for 2002 (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Middle East and Southern Africa) is for a total of EUR 80 million (of which only EUR 65 million has so far been allocated) and whereas total humanitarian expenditure for 2002 therefore amounts to EUR 530 million, which is EUR 13.7 million less than in 2001,
 - G. whereas use of the budgetary reserve has now become systematic and is considered as nothing short of a budgetary 'second tranche', while the complexity and uncertainty linked to this procedure is posing a threat to the funding of emergency action that enables lives to be saved,
 - H. whereas ECHO has adopted a primary emergency procedure enabling it to release funding within no more than 72 hours,
 - I. having regard to the dangers facing the staff of humanitarian organisations, including dangers to their own lives,
 - J. having regard to the strengthening of procedures to monitor recipient organisations, in particular by introducing a medium-term audit of ECHO's main partner organisations,
 - K. having regard to the limited resources allocated to DIPECHO in relation to ECHO's overall activities, despite the fact that the mandate (Article 1 of Regulation No 1257/96) specifically provides for risk preparedness measures,
 - L. whereas reducing the risks by stepping up capacities would help to save human lives and would be less costly than emergency aid,
1. Recommends that the branches of the budgetary authority promote an appropriate increase in

ECHO's initial budget (to bring it up to EUR 500-550 million) for the next few years in order to restore the reserve's original role as an exceptional, one-off facility, and recommends at the same time that human resources be increased in order to maintain quality standards in the management of aid;

2. Recalls that ECHO's mission is to provide emergency aid, making it possible immediately to save lives, and welcomes the refocusing of its missions on this basic mandate;
3. Considers that humanitarian aid, which confirms the importance attached by the Union to the values of solidarity with all peoples, should not be subject to the political conditionality which prevails in other areas of development aid;
4. Points out that prevention and rehabilitation also form part of this mission, though of secondary importance, and that ECHO's activity in these areas should, in a spirit of coordination with the other Commission services, be limited to guaranteeing a transition without hiatuses or gaps between the various phases of the European Union's intervention;
5. Calls on the Commission to ensure greater involvement of the other development instruments in seeking the most appropriate way of linking emergency relief, rehabilitation and long-term development strategy (LRRD), and considers that 'country strategies' would be a useful way of doing so;
6. Insists that disaster prevention and preparedness should be considered as priorities in promoting a 'culture of prevention' as a central element of the European Union's external action, and calls on the Commission to include disaster preparedness in all technical cooperation and development programmes;
7. Recommends making greater use of new technologies in the field of disaster prevention and preparedness;
8. Calls on the branches of the budgetary authority to allocate more resources to risk reduction and recommends that, as part of the aforementioned budgetary increase, funding be significantly stepped up in this area to reach 5% of humanitarian expenditure by 2005 by strengthening this type of action within both DIPECHO's humanitarian operations as such and its capacity-building, awareness-raising and training;
9. Calls on ECHO to ensure that the methodology adopted in 2001 is swiftly made operational so that 'forgotten crises' can be more effectively taken into account;
10. Commends ECHO on its more rigorous approach to management of aid, as illustrated, in particular by:
 - the strengthening of its partners' *ex ante* and *ex post* audit procedures,
 - local monitoring in closer contact with EU delegations,
 - improved dialogue with UN specialised agencies to improve management;

