

A PUBLICATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY HUMANITARIAN OFFICE (ECHO)

CALL ON EU TO TAKE HIGHER PROFILE ON HUMANITARIAN AID



Europeans are aware of the Union's humanitarian action but they want to be given more information about the actions they make possible

THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC WANTS TO SEE THE EU SPEND MORE ON HUMANITARIAN AID, WHILE GETTING MORE INVOLVED IN DIRECT ACTION

European citizens know about the EU's involvement in humanitarian aid, but they would like to be better informed about its actions. These were among the key conclusions in a Eurobarometer survey published in February. Those questioned would like to see the EU spend more on humanitarian aid, while getting involved

more directly in the field. The Eurobarometer on humanitarian aid was commissioned by ECHO and carried out in all 12 Member States in December 1994.

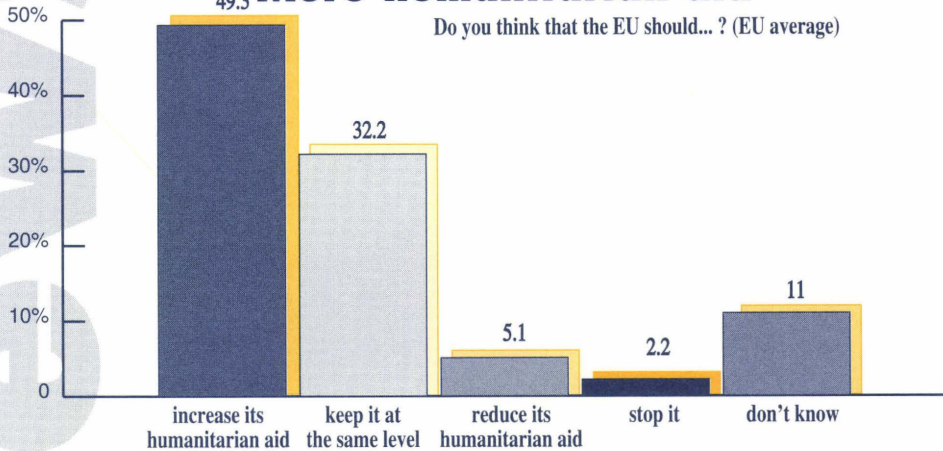
People know about EU humanitarian aid, but they want more information about it

More than six out of 10 people knew about the EU's work in the humanitarian field in general. Awareness scores are highest in Denmark (76%), Greece (72%), France (68%) and Belgium (67.9%). Seven out of 10

knew about specific case such as those of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Very few people had heard of the Humanitarian Office (ECHO), probably because it has only been in existence for two years, though the European Community has been active in the field of humanitarian aid since the 1970s. In its early days, the aid effort had only very modest resources at its disposal, however.

Those questioned said they would like to know more about what the European Union is doing in the field of humanitarian aid. In answer to the question «Would you like to be better informed about humanitarian operations carried out by the Union?» the answer was overwhelmingly «yes». On average, 76% of those polled wanted to be given more information, and in some countries, such as Greece, the number even climbed to over 90%.

More humanitarian aid



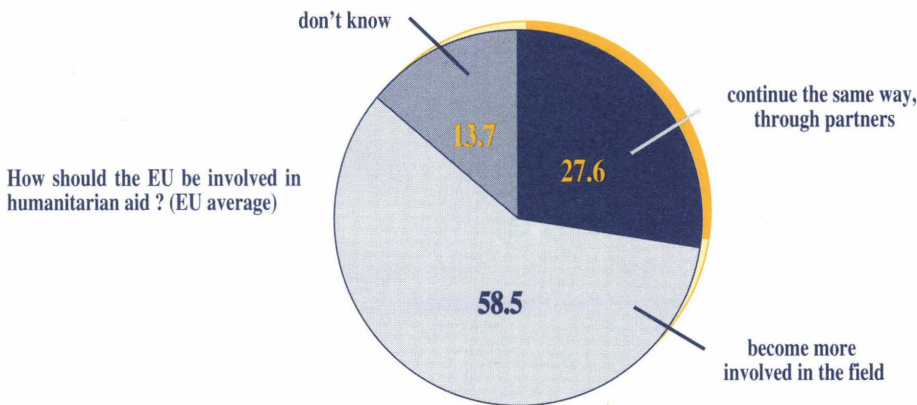
Should the European Union increase its humanitarian aid or maintain the status quo? Two-thirds of the countries feel that it should be increased, while one third prefers the status quo. Europeans do not wish to reduce or suspend humanitarian aid. **Most Europeans feel that the**

EU ought to increase its effort in the field of humanitarian aid. The force with which this opinion is expressed varies from one country to another: almost 90% of Greeks polled would like to see the aid increased compared to only 46% in Germany and France.

