

HUMANITARIAN AID, SOLIDARITY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Radoslava Brhlíková¹

Abstract

The article deals with the analysis of the humanitarian assistance provided at the level of the European Union. The Union *prima facie* becomes a global player. On the external side it is engaged mainly through so-called soft - civilian power, which it uses on its political objectives and to promote its interests on the global scene. The key word is solidarity, humanitarian aid as well as neutrality. This is the premise with which article works - humanitarian aid as an act of solidarity and political neutrality. However no aid is both impartial and apolitical. Same implies to the assistance of the European Union.

Key words

Humanitarian aid, solidarity, European Union and member state

Introduction

The Treaty of Lisbon from 2009, the legal basis of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU) which is still valid today, devotes Article 214 to humanitarian aid. Under the term humanitarian aid, this article understands the activities of the Union that are aimed at providing *ad hoc* aid and saving the population of third countries in the case of natural or man-made disasters. The goal here is to cover the humanitarian needs of affected persons. As the article further states, the Union and the member states complement and strengthen each other. However, each and every EU humanitarian activity is guided by the rules of international law and the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination. The Council of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the Council) and the European Parliament (hereinafter referred to as the EP) adopt measures in this field jointly within the ordinary legislative procedure (former co-decision procedure), and the EU and its member states may enter international agreements with third countries and international organizations

¹ Mgr. Radoslava Brhlíková, PhD., research assistant, Department of Political Science and European Studies, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slančíkovej 1, 949 Nitra, Slovakia, rbrhlikova@ukf.sk

(Article 214 paragraphs 1 to 4 of the TFEU). The Treaty counts the establishment of a European Voluntary Corps for Humanitarian Aid, whose status and mode of operation are adopted jointly by the Council and the European Parliament (Article 214 paragraph 5 of the TFEU). According to the Treaty, the Commission is entrusted with coordinating the activities of the EU and the Member States, while its goal is to strengthen the efficiency and complementarity of the EU's and the Member States' measures. The Treaty obliges the Union to ensure that its humanitarian activities are coordinated with the activities of international organizations, especially the UN (Article 214 paragraphs 6 and 7 of the TFEU) as the legal basis states.

EU humanitarian aid

According to statistics, the European Union is the most active donor of humanitarian aid in the world. At least that's how EU presents itself on its official website, where we can read that EU helps more than 120 million people in countries outside its territory annually. Along with the member states, the EU spends more than 1 billion euros per year, what makes it the biggest donor of the humanitarian aid in the world. Nevertheless, this aid represents less than 1% of its total annual budget – just over €2 per EU citizen².

Picture 1: Sectors that receive the most funding under EU humanitarian aid



Source: EU by topic: Humanitarian aid and civil protection,
http://europa.eu/pol/hum/index_sk.htm

²See: European Union: Humanitarian aid and civil protection. Available on:
http://europa.eu/pol/hum/index_sk.htm

Officially, through financial and material aid, services and technical assistance, the EU tries to prepare people for crisis situations and to act quickly in cases that seriously endanger people's lives, including natural disasters, disasters caused by human activity (man-made disasters) or structural crises. The Union's activities should, however, be based on the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence and non-discrimination, meaning that aid should go to people regardless of their nationality, religion, gender or ethnic origin.

The Union's humanitarian aid focuses on three types of aid: emergency aid: emergency aid, food aid and aid intended for refugees and internally displaced persons (hereinafter IDPs). There is only one goal and that is to provide help as quickly as possible to those who need it the most. As far as humanitarian aid is a short-term tool (maximum six months), its main objectives are: to save lives in and emergency situations and in the immediate post-crisis situations; to provide necessary assistance and relief to people affected by long-term crises, which arise especially when armed conflicts or wars break out; to implement short-term restoration and reconstruction works immediately after emergency situations, especially in the area of infrastructure and facilities; to cope with the consequences of population movements through repatriation and to help resettle the population as needed; to ensure preparedness for relevant risks and use an appropriate rapid intervention early warning system (Brhlíková, 2013, 223-224).