11. Considers it vital to establish effective supervisory mechanisms which enable humanitarian aid to be traced and which prevent aid from being misappropriated and seized by armed groups or corrupt authorities;
12. Calls, in the medium term, for an operational audit to be carried out on each partner at intervals of no more than 3 to 4 years;
13. Congratulates the Commission on simplifying procedures for speedier decision-making, enabling aid to be financed within no more than 72 hours;
14. Calls on ECHO to consolidate and improve this measure by speeding up the reform of Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA);
15. Encourages the Commission to pursue its efforts aimed at improved coordination between the various Directorates-General, along the same lines as the Afghanistan Task Force, set up in September 2001;
16. Reiterates its request to the Council and the Commission to set up a coordination platform for all the Member States' relief services in the event of major humanitarian disasters;
17. Calls on the Member States to coordinate their action amongst themselves and with the Commission in all areas of their work, in particular field work, policy initiatives and media coverage which otherwise diminishes their effectiveness;
18. Calls on the United Nations specialised agencies (HCR, WFP, UNICEF) to step up coordination amongst themselves under the aegis of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA);
19. Calls on the Commission to set up an operational framework in 2003 on the basis of the FPAs in order to supervise and specify partnership relations between ECHO and the United Nations specialised agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM);
20. Recalls its attachment to strengthening the strategy for public information on the European Union's humanitarian action and stresses that this task is in line with the democratic accountability requirement;
21. Encourages ECHO to ensure that partners financed by European funds make a full contribution to this strengthening process by including in their mission contract a detailed set of conditions to be met with a view to systematically publicising ECHO's presence and promoting appropriate communication strategies;
22. Calls on the Council and the governments of the Member States to promote greater visibility for the European Union's humanitarian policy and ECHO's action by ensuring that the combined humanitarian aid provided by Member States and the Union systematically appears in European and international statistics;
23. Calls for a presentation of ECHO's actions and strategy to be organised each year before the European Parliament's Committee on Development and Cooperation;

24. Calls on the Commission to propose holding a joint European Parliament/ECHO event in 2003 in order to raise awareness among young Europeans as a matter of priority and secure their support for European humanitarian action and the values it stands for, and to maximise ECHO's effectiveness;
25. Recommends that special emphasis be placed on capacity-building measures by increasing training opportunities for humanitarian personnel;
26. Encourages more effective protection of personnel through the following measures:
 - allowing administrative and technical staff to benefit from the provisions of Article 37(2) of the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961 (including diplomatic registration plates for their vehicles),
 - granting ECHO experts diplomatic status in particularly difficult circumstances,
 - stepping up coordination with other actors (in particular OCHA and ICRC) and examining the conditions for use of the EU Rapid Reaction Force, once it becomes operational, to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid and, where necessary, provide military support for humanitarian action in the framework of existing international rules and at the express request of humanitarian actors (United Nations agencies, NGOs and others) operating on the ground;
27. Supports the grant facility for training, studies and networks in the humanitarian field and the network on humanitarian assistance (NOHA), and calls for these initiatives to be extended to a larger audience in future years;
28. Calls on all the donor states to adhere to the practices, established over long years of experience, of a gradual approach on the ground, based on the establishment of relations of trust with local populations and due account for their eating habits, and in this respect deplores the disastrous effect of Afghanistan being 'bombarded' with food aid parcels by the US air force in the winter of 2001-2002;
29. Recalls that humanitarian aid is politically neutral and calls therefore on all governments to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid in all circumstances; in this connection, deplores, in particular, the difficulties and obstacles encountered in war-torn and politically unstable countries and in this respect calls on the Commission and Member States to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid;
30. Recalls its attachment to parliamentary scrutiny over EU humanitarian aid and insists, in the context of the revised Rules of Procedure adopted on 12 June 2002, that use be made of all provisions of these Rules enabling it to be exercised effectively (extraordinary debate and oral or written questions, in particular);

31. Expresses the wish that Parliament will in future deliver its opinion before September on the basis of an annual report published by ECHO around 31 March;
32. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the United Nations Secretary-General, the United Nations specialised agencies, the International Federation of the Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross and a broad spectrum of NGOs.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Humanitarian action is of central importance to the European Union's external action. The EU is the world's leading contributor in this field.

The analysis of the global humanitarian situation in 2000 and 2001 shows a trend towards more frequent and more serious crises at world level, with regard to both natural and man-made disasters. This trend is all the more worrying when one considers the increase in the number of incidents which threaten the safety of personnel, involving refusal to grant access to victims or increasing difficulties in this area.

ECHO has adopted and implemented new internal procedures and action methods to make its operations more effective and respond more fully to the many challenges it faces. This report concerns the 2000 and 2001 ECHO annual reports and is intended to put into perspective two crucial years in the development of its missions and organisation.