«Tell us what you're doing»

Most people polled knew that the European Union was involved in humanitarian aid. They had heard that the EU had given aid in two major crises, in the former Yugoslavia, and in Rwanda. But very few had heard of ECHO as such, and practically all wanted to know more about what the European Union is doing in the field.

Greater direct involvement on the ground



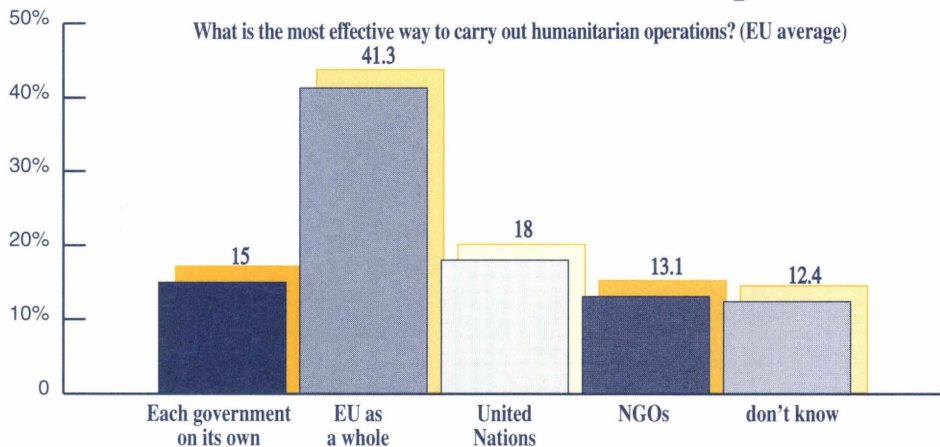
«Get more involved in the field»

Many of those polled felt the European Union should get more directly involved in the field. Most of ECHO's aid is currently entrusted to non-governmental organisations and to international organisations. ECHO has, however, intervened directly on the ground in the former Yugoslavia, and for most people, this is their image of how the European Union should work - with direct action.

Six out of 10 Europeans feel that the EU ought to become directly involved in distributing humanitarian aid, rather than entrusting this to other bodies. The countries

in which the preference for direct involvement is most marked are Greece (76.4%), Luxembourg (69.8%), France (67.5%) and Italy (60.6%).

How can a humanitarian operation be carried out effectively?



Strength in numbers

The European Union should act as a union in giving aid, rather than leaving it up to individual Member States or channelling aid through the United Nations. That was the verdict of over 40% of those polled. They were asked whether aid should be provided through the EU, through Member States, the UN or NGOs.

EU's role as biggest donor little known

The European Union is the world's biggest donor of humanitarian aid, but few people are aware of the fact. People were asked who they thought the biggest donor was. A total of 60% either didn't know, or else they thought the United States held the top slot. Barely 37% thought the EU was the leading donor.

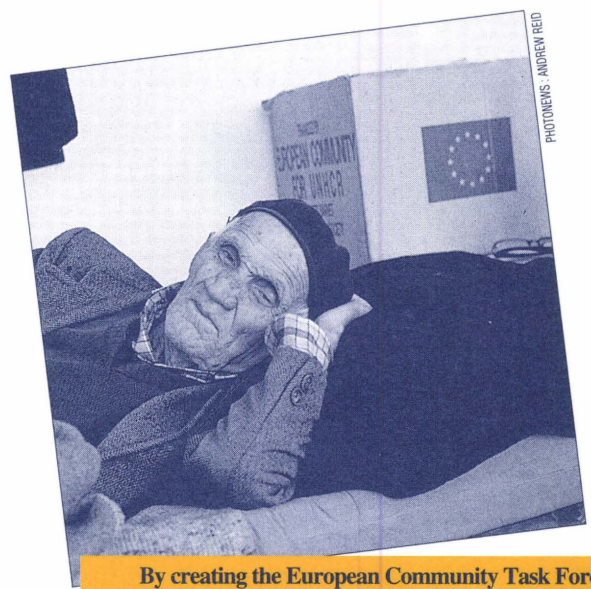


PHOTO NEWS ANDREW RED

By creating the European Community Task Force (ECTF), the European Union has become directly involved in the humanitarian field in the former Yugoslavia. Europeans favour direct action.