The main elements of EU humanitarian aid are:

- resilience-building assistance that targets individuals, households, communities, regions and countries in adapting to and overcoming shocks such as drought, violence, conflict and natural disasters;
- emergency aid – financing the purchase and provision of basic needs such as medicine, food and shelter, or financing reconstruction work after a disaster;
- food aid – financing supplies for regions affected by drought and hunger until their normal functioning is restored or financing emergency food aid in cases of food shortages caused by armed conflict or a sudden natural disaster;
- aid for refugees – to overcome the period before they can return to their homes or settle in a new country;

- disaster risk reduction, which includes disaster preparedness and consideration of disaster risk reduction in all aspects of humanitarian response (Brhlíková, 2013, 224).

Through humanitarian aid, it is also possible to finance work aimed at improving its implementation, such as preparatory and feasibility studies, project assessment, raising awareness in the humanitarian field, strengthening coordination between the EU and member states. EU humanitarian aid is provided in the form of grants and can be implemented at the initiative of the European Commission (hereinafter referred to as the Commission or EC), international organizations, a member state or at the request of the country receiving the aid (Brhlíková, 2013, 225).

In principle, the Commission has three different decision-making procedures at its disposal. The first is the delegation procedure. The aim of this procedure is to respond quickly to urgent crisis situations. Thus the Commission has delegated the competence to adopt decisions on extraordinary emergency mission in limited scope (the amount of aid does not exceed EUR 3 million and the operation does not last more than 3 months) to the Director General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). Another procedure is the authorization procedure, where the Commissioner responsible for humanitarian aid has the power to decide on emergency operations whose costs do not exceed €30 million and last for a maximum of 6 months, as well as on less urgent operations whose costs do not exceed €10 million. These decisions are the subject of consultations (in the cabinet, or between directorate-general units). The decisions on emergency operations exceeding EUR 10 million and decisions on less urgent operations exceeding EUR 2 million must be approved by the Humanitarian Aid Committee. The last of the procedures applied is a written procedure that applies to all decisions that do not fall under the definition of delegation and authorization procedures. The Commission is also responsible for issuing instructions, management, follow-up and evaluation of operations. It is assisted with these actions by a committee composed of representatives of member states in accordance with the comitology procedure (Brhlíková, 2013, 225-226).

The European Union provides humanitarian aid through non-governmental organizations, international bodies and organizations, the Commission itself or through specialized bodies of member states. The EC supervises the coordination of its operations and the operations of the member states as well as the harmonization of the operations of international bodies and organizations.

This activity is coordinated by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), which works closely with partners providing assistance directly at the scene, in the field, especially with the UN and non-governmental organizations. At the end of each financial year, the Commission submits an annual report to the European Parliament and the Council, the content of which is a summary of the financed operations, information on the actors contributing to the realization of these operations and the overview of conducted external assessments.

The scope of the ECHO Directorate General (hereinafter referred to as DG ECHO) is a reflection of the growth of serious crises in the world, as well as the EU's interest in leading the way in providing aid to victims, or the EU's interest in becoming a global power. It is an instrument of soft power of the European Union, through which it creates a circle of grateful supporters. Since the creation of this Directorate General, its basic task has been to help save the lives of people in crisis areas, minimize their suffering and protect their integrity and dignity. For example, tents, blankets, food, medicine, medical equipment, water purification systems and fuel are distributed in emergency relief. The budget of DG ECHO finances the activities of medical teams, demining specialists, as well as transport and logistical support. Since 1992, DG ECHO has operated in more than 140 countries. In addition to humanitarian aid, DG ECHO assists in the coordination of civil protection in the EU. It runs the Monitoring and Information Center (MIC), which has been operating as the European Emergency Response Center (ERC) since the first half of 2013. DG ECHO does not have its own humanitarian workers and does not employ any of them, not even the necessary equipment to provide emergency rescue assistance, send rescue teams, establish emergency field hospitals or build temporary communication systems. Instead, it funds and coordinates such humanitarian operations through 200 partner agencies, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), specialized UN agencies and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, which operate on the ground. In Brussels headquarters there are 300 employees and in its 44 local offices in the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America there are more than 400 humanitarian experts are employed (Brhlíková, 2013, 226).

Solidarity

Due to the above-mentioned organizations and this policy, the EU is present and active in all major crisis areas such as Syria, South Sudan, Ukraine, West Africa affected by Ebola or the Ivory Coast, or is involved in the so-called forgotten crises such as that in the Central African Republic. The aid for these areas is provided, as declared by the EU, impartially, regardless of race and of affiliation to specific ethnic or sexual group, religion, gender, age, national or political affiliation. The EU presence is in conformity with the principle of solidarity with the suffering and people in need. As Richard von Weizsäcker noted, only solidary world can be just and live in peace, which is a fundamental value of the European Union.