In future, the rapporteur would be in favour of drawing up a report to be adopted before the summer by the European Parliament, on the basis of an annual assessment published on 31 March by ECHO.

The positive assessment of ECHO's action is clearly illustrated by a few figures. Most of the operations funded have been conducted effectively despite undeniable constraints. In practical terms, **18 million people are assisted each year by ECHO aid in more than 60 countries, through 208 partners** (NGOs, ICRC, United Nations specialised agencies, in particular the HCR and WFP). **In 2000 and 2001, ECHO spent EUR 491.7 and 543.7 million respectively** to fund humanitarian projects.

However, the financial resources made available are not commensurate with the size of the task. The manner in which the ECHO budget has evolved is at odds with the alarming humanitarian situation around the world and the need to take account of the 'forgotten crises' mentioned in this report. In general terms, the budget allocated to ECHO over the past few years has not made it possible to respond to the increasing frequency and gravity of humanitarian crises world wide and has made it necessary to resort systematically to the budgetary reserve during the year. Humanitarian expenditure was even reduced in 2002 (EUR 425 million approved in the 2002 budget, to which an additional 65 million - out of the 80 available - taken from the reserve during the year). The financial perspective for 2003 (EUR 470 million) is in no way commensurate with the increasing humanitarian requirements and will probably make it necessary to resort again to the reserve.

The reserve is thus seen as a budgetary 'second tranche', and the complicated procedure for obtaining such resources constitutes a threat each year to the financing of certain humanitarian emergency operations.

In its recommendations, this report will propose significantly increasing ECHO's initial budget in the forthcoming financial years (to reach a total of EUR 500-550 million) so as to restore the reserve's original role as an exceptional, one-off facility).

I - ECHO's mandate

ECHO's mandate was specified in April 2001. The key words are clarifying and refocusing.

1. Refocusing activities on ECHO's basic mandate

ECHO should focus more closely on its basic mandate, namely the provision of emergency aid geared to immediately saving lives. Several initiatives were launched in 2002 and 2001 to this end. **In its conclusions, the report encourages this development.**

The primary emergency procedure

A rapid response procedure ('primary emergency decision') was adopted in June 2001 to enable projects to be financed within a period of 24 to 72 hours. This procedure was, for instance, tested successfully at the time of the earthquake in Peru, floods in Algeria, the Iris cyclone in Belize and the Afghan crisis.

Taking account of 'forgotten crises'

Political conflicts and deadlocks prevent direct access to refugees. Certain populations thus remain cut off from all aid. This was the case, in particular, in Angola, the Western Sahara, the northern Caucasus/Chechnya, Sri Lanka and some regions of Sudan.

In 2001, ECHO drew up a methodology aimed at establishing a more effective definition of forgotten crises and unstable post-crisis situations. This basis for discussion should lead to operational proposals in 2002.

2. Clarifying responsibilities in the 'grey zone'

It is often difficult on the ground to distinguish between relief aid (short-term humanitarian aid supplied to save disaster victims), rehabilitation (stabilising the economic and social situation following a crisis) and a development strategy (in the medium and long term).

The Commission has sought to clarify the very concept of LRRD, i.e. Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. This clarification of the concept implies clarifying ECHO's mandate and the role of other actors and instruments within the Commission and in the Member States. For its part, ECHO established a clearer definition of its methodology and drew up a working document in December 2001 seeking to clarify the criteria for its intervention. The action criteria should be **to avoid hiatuses or gaps in the European Union's external action** as such during the different phases. Thus, although rehabilitation is not its principle mission, ECHO may, given its flexible procedures, carry out post-emergency measures to ensure a smooth transition towards development aid. ECHO should ensure, in cooperation with the other actors involved in development aid, including the other Commission services, that the transition is as smooth as possible. The use of the reserve for post-emergency measures should not be ruled out¹. However, for it to be effective, this approach also calls for an active role to be played by the other players and a capacity to anticipate the following stages of the process.

¹ Interinstitutional agreement of 6 May 1999, paragraph 23c.