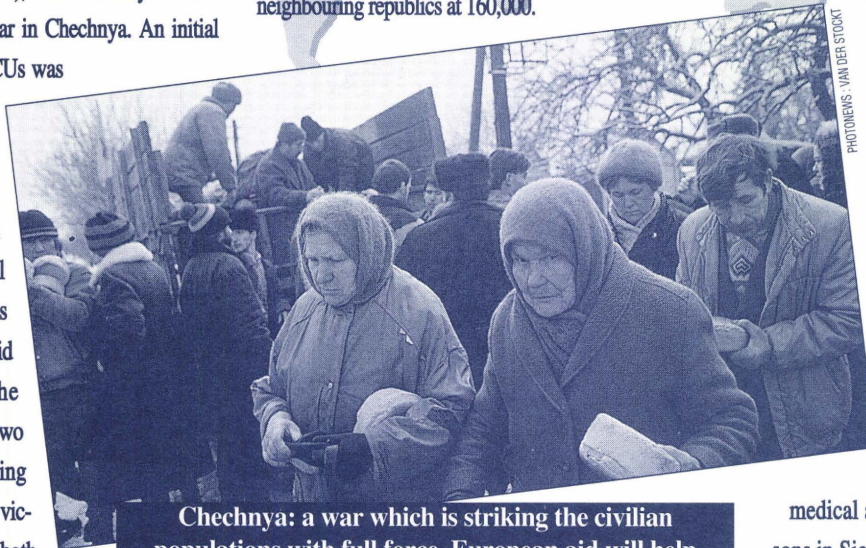


ECHO's global reach

CHECHNYA

The Commission is extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Central Asia (particularly in the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus), and is closely monitoring the development of the war in Chechnya. An initial decision to provide 310,000 ECUs was taken at the end of 1994 on behalf of the victims trapped in the battles zones and displaced persons. In response to an appeal by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which is coordinating aid operations in the region, the Commission followed up with two subsequent allocations involving five million ECUs to assist all victims of the armed conflict, on both sides, in accordance with the ICRC's

principles of neutrality. It is intended to provide global emergency aid to the victims during the harshest winter months. The number of displaced persons following the fighting is estimated at 240,000 and the refugees in the neighbouring republics at 160,000.



Chechnya: a war which is striking the civilian populations with full force. European aid will help victims to survive the harshest winter months

SIERRA LEONE

Since 1991, the civil war in Sierra Leone has led to the displacement of over one million people. They are mainly farming families living in disastrous conditions, cut off from their villages and land, with no access to medical care. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world. To assist people in such great need, ECHO released 700,000 ECUs with the aim of providing maximum support to the few NGOs still working in the region. Conditions for implementing aid are exceptionally difficult in this small country. ECHO is currently supporting two other food, sanitation and medical aid programmes on behalf of displaced persons in Sierra Leone.

GEORGIA

Living conditions continue to be very difficult for the population of Georgia, victims of a twofold political and economic crisis since the break-up of the former USSR. The lack of energy is making itself cruelly felt. Today potatoes are cooked over wood fires in the streets of Tbilisi. When President Eduard Shevardnadze visited Brussels on 17 February, ECHO announced an additional six-month aid programme. This involves the supply of fuel oil to guarantee minimum electricity supplies to the city of Tbilisi and to carry out emergency repairs to the electricity generation system of hospitals

