

Humanitarian Roundtable Spain

Friday, 13 March 2015, 09.00 – 14.00

Venue: **Cáritas Española**, C/ Embajadores, 162, 28045 Madrid

On 13 March, VOICE organized a humanitarian roundtable in Spain with the support of IECAH and CONGDE and hosted by Cáritas Española. 36 people participated in the discussions with guest speakers from the European Commission's DG ECHO, the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, the Spanish Foreign Ministry and the VOICE Board.

Maite Serrano, CONGDE Director and Nicolas Borsinger, VOICE President, set the scene for the day's discussion describing, against the backdrop of the rising and complex global crisis humanitarian caseload, the '*dismantlement of Spanish aid*'; a reduction of nearly 65% (80% for humanitarian assistance) of the Spanish aid budget, and its impact on NGOs. VOICE President expressed the hope that the discussions, in the presence of the VOICE Board members from humanitarian NGOs across Europe might help Spanish NGOs get a broader perspective on the humanitarian landscape in Europe and from Brussels.

Panel: The EU Aid Architecture: Opportunities and challenges

Chair: Cecilia Delaney (*IECAH*). Panellists: Johannes Luchner (*Adviser to Director General, ECHO*), Manuel Sanchez Montero (*MFA Spain*), Ester Asin Martinez (*Save The Children, EU Office*)

Regarding the Spanish situation, Mr Sanchez Montero described the role he can see for Spain in the humanitarian world, when there is so little public money allocated. He described Spain's engagement in humanitarian diplomacy, its renewed focus on how money is spent through different actors, and also Spain's concerns regarding the asymmetries of power with regard to bigger and smaller donors and organisations in the humanitarian aid system and those Member States and organisations who are not donors at all. As a priority at EU level, Mr Sanchez Montero expressed his commitment to keeping the spirit of the Consensus alive in follow up to the evaluation of its action plan. The panelists also discussed the importance of linking developments with regard to national and European funding, citing the successes in advocacy related to ECHO funding in 2014 by the VOICE network and acknowledging the commitment of the European Parliament's humanitarian rapporteur Mr. Guerrero Salom.

Mr. Luchner and Ms. Asin Martinez described the European institutional changes, 2014-2015 and the opportunities and challenges this is presenting. The European Commission is now working in thematic clusters meaning that the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid is now reporting to the HR/VP directly. This presents opportunities for more coherent and coordinated foreign policies and negotiations (including internally in the EU with regard to Budgets), as well as opportunities for Mr. Stylianides to raise awareness on humanitarian assistance more systematically with his counterparts, but this coordination also increases the chances that humanitarian aid could be instrumentalised as a foreign policy or crisis management tool, endangering the Consensus approach.

Ms. Asin Martinez drew particular attention to dynamic and problematic communication from the EU institutions recently with regard to crises and conflicts, and in particular the serious concerns NGOs have with regard to the Joint Strategy on Syria, Iraq and Da'esh. This in fact confirms some of the risk that NGOs have expressed during the development of the EU Comprehensive Approach. Both development and humanitarian aid are named as tools in

defeating extremism and combatting terrorism, when in fact the reality is more complex and this is the objective of neither. She expressed the hope that the Member States would correct this miscommunication and that over time the new institutional structures would learn that maintaining the independence of EU humanitarian aid, protects ECHO, its partners and the aid beneficiaries, and is of crucial importance. Panelists agreed that the Syria strategy had been in some ways worrying and it should be followed closely.

Participants asked questions regarding ECHO's priorities in relation to the relationship with its partners, expressing the difficulty of balancing different donors' needs, while also seeking to fill the gaps created in public support for humanitarian aid by donors such as Spain dramatically decreasing their ODA. Mr. Luchner acknowledged that within ECHO discussions on the needs of the donor and the needs of the partner were always alive, touching on both the contractual, and the policy and regulatory framework for EU humanitarian assistance. He encouraged organisations to ensure their professional reputation and capacity to deliver as this would always be part of the elements in play. Donors do look to channel funds through larger grants, thereby encouraging partners into consortia, partially also in order to free up the management capacity for those small niche activities or organisations.

During the discussion an important point was also raised regarding public support for humanitarian action as an important tool in preserving the funding available and protecting humanitarian assistance. Communicating humanitarian principles without talking about them but rather their value as an operational tool was underlined as one strategy towards the public in this regard.

Panel: The World Humanitarian Summit: what's next after the EOG consultation?

Chair: Kathrin Schick (*VOICE*) Panellists: Anne Street (*CAFOD, UK*), Robert Smith (*WHS Secretariat*), Lara Contreras (*Oxfam Intermón*)

Mr. Smith of the WHS Secretariat presented¹ the main trends in consultations so far and next steps towards the WHS. From CAFOD's perspective, Ms. Street expressed her optimism regarding the process, especially as it is a multi-stakeholder process where NGOs have a seat at the table, and she hopes NGOs take full advantage of this. CAFOD on its side has prepared reports on key issues it sees in relation to humanitarian effectiveness to feed into discussions with a specific focus on local actors. As regards the process at the regional consultation in Budapest, she expressed disappointment that areas of disagreement could not be more fully acknowledged and that the conflict theme appeared to be downplayed. In this regard the joint NGO statement on the humanitarian principles, as a sort of bottom line for NGOs was very useful. Ms. Contreras observed that from an Oxfam perspective, very few new and innovative approaches are coming out of the WHS consultations. Despite an effort to do so, new actors are not truly being included in the discussions – traditional actors seem reluctant to make space at the table. Protection of civilians is not getting the attention it deserves and the role of local actors, while prominent in discussions, still requires further action to be properly reflected.

During the interactive discussion, concerns were expressed about the WHS looking at every possible topic in relation to humanitarian effectiveness, except the role of the UN. Syria was cited as an example of where the transformative agenda had not been realised. Questions were also raised as to the distorting effect of the openness of the overall WHS discussions, where on the one hand the online consultations are open to everyone and on the other hand, it is not clear how expertise and existing influence within the system will be weighted in the end.

Several suggestions were made regarding humanitarian resourcing such as adopting humanitarian goals within ODA or examining cost effectiveness in regard to supply chain and logistical costs and associated savings through different implementing partners. With regard to local organisations and resourcing, the need to invest in first responders capacity was

highlighted while ideas on compensation (e.g. transfer fees) with regard to qualified humanitarian staff being drawn out of local organisations into better paying INGOs and into the UN were floated. Participants highlighted that in particular the shift from goods to services should have a lot of potential with regard to retaining a cost efficient local response.

Questions were also raised as to the responsibilities of states vs other (including humanitarian) actors as regards protection of civilians and the limits of 'interoperability'.

In terms of next steps, the need to engage with the thematic consultations in order to ensure that the final regional recommendations for the Secretary General's report due in late 2015/early 2016 are relevant was emphasised. The importance of the EU taking a policy position, preferably through a Communication, in time to influence the global consultation in the autumn was emphasised. The WHS secretariat indicated that they hope the Summit itself would draw out commitments and pledges to action from the various stakeholders and lead to a more classic UN, intergovernmental process with regard to relevant recommendations including for the UN system.

ⁱ Presentation available on request.

<p>VOICE (<i>Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies</i>) is a network representing 82 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. It represents and promotes the values and specific features of humanitarian NGOs.</p>	<p>EUROPEAN COMMISSION</p>  <p>Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection</p> <p><i>This event is supported by the European Commission through its Humanitarian Aid department</i></p>
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