Defining the concept of solidarity is not always easy, especially if politicians dishonor it by associating it with opposing values and events. Dictionaries generally define this term as mutual support, reciprocity, sociability and concord. All of these words can be considered archaic in terms of current individualistic-libertarian world oriented towards the individual and destroying communities and communities and societies - at least in the Western world. However, solidarity is an important principle that governs social life and holds society together. The definition usually refers to solidarity as a voluntary social cohesion between equals, a willingness to help and support each other within a group (Petrušek, 1996, 1185). The man is then solidary with a group as long as s/he supports it and s/he feels its successes, achievements and failures as his/her own. In general, there is a belief in society that it is good to sacrifice the well-being of the individual for the benefit of the whole group, since people, as social creatures, are inevitably mutually dependent. They depend on each other in various ways. Solidarity is largely about responsibility, forbearance and tolerance within society in the spirit of the musketeer motto "*one for all and all for one*". It expresses respect, acceptance and recognition. It means being oneself without the need to impose one's attitudes and opinions on others. It comprises of helping those in need, those who cannot help themselves. Solidarity is reciprocal, it does not ask who needs help and when. We give it and we consume it ourselves. It stands in opposition to the idea of dominion and power of one over another. This leads us further to consider whether Western societies with their orientation towards strong individualism are still at all solidary within themselves and thus also an example worthy of following by societies which the Western world arrogantly considers less developed. The

demand for solidarity, including and especially with the poorer parts of the world or in the current so-called the refugee crisis that affected the European Union becomes a significant ethical challenge for everyone and for many thinkers it remains a virtue of modern societies (see Camus, Rorty).

With its humanitarian aid policy, the Union tries to show solidarity with people in countries affected by natural disasters, civil war, and social conflict. A survey conducted in 2012 showed that nine out of ten EU citizens support the funding of humanitarian aid and more than 80% of respondents agreed with the statement that coordinated EU measures to deal with disasters are more effective than individual state measures. This means that the EU citizens are in solidarity and feel responsible for the communities and societies affected by the disaster, but at the same time they emphasize that complex, comprehensive and coordinated EU aid is more effective than individual aid (Humanitarian aid..., 2014, 4).

In 2007, a crucial political document called the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid was concluded between the EU institutions and 27 member states. The Consensus emphasizes that EU humanitarian aid is not a political instrument and confirms the principles of humanitarian aid such as humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality.

Conclusion

After analysing the EU humanitarian policy in terms of principles applied and activities DG ECHO, we may surely agree that these are all highly ethical and noble principles, but does the EU and all donors follow them always and under any circumstances? Perhaps the EU as an independent institution carefully watches the general goals and maintains the accepted principles of impartiality and non-discrimination, but the member states in most cases pursue their own goals and interests and focus on the radius of their own preferred recipients of aid (see, for example, France and its focus on former colonies in Africa such as the Ivory Coast, or Algeria). This subsequently leads us to the question to what extent is such help then effective? German diplomat Volker Seitz, serving 17 years in Africa for, argues that aid governed from outside is usually as ineffective because the finances dedicated to aid are mostly spent in sustaining the system in countries which is usually based on nepotism, corruption and protectionism (Seitz, V., 2016). One might point to the fact that the almost in every case the aid provider follows its own interests and goals, and therefore aid

becomes a tool for achieving them. The aid is distributed into recipient countries usually according to the list of priorities of the donor country, or the community of donor countries, which put the humanitarian character aside (Dudáš, T., 2007, 58). Seitz believes that more funding, more money does not lead to better results. The aid should not be managed from outside, but the initiative should come from the recipient countries themselves (Seitz, V., 2016).