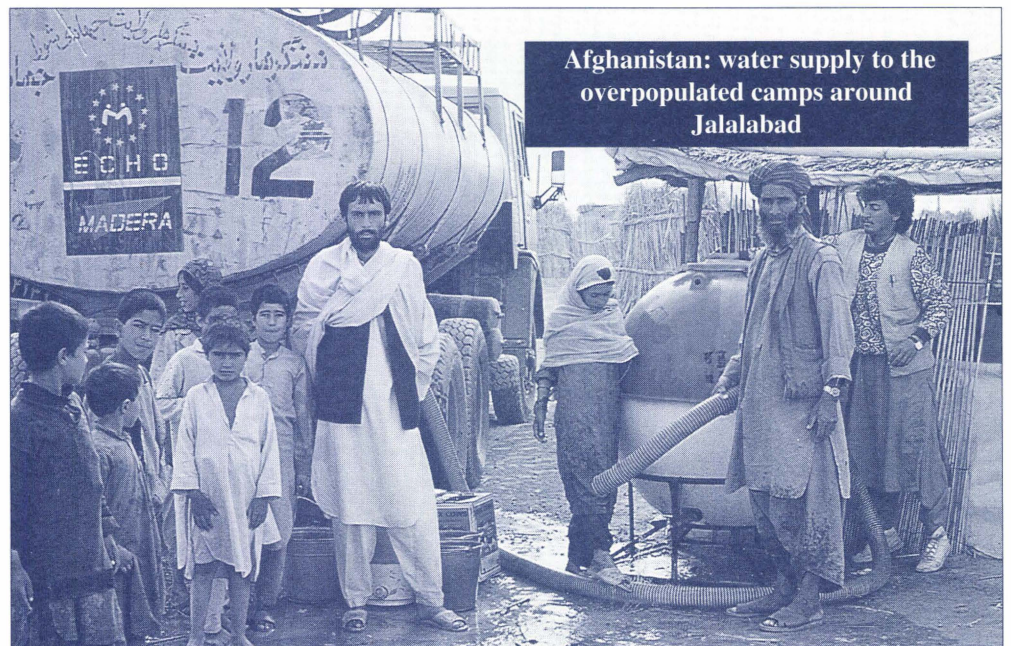
and social infrastructure. Food aid in the form of individual parcels will be distributed to families sheltering displaced persons while bulk food will be supplied to major centres (schools and public establishments) where other displaced persons take their main meals. Medical aid is also provided for in this decision which involves a total sum of 11.2 million ECUs.



Hospitals barely functioning, neither heating nor electricity: a serious energy shortage is paralysing Georgia. Jacques Santer, Commission President, has promised Eduard Shevardnadze, President of the Republic of Georgia, the Commission's continued support on behalf of people in need in this Caucasian republic

AFGHANISTAN

Fighting between rival factions continues to rage in Kabul. A large proportion of the inhabitants has fled the capital. Only those who do not have the means to leave remain. The Commission has just granted aid of 620,000 ECUs to assist 30,000 Kabulis sheltered in the cities' public buildings. The aim of the aid is to supply food products to help them survive the winter. Today, most of Kabul's inhabitants are displaced persons. Fighting spreads from district to district, laying waste buildings and infrastructure. Outside Kabul, the Commission is also supplying substantial aid to displaced persons living in the camps close to Jalalabad and around Mazar-I-Sharif in the north (see «Afghanistan, a forgotten tragedy» dossier, in ECHO News no. 5, December 1994).



Afghanistan: water supply to the overpopulated camps around Jalalabad



'I believe we have to make a big effort to take preventive action'

EMMA BONINO

new Commissioner with responsibility for humanitarian aid



The day after you took office, you left on a mission to the former Yugoslavia. Do you take it that you like to work in the field?

Definitely. For me, going into the field is the best way to understand what is at stake in any given situation. I prefer to face reality rather than consulting background notes. But there were other reasons for arranging a trip to ex-Yugoslavia so early on. I wanted to express the European Union's concern about the Yugoslav question in person, and to reassure the populations affected. We will keep up our efforts to provide humanitarian aid. Rumours that the international community is gradually abandoning interest in the Yugoslav issue are groundless. While I was on the spot, I was able to see how efficient European aid is, while recognising the limits of humanitarian aid without political initiative. What I found heart-warming was to see hundreds of young Europeans involved in humanitarian aid activities on the ground. It's a wonderful expression of support for the former Yugoslavia, and solidarity is in my view is the most important European value.

The EU's Humanitarian Office is very new. It was created with the aim of increasing the efficiency of Union aid by grouping together the various emergency aid activities under the same umbrella. What has ECHO's creation changed?