In relation to this 'grey zone', this report endorses the proposals contained in the report by Mr Max van den Berg (resolution of 5 February 2002), in particular:

- **incorporating provisions on emergency measures and LRRD Country Strategy Papers and promoting an accelerated procedure to amend these documents (*addenda*)** in order to respond to emergency situations,
- **encouraging the creation of task forces which should include, as soon as a crisis erupts, local authorities, local and European NGOs and the appropriate services of the UN and the Commission** (even though the creation of task forces does not, as such, guarantee success for LRRD),
- **closely involving the local population**, ensuring in particular that gender issues are integrated.

II - Disaster prevention and preparedness (DIPECHO)

This is a priority which this report would wish to strongly emphasise.

ECHO has already launched disaster preparedness programmes. In 2000 and 2001 the action plans for south-east Asia and Latin America were continued and extended to southern Asia. In December 2001 action plans for the Andean community and the Caribbean region were adopted.

However, the action taken in this area is still far from sufficient. Following the example of the International Federation of the Red Cross in its '*World Disaster Report 2002*', **we must sound the alarm and point to the lack of resources for risk prevention, preparedness and reduction**. DIPECHO (*Disaster Preparedness ECHO*) spent EUR 8 million in 2001, equal to only 1.5% of the total ECHO budget, even if one takes account of the fact that disaster prevention and preparedness form part of the programming of humanitarian operations in general (*mainstreaming*). Risk prevention, preparedness and reduction are, however, particularly 'profitable', in terms of both the number of lives saved and the economic cost. The cyclone in Bangladesh is a very good example of this: thanks to thorough preparation of the population through simulation exercises (e.g. evacuation) and measures to step up civil protection capabilities, it was possible to save some 2.5 million people without the annual financial cost exceeding EUR 7 per inhabitant.

Given its purpose, prevention policy does not concern ECHO directly but should be seen as a long-term objection for all those involved in development. From this point of view, **the EU must take further action in combating desertification and take the initiative of strengthening international cooperation in the context of the Convention to combat desertification, which entered into force in 1996**. Basic training, a water point and a tree nursery are sufficient, but someone has to start the process.

In order to meet this priority more effectively, this report recommends:

1 - Promoting a 'culture of prevention' within each of the European Union's external action instruments.

2 – Incorporating disaster prevention and preparedness in all technical and development cooperation programmes (this recommendation already appeared in the report by Mr Renzo Imbeni, European Parliament resolution of 5 September 2000).

3 – Significantly increasing funding in this area: as part of the budgetary increase mentioned above, **5% of humanitarian expenditure should be devoted to disaster preparedness by 2005** (this increase may be incorporated into humanitarian operations, in the strict sense of the term, as well as capacity-building, awareness-raising and training, which come under DIPECHO).

III – Restructuring of the internal organisation and management of staff

ECHO adopted a new establishment plan, which entered into force on 15 July 2002. This report recommends significantly increasing the provision of training for humanitarian personnel. We call, in particular, for an appropriate training plan to be introduced, in accordance with the recommendations contained in the communication on ‘evaluation of humanitarian activities’.

Similarly, the rapporteur would encourage the grant facility for training, studies and networks in the humanitarian field and support for the network on humanitarian assistance (NOHA), which provides for a post-graduate diploma for around 20 students in eight participating European universities, and considers that these initiatives should be extended to cover a wider audience over the next few years.

IV – Control/audit

1. Commission audits of ECHO activities

Project audits are carried out regularly on the activities of partner organisations working on the ground. An external audit team within ECHO is specifically responsible for these checks. At present, around 20% of projects are audited each year. The aim is that an operational audit be carried out on each partner once every three or four years. **The rapporteur is in favour of this development.**

There is also a second, more specific type of audit which is carried out at the end of projects when contracts are wound up.

2. Prior selection by ECHO of its partners: Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA)

ECHO has introduced provisions governing its relations with partner NGOs (more than 60% of the aid supplied by ECHO transits through NGOs; 220 partner organisations are currently registered) and the use of the funds: these are set out in Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA). FPAs enable a preliminary selection of eligible partners to be made. The signing of an FPA is preceded by an audit, in accordance with Article 7 of Regulation 1257/96.

