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Doing Well by Doing Good:

The Role of Humanitarian Aid in Europe's Global Strategy

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Introduction

While Europe is struggling to get its economic house back in order and its common foreign policy up and running, there is one area where the Union is faring much better: humanitarian aid.[1] Here, Europe is second to none. Collectively, the EU is the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid, committing annually some 2 billion euros – or nearly half of all international humanitarian assistance.[2] Moreover, Europe's active participation in various multilateral fora makes it an influential player in shaping the norms and practices underpinning the global humanitarian system. On top of this, its extensive field presence also gives it an advantage vis-à-vis other donors when it comes to quickly mobilize humanitarian assistance. Not only is this area an EU forte, humanitarian aid is increasingly also being seen as a core global imperative.

For the EU, which has traditionally clothed itself as a 'civilian power'[3], these kinds of activities serve an important part of a 'smart power' approach to solving complex global emergencies. Humanitarian aid is critical not only for enhancing Europe's image abroad – it can also strengthen stability and security and help with controlling unregulated migration.[4] As illustrated in a several recent crises such as Libya, Pakistan, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, major emergencies occurring in weak states could easily spill over national boundaries and also affect societal security

[1] According to the latest Eurobarometer survey, there is still widespread public support for EU humanitarian activities. See European Commission, 'Eurobarometer – humanitarian aid and civil protection', Brussels, 2012, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_383-384_eufact_en.pdf

[2] See Steets, J. & Hamilton, D. (eds.) (2009) "Humanitarian Assistance: Improving US-European Cooperation', Center for Transatlantic Relations, The Johns Hopkins University/Global Public Policy Institute, 2009; Bretherton, C. and Vogler, J. (2005). *The European Union as a Global Actor* Abingdon: Routledge.

[3] Hill, C. (ed.) (1996). The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy. London: Routledge.

[4] Steets (2009), op cit., p.3

elsewhere in the world in the forms of massive refugee flows, the spread of infectious diseases, or environmental collapse.[5]

A number of developments have added a sense of urgency to this issue. Past decades have witnessed a growing number of humanitarian emergencies such as natural disasters, famine, epidemics and armed conflicts. Compounding these trends are a number of factors, ranging from demographic changes to climate change to poor governance, which have contributed to further exacerbating existing vulnerabilities, particularly in weak and fragile states. Meanwhile, while the global demand for humanitarian relief has increased, the impact of the global financial crisis risks aggravating the challenge by threatening to limit the resources available for humanitarian action.

As the European foreign policy community is currently contemplating the utility of staking out a new European global strategy, the issue of humanitarian aid deserves strong attention. In addition to Europe's role as an economic, political and military power, the EU should seek to further enhance its role as a global humanitarian power. Not only does this help to enhance the view of Europe around the world; increasingly it also serves as an imperative to promote security and stability across the world.

Humanitarian Aid: A Rising Global Imperative

Throughout Europe and across the world, humanitarian emergencies have been on a consistent rise during the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century. But humanitarian emergencies are not only becoming more frequent and affecting more people, they are also becoming increasingly complex.

[5] Of course, developed states are not immune to severe disasters (e.g. Hurricane Katrina in the US and the tsunami in Japan). Moreover, spillover effects could also occur when a disaster hits a developed country (e.g. the 9/11 attacks had worldwide economic effects).

Ranging from natural disasters to famine to epidemics to armed conflicts, the scope and scale of major humanitarian crises is increasingly felt across the world.[6] The combined impact of various factors – ranging from demographic changes to urbanisation, climate change, competition for resources, high and volatile food and energy prices and security threats and poor governance – have contributed to exacerbating vulnerabilities and further increasing demands for humanitarian support. Weak and fragile states, lacking adequate emergency response capacities, infrastructure and health services are particularly vulnerable to these kinds of emergencies.[7] Conflict-related crises in places like the DRC, Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan have also become growingly protracted.

In face of humanitarian catastrophes, the international community's response typically falls under a) providing relief assistance and services (such as water, medicines, etc.), b) emergency food aid, and c) relief coordination, protection and support services. While international assistance is crucial during the immediate phase of major disasters, long-term humanitarian aid can also focus on building resilience through enhancing both preparation and focusing on reconstruction and development.[8] The main providers of humanitarian assistance include governments (such as Europe, United States and Japan), international organizations (such as the UN and regional bodies), and NGOs. Media attention also drives political processes toward pressures on developed countries to intervene on behalf of disaster stricken peoples around the globe.

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[6] According to figures from the World Bank, the number of recorded natural disasters rose from less than 100 to more than 400 between 1975 and 2005. See EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database, Université Catholique de Louvain, available at: http://www.em-dat.net/documents/figures/nat_dis_trends/natural19012004final.pdf

[7] United Nations (2007) "Disaster Risk Reduction: Global Review 2007", Geneva: UN, available at: http://www.preventionweb.net/files/1130_GlobalReview2007.pdf

[8] For a discussion of the concept of resilience in terms of disasters, see Comfort, L.K., Boin, R.A. and Demchak, C.C. (2010) Designing Resilience: Preparing for Extreme Events Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press.

