



VOICE RECOMMENDATIONS for the EU budget review

– March 2008 –

VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing some 90 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. Seeking to involve its members in information, training, advocacy and lobbying, VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness and promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

The future European Union budget is to respond to the challenges of the changing global environment and set new priorities for action both inside and outside of the EU to address them. The EU should seize the opportunity to build upon its role as a global player and prioritise responding to the challenges set by external factors such as climate change, conflicts over natural resources, and conflicts due to pressures of globalisation which can lead to the fragmentation of countries. The EU's strong engagement as a global policy maker and involvement as an active donor would greatly contribute to ensuring an environment of peace, growth and security in Europe.

Within the framework of European Union external action, humanitarian aid is a fundamental tool in ensuring that the EU's common values of solidarity are applied to EU actions that occur outside the European Union. EU humanitarian aid is not an instrument that of itself will solve the challenges faced across the world, but which focuses upon the increased humanitarian needs caused by them. Given its broad reach humanitarian aid is essential in implementing European values and demonstrating the solidarity of European citizens towards those affected by crises. Humanitarian response to save lives must be a priority. However, the EU should also use its growing influence to seek political solutions to the underlying causes of human suffering. Globally, the humanitarian needs of crises affected populations will continue to rise due to external factors leading to more devastating natural disasters and conflicts.

VOICE calls for the European Union to ensure greater attention is given to external action, and especially to humanitarian aid, in the future EU budgets.

Humanitarian Aid – a policy priority for EU external action

Increase in humanitarian needs

Over the coming years global humanitarian aid needs and related costs are constantly increasing. Climate change is resulting in an increase in the number, frequency and intensity of natural disasters. Humanitarian aid is also solicited in increasingly complex man-made crisis over limited resources. At the same time, the EU humanitarian aid budget allocations remain stable. The spiralling price of basic food costs is of significant concern, and increases in the cost of food will result in less food being available for crisis-affected populations. These factors may also lead to increasing population movements, with the possibility of the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and overall vulnerability increasing in the coming decades. The increasing needs have to be reflected through the provision of adequate funds for quality implementation of EU humanitarian aid.

Coherence in EU external actions

The Lisbon Treaty seeks to ensure greater policy coherence between different EU external relations actions. This should also be reflected in increased transparency of the EU budget on how the different external relations' instruments interact with each other. In responding to crises, humanitarian aid, development, conflict prevention and peace-building should all have priority over military-driven crisis management activities. It is vital to make sure that the funds allocated to EU humanitarian aid remain separate from other instruments, which are funding politically-driven external actions. Having a specific EC service for humanitarian aid (DG ECHO) contributes to ensuring that EU Humanitarian Aid is allocated based on identified humanitarian needs, as well as showing independence from other external action funding instruments.

Continuity in EU external actions

The EU budget for external action must ensure complementarity and continuity in aid. It is important that the different funding mechanisms enable and facilitate the transition between humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development action. The EU aid budget also needs to acknowledge the importance of risk reduction and preparedness. Building the capacities of local communities and their resilience has an immense impact in saving lives in the event of an emergency. Thus, the EU budget for external action must focus on enabling greater coherence between different instruments, and ensure adequate new resources for alleviating suffering and saving lives through increased preparedness.

The added value of EU humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid saves lives

Humanitarian aid is delivered in the first months of a disaster on the basis of identified needs of crisis-affected populations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), through their interventions, save lives and alleviate the suffering of these populations. Humanitarian responses do not seek to address the structural or other causes of human suffering. The humanitarian imperative to save lives and reduce suffering is a priority in and of itself. Humanitarian action is not the solution to poverty or continued crisis, and other external relations actions must be developed in a manner which is consistent and joined up with it. European humanitarian aid is a stabilising factor and provides a solid foundation upon which to implement EU development policy.

The EU is an active global donor in humanitarian aid

The EU is a major global aid donor, one of whose priorities is the delivery of principled humanitarian aid. In 2007 the EU, including the 27 Member States, reached a *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*, which sets out values, principles and objectives for EU humanitarian aid. On this basis, it is important that the EU continues to be an active donor influencing the global humanitarian aid policy and practice.

EU humanitarian aid is based on humanitarian principles

The *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* emphasises that EU humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool, but that it is to be delivered based on the identified needs of the people in distress according to humanitarian principles and international law (including Human Rights Law, Refugee Law and International Humanitarian Law). This principled approach to aid is recognised as a prerequisite in gaining access to crisis-affected populations.

EU humanitarian aid expresses the solidarity of European citizens

Humanitarian aid is an important element in external relations. EU humanitarian aid is an expression of European solidarity with crisis-affected people, and of intercultural dialogue. It is also appreciated by European citizens, for example the Eurobarometer survey¹ after the South-East Asian tsunami in 2004 indicated wide support to EU humanitarian aid among European citizens. EU humanitarian aid is implemented by a diversity of civilian actors². This includes European NGOs who enjoy the support and involvement of European citizens.

EU humanitarian aid is professional

EU humanitarian aid seeks to be efficient, accountable, delivered in a timely manner, of a high standard and provided in a manner which respects humanitarian principles. The EU recognizes the advantage of working with a diversity of high-quality implementing partners. There is a continuous search to improve coordination, complementarity and the impact of humanitarian response. The added value (speed, local knowledge, flexibility and special sectoral expertise) of humanitarian NGOs in aid delivery is well recognised.

VOICE therefore believes that the call for the EU to ensure greater attention to external action, and especially to humanitarian aid, in the EU budgets is justified.

¹ Special Eurobarometer 268 on Humanitarian Aid, 2006.

² Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Natural Disasters (the Oslo Guidelines), and the Guidelines on The Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets To Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (the MCDA Guidelines) indicate that military assets in humanitarian aid are to be utilised only in exceptional circumstances.