A reform of the FPAs is currently in progress, aimed at gradually converting the *ex ante* control arrangements to *ex post* checks, in other words placing greater emphasis on ‘intermediate’ and ‘final’ controls rather than prior analysis of requirements.

V – Improved coordination with ECHO partners

NGOs are, by far, ECHO's principal partners. However, there has been an increase in the share of funding provided by United Nations agencies (26.5% in 2001 as against 19% in 2000).

The recent crisis in Angola has shown to what extent a lack of coordination and communication between various actors (United Nations agencies, government, NGOs) can cause a humanitarian crisis to worsen. The Kosovo crisis could have served as a lesson. Tensions between ECHO and its United Nations partners had caused EUR 15 million in food aid to be blocked at the height of the crisis¹.

(a) With the other Commission services

Significant progress has been made in the context of the RELEX reform. The Commission's external action staff are moving towards improved coordination and 'understanding' between services and policies (coordination meetings, joint strategy papers, task forces).

This improved coordination must not be allowed to diminish or challenge the specific role of humanitarian action and, by extension, development policy within the Union's external action. In this connection, the Committee on Development recently deplored the decision to abolish the Council of Development Ministers.

(b) With Member States

On the ground, problems sometimes arise in relation to states which are reluctant to engage in such coordination.

The Afghan crisis is an example of good coordination:

- frequent meetings of the Humanitarian Aid Committee representing the Member States,
- exchange and dissemination of information among all the actors, and in particular the European Parliament.

Member States are asked to further coordinate their activities amongst themselves and with the Commission and to avoid competition for media coverage.

ECHO should become a coordination platform for all Member States' emergency services in the event of major natural disasters or other serious crises.

¹ General report of the Court of Auditors for 2000, OJ C 359, 15.12.2001, p. 272.

(c) With international organisations¹

The lack of understanding and, at times, refusal to listen, which prevailed a few years ago, has given way to a more constructive dialogue. A 'programming dialogue' takes place at the annual meetings involving ECHO, the United Nations specialised agencies, the Red Cross family and a platform of NGOs to elaborate a programming strategy and identify priorities and points of agreement. There are, however, recurring coordination problems between the various United Nations specialised agencies (HCR, WFP, UNICEF) despite the work done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), whose mission should be clearly accepted by all.

A specific agreement, along the same lines as the FPAs with NGOs, should be introduced as soon as possible to provide a framework and rules for partnership relations between ECHO and international organisations. This report recommends establishing an operational framework in 2003.

VI – Information and communication

The Eurobarometer survey carried out at the beginning of 2001 confirmed that public opinion in Europe is strongly attached to the principle of European humanitarian assistance but that there is little awareness of the role played by ECHO in this field.

To improve the visibility of EU humanitarian action, this report makes a number of recommendations:

- 1) The Commission should step up its public information strategy on its humanitarian action. This is in line with the democratic accountability requirement: European citizens should be informed of the manner in which European funds are used in the field of humanitarian affairs.
- 2) To improve ECHO's visibility, the report calls on the Council and all Member States to promote the dissemination of information and media coverage of European humanitarian action and, in particular, to ensure that figures regarding the aid provided by ECHO are systematically included in European and international statistics.
- 3) A presentation of ECHO's action and strategy should take place before the European Parliament's Committee on Development each year. This annual debate should include, in particular, a question and answer session to enable Members to give concrete answers to citizens who regularly question them on humanitarian issues.
- 4) The Commission should propose holding a joint European Parliament/ECHO event in 2003 (e.g. a day of action and information around the work done by ECHO, aimed at a target audience or geographical area).

VII – Safety and protection of humanitarian personnel

¹ Relations between ECHO and partner international organisations are governed either by a Framework Partnership Agreement between ECHO and the ICRC, the IFRC and the IOM or by the Commission's 1999 framework agreement with the United Nations. Under Article 53(1)(c) of the new Financial Regulation (Council Regulation 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 applicable to the general budget of the European Communities, OJ L 248 of 16.9.2002, due to enter into force on 1 January 2003), the Commission will decide what type of agreement should be applied to relations between itself and international organisations.