However, a number of recent large-scale emergencies have highlighted the need for more efficient and effective humanitarian assistance. The inadequate international coordination seen during the 2004 Asian Tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the 2010 Pakistani floods, with significant problems in redundancies, unnecessary overlap and unilateral decisions as a result, has provided additional impetus to move towards closer international coordination through the UN-OCHA framework.[9] The focus of the international community in the coming decade will likely continue to put emphasis on improving the coordination of international efforts during complex large-scale emergencies across the world. The need to respond effectively to emergencies is also hampered by the widespread disregard for international humanitarian and refugee law. The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are frequently under fire and the shrinking 'humanitarian space' has become a constant problem during recent crises.

The lack of an effective international consensus to prevent and resolve crises causes new crises break up while chronic crises persist. At the same time, there is an emerging worldwide consensus that the complexity of global crises, particularly in fragile parts of the world, requires more than 'quick-fix' or 'band-aid' solutions. Taking a holistic approach to crises that emphasizes prevention before a crisis occurs is increasingly becoming a new imperative. Finally, the global financial crisis in combination with increased costs in delivering humanitarian support means that there is a growing mismatch between the humanitarian needs and the resources available for these activities. The revolution in communication technology and the proliferation of social media has also put additional pressure on public authorities to respond quickly to emergencies, regardless of where they occur.[10]

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[9] See, for example, Brattberg, Erik and Sundelius, Bengt 'Mobilizing for International Disaster Relief: Comparing U.S. and EU Approaches to the 2010 Haiti Earthquake', *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, Vol.8:1, 2011.

[10] For more on the public perception of crisis leadership, see Boin, R.A., 't Hart, P., Stern, E. and Sundelius, B. (2005) *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under* Pressure, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The EU as a Global Actor in Humanitarian Aid

The European Union is a recognized global player when it comes to humanitarian aid, accounting for a significant portion of the world's total aid in these areas. Collectively, the EU is the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid, committing annually some 2 billion euros – or nearly half of all international humanitarian assistance. The EU Commission is the second biggest humanitarian assistance donor followed by several EU member states. When compared to other non-EU donor countries, several EU member states are also leading international donors (both in absolute numbers and as relative ODA as a percentage of GDP). The majority of the money is spent in sub-Saharan Africa followed by the Middle East and Central Asia.[11] Fragile states account for the lion share of EU spending on humanitarian aid, amounting, to 80,2% of the total spending in 2010.[12] When funding comes from the Community budget, the EU's preference is for sub-contracting delivery to multilateral organisations, NGOs and the recipient governments. In particular, the Red Cross Movement is a notable partner of the EU in delivering humanitarian aid to crises overseas.

Europe is also playing a leading role in supporting the international humanitarian system. An active participant in various multilateral fora, Europe is an influential player when it comes to shaping the norms and practices underpinning the global humanitarian system. The EU's formal commitment to humanitarian principles is codified in the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*, which outline common values and interests guiding EU action. The EU has also collectively endorsed the global initiative aimed at linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD). At the same time, the plethora of differing, parallel humanitarian assistance policies in

[11] http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/eu-institutions
[12] Ibid.

member states means that priorities are not necessarily compatible with each other and/or with the EU institutions, thus potentially (and often in reality) undermining combined efforts. A common challenge in Brussels is simply to coordinate national actors prone to follow national priorities and to acting spontaneously. As seen in several recent responses, the EU has also frequently failed to speak with a 'single voice' during its humanitarian efforts.

In Europe today, responsibilities for responding to international humanitarian emergencies are dispersed among various EU institutions and the 27 member states. In the areas of external crisis and disaster relief, the European Union has developed a number of distinct instruments for action, responding to a variety of policies and mandates, including humanitarian assistance, stabilization, reconstruction, and sustainable development goals. Following the Lisbon Treaty, the Commission has reorganised itself to bring disaster relief and humanitarian assistance under the same administrative umbrella in the form of the new Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO), with the intention that this would promote consistency between short and long-term objectives. Recently, the EU has raised its profile in international disaster relief, deploying response teams and supplies at an ever-increasing rate.[13] Such cooperation on humanitarian assistance during emergencies is facilitated and coordinated in the EU by the so-called Community Civil Protection Mechanism (CPM).

While the member states have traditionally been responsible for handling international humanitarian operations, recent disasters such as the 2004 Asian tsunami and the 21010 Haiti earthquake have highlighted the need for closer EU cooperation and coordination in this area. Recently, common and stand-by civilian capacities are slowly being built to be able to enhance the readiness for future external assistance needs. In particular, there is an on-going effort to establish a new European

[13] Hollis, S. (2010). *National Participation in EU Civil Protection*, Acta B42, Stockholm: National Defence College.

