



Brussels, 13 November 2002

*Statement on the occasion of the Round Table:
The Future Role of Development Cooperation in the European Union*

VOICE is the European network representing some 100 humanitarian NGOs, which interacts on humanitarian issues with the European institutions – e.g. ECHO and the European Parliament. It gathers more than half of ECHO's partners. After 10 years of liaison activity in the European contexts, VOICE is closely familiar with European Union political issues and well prepared to comment on the place of humanitarian assistance policy within a future Europe.

The main concern today of the humanitarian sector – especially NGOs – is that within a reorganized Europe, **humanitarian assistance is in danger of being subsumed under crisis management procedures, in order to strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).**

We are writing today in an appeal to the Convention to preserve the special place for humanitarian assistance in the future Europe. Unlike other types of aid, which may be political or conditional, EC humanitarian assistance is based on international humanitarian law principles of impartiality and non-discrimination. Humanitarian assistance is therefore not an appropriate tool for CFSP. ECHO's current mandate, which ensures that humanitarian assistance remains needs-based, impartial and apolitical, must be maintained.

We recommend in particular:

1. that humanitarian assistance be seen alongside development cooperation as one element in the fight against poverty, and as such it requires separate mention in the future treaty.
2. that EC humanitarian assistance remain disconnected from political considerations as agreed under international humanitarian law.
3. that linkages between humanitarian relief and other, longer-term assistance (such as rehabilitation, disaster preparedness, food security, development, etc.) be recognised as essential for achieving coherence among EU international cooperation policies.
4. that attention be given to the impact of crisis management procedures on ECHO's role and impartiality, and that of its partners, in the future provision of EU humanitarian assistance.
5. that the possible future involvement in humanitarian actions of other actors, such as the military and civil protection agencies, be carefully considered.
6. that the added value of the EU relative to its Member States, to voice concerns about humanitarian issues such as protection and access, be acknowledged.

It is our hope that the future of Europe will involve a Comprehensive External Policy Framework that guides all external actions, based on the values and objectives of the European Union and within which space remains for impartial humanitarian assistance.