Personnel safety has become a priority issue. It is also linked to that of the growing insecurity faced by refugees and displaced persons themselves: high-risk places are the same in both cases. The WFP Executive Director recently informed the Committee on Development and Cooperation that humanitarian personnel are sometimes even more at risk than peace-keeping forces (Sudan).

The forthcoming recruitment of a staff member responsible for setting up a safety training programme for ECHO personnel is undeniably a step forward. Further steps must be taken in the same direction.

Three measures should be taken to significantly improve the situation as regards personnel safety:

- 1) Allowing administrative and technical personnel to benefit from the provisions of Article 37(2) of the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961 (including the granting of diplomatic registration plates for their vehicles).
- 2) Granting ECHO experts diplomatic status in particularly difficult circumstances.
- 3) Stepping up coordination with other actors (in particular OCHA and ICRC) and examining the conditions for use of the EU Rapid Reaction Force, once it becomes operational, to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid and where necessary, provide, military support for humanitarian action with a UN mandate.

VIII – Parliamentary scrutiny over humanitarian aid.

In addition to the *a posteriori* global control referred to in this report, **regular parliamentary scrutiny over EU humanitarian aid is essential.** The **conditions** in which aid is granted (speed, coordination with other donors, effectiveness on the ground, etc.) should, in particular, be the subject of political debate. Parliament should also be given an opportunity formally to express its solidarity with affected populations.

It is therefore important that, following the revision of the Rules of Procedure, all available provisions of these Rules be used to exercise parliamentary scrutiny over humanitarian aid, in particular through **extraordinary debates** (Rule 111a) and **oral or written questions** to the Commission and/or Council in plenary and in committee. Parliament's solidarity with affected communities may be expressed through a declaration by the President at the opening of a part-session.

17 April 2002

**OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HUMAN RIGHTS,
COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**

on the Annual report on humanitarian aid 2000
(COM(2001) 307 – C5-0397/2001 – 2001/2155 (COS))

Draftsman: Johan Van Hecke

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy appointed Johan Van Hecke draftsman at its meeting of 12 September 2001.

The committee considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 25 March and 15/16 April 2002.

At the latter meeting it adopted the following conclusions unopposed, with one abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Geoffrey Van Orden, acting chairman; Christos Zacharakis, vice-chairman; Ole Andreasen, Alexandros Baltas, André Brie, John Walls Cushman, Joseph Daul (for Philippe Morillon), Pere Esteve, Glyn Ford, Michael Gahler, Per Gahrton, Gerardo Galeote Quecedo, Jas Gawronski, Vitaliano Gemelli (for Franco Marini), Alfred Gomolka, Vasco Graça Moura (for José Pacheco Pereira), Joost Lagendijk, Alain Lamassoure, Jules Maaten (for Bob van den Bos), Nelly Maes (for Reinhold Messner), Cecilia Malmström, Emilio Menéndez del Valle, Raimon Obiols i Germà, Doris Pack (for Jürgen Schröder), Jacques F. Poos, Lennart Sacrédeus (for Gunilla Carlsson), Jannis Sakellariou, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Jacques Santer, Amalia Sartori, Elisabeth Schroedter, Ioannis Souladakis, The Earl of Stockton (for David Sumberg), Ilkka Suominen, Hannes Swoboda, Charles Tannock, Maj Britt Theorin (for Véronique De Keyser), Demetrio Volcic, Jan Marinus Wiersma and Matti Wuori.

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

Over the last thirty years Europe has gradually, and perhaps a little too discreetly, become the principal donor of humanitarian aid in the world.

This European humanitarian action, which has evolved over the past few years, particularly since the end of the 1980s, has become one of the most representative aspects of the Union's external action. There are two basic reasons for this: firstly, the ever-increasing number of serious crises in the world (36 active war zones and violent crisis zones worldwide in 2000, compared to 27 in 1997), and secondly, the Union's firm will to assert its presence on the international stage and to take on political responsibilities commensurate with its economic and commercial weight.