Emergency Response Centre (ERC) within the Commission. The new centre is envisioned to have access to some pre-committed member state capacities on constant stand-by for EU operations through the so-called European Emergency Response Capacity. If implemented, these measures would mark a noticeable shift from the present where member states capacities are requested on a case-by-case basis in an ad hoc fashion – and could potentially generate a more coordinated and efficient EU response. Nevertheless, the divisions of judicial and political mandates across the many relevant institutions and between the sovereign member states and the supra-national level remain largely unresolved.

Another recent development with potential to affect the prospects for a more coordinated EU response to humanitarian emergencies is the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010. The EEAS subsumed several vital components that previously belonged to the Commission, including the Instrument for Stability.[14] Noticeably, the EEAS established a new Crisis Response Department to play a vital role in EU disaster response activities – alongside DG ECHO. The new Crisis Platform suggests more integration between disaster response/humanitarian assistance activities and the CSDP instrument during future crises situations in weak and fragile states. This would mean that the civil protection instrument accordingly will be increasingly used together with other areas as a part of an overall EU comprehensive approach. While it is still relatively early to assess the long-term implications of the EEAS role in responding to crises and its relationships with DG ECHO, recent events such as the so-called Arab Spring may suggest that the new disaster coordination department in the EEAS marks a step forward in the EU's efficacy in responding to far-away crises and disasters. During the EU's response to the 2011 Libya crisis, DG ECHO and the EEAS worked closely together. The EEAS

[14] The IfS consists of two components. The first is a short-term crisis response and preparedness' component, providing rapid and flexible funding to prevent conflict, to support post-conflict political stabilisation and to carry out early recovery after natural disasters whereas the second component is more long-term-oriented and is intended for use in more stable contexts. Currently, the overall budget of the IfS amounts to € 2.06 billion.

field office in Benghazi served to provide other involved EU agencies with valuable information which served to guide their activities in the field.

Finally, with the creation of the EEAS also enhanced the prospects for civil-military cooperation during EU responses to complex emergencies. The European Union Military Staff (EUMS) now exists alongside the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) and the Civilian Planning Conduct Capability (CPCC) within the EEAS organizational structure. This could improve coherence between military and civilian planning assumptions.[15] There is also an on-going debate around the need to grant DG ECHO access to military capacity, such as airlift capabilities and an EU civil protection force, and whether the established EU Battle Groups could be deployed to a disaster site.[16] Divisions still amongst EU member states regarding capabilities: although the EU has considerable international disaster response instruments in principle, mobilising those instruments is sometimes hampered by member state disagreement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The world is currently undergoing a number of significant changes underpinning the necessity for humanitarian aid in coming years. Not only are major emergencies becoming more frequent in number and affecting more people, they are also becoming increasingly complex in nature. This is particularly the case in weak and fragile states where state local capacities are limited and where humanitarian emergencies may occasionally interplay with armed conflicts. Addressing humanitarian crises is accordingly a rising global imperative, not only to save lives but also to promote security and stability.

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[15] Brattberg and Rhinard (2012), 'The EU and the US as International Actors in Disaster Relief', *Bruges Political Science Papers* No.22, Bruges: College of Europe, January 2012, p.19.

[16] Following the so-called Petersberg Tasks, European military units have the authority to engage in 'humanitarian and rescue tasks', but have not yet been deployed on strictly humanitarian missions, although military personnel and assets of EU member states are increasingly being used in emergency situations.

The global humanitarian system has not yet fully caught up to these realities. There is a growing recognition that the short-term provision of humanitarian aid needs to be incorporated into a wider framework centred around a comprehensive approach. International cooperation and coordination between humanitarian donors is key, but remains hard to implement in practice. At the same time, the shrinking 'humanitarian space' as seen in many crisis zones and the lacking observance to basic humanitarian principles by many actors means that the context confronting donors is increasingly challenging. On top of this, the global financial crisis means that the resources available for humanitarian aid will likely be significantly less in the future.

With its full range of different tools and instruments, the European Union is well positioned to play a leading role in supporting the global humanitarian system. While humanitarian aid is an important component of Europe's global 'soft power', it also serves a security imperative as major emergencies in poor and weak states increasingly risk giving rise to spillover effects in the form of, for instance, massive refugee flows.

Given the increased need for humanitarian aid in the future and the importance of these kinds of activities to the EU's global role, a possible European global strategy should:

- Acknowledge the rising number and growing complexity of major humanitarian emergencies, particularly those taking place in poor and fragile states;
- Stress the importance of humanitarian aid to assist during major complex humanitarian emergencies worldwide and to contain negative spillover in the form of, for instance, massive refugee flows and instability;
- Note the importance of elevating civilian power alongside military power as equal and complementary pillars of EU external action. The EU must

increasingly see humanitarian assistance as a vital tool as a part of a larger toolbox in pursuant of other, broader foreign policy goals;

- Underscore the importance of adopting an integrated '3D' approach bringing together development and humanitarian aid, diplomacy and defence under a comprehensive approach. The EU must also work to better integrate humanitarian assistance and CSDP without compromising core humanitarian principles;
- Stress the importance of continuing to support the international humanitarian system and strict adherence to humanitarian principles by all relevant actors in the field.

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