The aid from the side of donors may be understood as a kind of tangle of moral obligation to help less developed countries, i.e. solidarity and national interests. Rich countries, in terms of European countries and the US, tries to compensate negative impact of unequal economic development, as well as their own foreign policy decisions, such as the destabilization of the Middle East, and at the same time to gain the economic and political influence in the developing world. British expert on development aid Lord Peter Bauer claims that foreign aid is not an "aid", but a transfer or subsidy. It is not a transfer to the poor or the needy, but to the government. Therefore, the predominant effect of "foreign aid" has always been to increase the size and scope of the state, what leads to the centralization of government power, since the final recipient of the transfer is always the central government of the country receiving the aid. As foreign aid flows from one government to another, it inevitably diverts resources from productive activity to passive receive of money - rent-seeking - or attempts to get government funds. This creates a gigantic patronage machine with omnipresent corruption. This corruption often leads to armed conflicts that are beyond the control of auspices in many Third World countries. And so, while more and more resources are spent on pasive admision of money instead of production and enterpreneurship, the countries that receive the aid become poorer and poorer leading to opinion that it is the foreign aid which actually causes a *"vicious cycle of poverty"*. It means that foreign aid is a "vicious cycle of poverty". The foreign aid also keeps corrupt interventionist states afloat despite their counterproductive, if not downright disastrous, economic policies. Governments that slow down economic growth through high taxes, spending and lending, borrowing, overregulation of market, protectionism, inflation, price controls, land collectivization, undisguised and full frontal corruption are protected against the civil riots right becasue of the foreign aid provision that feeds enough people and thus keep the masses of people calm. Thus, foreign aid actually imposes the impression on its recipients that circumstances are beyond their control, and therefore they must rely on begging from foreigners (Bauer, 1991).

Kenyan economist James Shikwati strongly asked the West to immediately cancel the aid, in the interview for the German weekly Spiegel. According to him, the World Food Program is "*a huge office of apparatchiks, which is in an absurd situation: although it signed up to fight against hunger, everyone would lose the job if they eliminated this hunger*" (Thielke, T., 2005). Shikwati describes the aid cycle in Kenya as follows: the local UN office accepts the government's request for aid, often exaggerates its scope, and soon thousands of tons of maize arrive. Part of the supply ends up in the hands of corrupt politicians, the other on the black market, where it is sold for dumping prices. Local farmers lose their jobs, suffer from hunger – and need help (Thielke, T. 2005). Based on this example it is possible to illustrate whether the aid is necessary and efficient, or whether it serves only as an excuse for bad conscience of rich Western countries as well as a tool for pursuing their foreign policy goals.

The EU, in its position as a supranational organization can act impartially and independently, however it is still made up of 28 different member states and thus of 28 different foreign divergent policies and interests in the end

References

BAUER, P., *Development Frontier. Essays in Applied Economics*. London : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

BRHLÍKOVÁ, R., *Politiky Európskej únie po Lisabone*. Nitra 2013, ISBN 978-80-558-0478-1

CAMUS, A., *Člověk revoltující*. Praha: Český spisovatel, 1995 - 303 s. ISBN 80-202-0584-5

DUDÁŠ, T., *Rozvojová pomoc a spolupráca*, Ekonóm 2007, ISBN 978-80-225-2393-6

PETRUSEK, M, (vyd.), *Velký sociologický slovník II*. Praha: Karolinum 1996, heslo Solidarita

Politiky Európskej únie: Humanitárna pomoc a civilná ochrana, Európska únia, Luxemburg 2014, ISBN 978-92-79-36444-0, dostupné v pdf na: http://europa.eu/pol/hum/index_sk.htm

RORTY, R., *Nahodilost, ironie, solidarita*. Praha: PedF UK 1996 - xv, 227 s.
ISBN 80-86039-14-5

Internet sources:

EUROPEAN UNION: Humanitarian aid and civil protection. Retrieved from:
http://europa.eu/pol/hum/index_sk.htm

SEITZ, V.: V Afrike zlyhajú tri zo štyroch rozvojových projektov. Retrieved from: <http://euractiv.sk/obrana-a-bezpecnost/v-afrike-zlyhaju-tri-zo-styroch-rozvojovych-projektov-021001/>

THIELKE, T.: *SPIEGEL Interview with African Economics Expert: "For God's Sake, Please Stop the Aid!"* DER SPIEGEL 27/2005. Retrieved from: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/spiegel-interview-with-african-economics-expert-for-god-s-sake-please-stop-the-aid-a-363663.html>;

Or in German language:

THIELKE, T.: *Streich diese Hilfe*. DER SPIEGEL 27/2005. Retrieved from: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40952573.html> ;