The Commission report on humanitarian aid concerns the financial year 2000. It reviews the humanitarian operations carried out by ECHO in various parts of the world to provide aid for victims of natural disasters and disasters of human origin. The impact of ECHO's activities is undoubtedly positive, although there are still a number of weaknesses concerning the management of the aid, its effectiveness and the swiftness of the operations, which have been justifiably criticised. One of the key aims is without a doubt that of improving internal organisation and procedures, which slow down the operations and reduce their effectiveness.

The draftsman, whilst recognising the need to increase ECHO's efficiency and strengthen its role in aid programming, wishes to stress a number of principles:

- the key objective of EU humanitarian action is to respond promptly and efficiently to the needs of the victims of humanitarian crises, in order to alleviate their suffering in a spirit of human solidarity. It goes without saying that political considerations have no place in such an area;
- under no circumstances must humanitarian aid act as a substitute for development efforts, which are necessary in order to release crisis-stricken countries from a situation of poverty and economic dependence. Aid should be prevented from becoming a means of subsistence, or even survival, for an entire people, with the risk that it be perpetuated until a political solution is found. A very eloquent example is that of the Saharaouis people in Tindouf (Algeria): for 26 years some 200 000 refugees have been attempting to survive on humanitarian aid as best they can;
- care should also be taken to ensure that humanitarian aid provided over a long period does not discourage local socio-economic operators from continuing their development efforts. An in-depth analysis of the impact of humanitarian aid on the local economy and on the activity of local operators would be very useful in terms of aid programming, so as to avoid any counterproductive effects and grey areas (long-term post-emergency intervention);
- all necessary measures should be taken, and safeguards applied, to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches its true destination and is not misappropriated by armed groups or corrupt authorities, which can use it for their own selfish interests or can thereby acquire the means to perpetuate conflicts in crisis-stricken regions.

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy calls on the Committee on Development and Cooperation, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following points in its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that humanitarian aid, which confirms the importance attached by the Union to the values of solidarity with all peoples, should not be subject to the political conditionality which prevails in other areas of development aid;
2. Takes the view that the continuing occurrences of, and even increase in, man-made disasters, oblige the international community to couple humanitarian aid with ongoing efforts to tackle the true causes, develop preventive measures and promote the long-term role of development aid;
3. Considers it vital to establish effective supervisory mechanisms which enable humanitarian aid to be traced and which prevent aid from being misappropriated and seized by armed groups or corrupt authorities; this is a very worrying phenomenon which distracts from the purpose of humanitarian aid, thereby depriving the victims of the support they expect, and damages the Union's credibility;
4. Deems it important to ensure consistency between actions taken in the context of development aid policy and humanitarian aid operations, which should complement each other without replacing each other; calls on the Commission to draw up an updated analysis of the impact of humanitarian aid on the objectives of the development programmes under way in the beneficiary countries;
5. Considers it necessary to give ECHO a more active role in the programming, implementation and monitoring of humanitarian aid actions financed by the Union and brought to the beneficiaries by UN agencies and NGOs; ECHO's participation in the decision-making process would increase transparency and raise the Union's profile whilst creating fresh synergies between all those involved;
6. Reiterates its desire to give more European financial support to the UNHCR and to work together as well as possible with this UN organisation;
7. Calls on the Commission to ensure that humanitarian aid given for a long period to countries seeking assistance and accounting for a substantial percentage of their GDP does not discourage the political authorities and local socioeconomic participants from continuing their development efforts; calls on the Commission also to ensure that the aid is not used as an excuse for maintaining the status quo, thereby creating dependency and curbing progress in the short and medium term;
8. Calls on the Commission to examine ways of simplifying and expediting decision-making and payment procedures which would enable a prompt response in the case of emergencies; considers that it might be necessary to increase the number of ECHO staff in order to improve management;

9. Considers it necessary to strengthen cooperation arrangements with all those involved in humanitarian aid (Member States, third countries, international bodies, NGOs and local operators) in order to avoid overlapping and to optimise the impact of the aid;
10. Considers that once the EU Rapid Reaction Force is operational, it could, where necessary, help provide military support for humanitarian actions under the authority of the United Nations.