Not only does ECHO put all the Commission's various emergency aid activities under one roof, making it much more streamlined than before, but above all, ECHO has a mandate to coordinate the Commission's activities. That means coordi-

nation among the Commission's internal departments (food aid, refugees), coordination among donors and operators in the field, coordination of humanitarian initiatives of Member States and of the Commission. Good coordination is a sine qua non for the efficiency of humanitarian actions and it is in this field that ECHO's role is essential.

ECHO was also created to make the Commission's humanitarian action more visible. What is your position in this regard?

I have a very clear and very firm view on this subject. European citizens must be informed about the actions made possible thanks to their money. The Eurobarometer (see pages 1 and 2) confirms the wish of the vast majority of Europeans to be better informed about the Union's humanitarian actions. So it seems natural to me that our partners in the field, non-governmental organisations or international organisations, should make known ECHO's participation in their projects. I am keen to make the EU's visibility one of my priorities, not as regards me personally, but quite simply because that's the way it should be. No-one disputes the need for NGOs and international organisations to invest in communication. ECHO has exactly the same reasons for doing so. I find those involved in humanitarian aid unconvincing when they argue that they should not be compared to a political force. Some crises have been resolved precisely because the European Union intervened. As a general rule, I want to see ECHO's flag flying alongside those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the NGOs which ECHO funds. I am prepared to allow a few exceptions in specific cases. But at the moment, the exceptions appear to be the rule, and that is unacceptable. All the same, I must stress that visibility as such is not an end in itself for ECHO. The proof of that is that we are present — and often we are the only ones present — in countries that no-one talks about, such as Afghanistan, the Caucasian republics, southern Sudan, Liberia, and so on. In short, when the TV cameras are there, we want to wave our flags, but that doesn't stop us being there in regions where there isn't even a radio set.

What issues are particularly close to your heart at the moment?

I am very concerned by the situation in Rwanda, and by the way, I intend to go there in the next few days. The refugee camps ruled by the Hutu militia are a serious threat to peace today. There is a risk that humanitarian aid workers could be accused of having fostered a second civil war. A political solution is needed. That is not part of ECHO's mandate, but it is one of my most serious concerns at the moment, one which is shared by the entire international community. I feel that an enormous effort is needed in the area of preventive action. ECHO is involved in the prevention of natural disasters, but things are much more complicated in the field of preventing conflict. Appropriate instruments will have to be created for that.

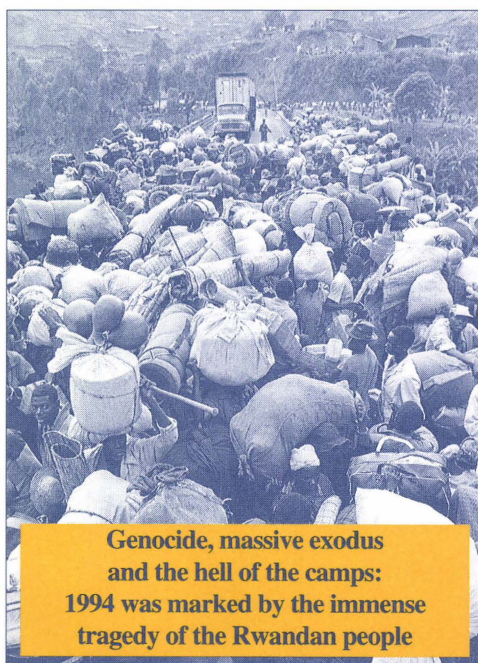
Interview by Isabelle Brusselmans for ECHOnews

Annual report

ECHO'S SECOND YEAR: THE CHALLENGE OF RWANDA

The crisis in Rwanda was the biggest challenge ECHO faced in its second full year of operations. In its 1994 annual report, ECHO said that over 180 million ECUs were spent on aid to refugees in Rwanda and Burundi. Overall, ECHO grants in 1994 totalled 764 million ECUs, against 605 million ECUs in 1993.

«In crises where political rationale fails to defuse tensions, humanitarian aid is the only tangible way the Union can express its concern,» Commissioner Emma Bonino said at a news conference to present the report. But she was concerned that few people polled in the Eurobarometer survey (see pages 1 and 1) knew of ECHO's activities. *«I am afraid of an outbreak of donor fatigue,»* she said. *«I am afraid that taxpayers will decide to tighten the purse-strings of humanitarian aid if they do not see any results. We must avoid that danger by presenting them with positive results,»* she added. ECHO aid reached 63 countries in four continents.



Genocide, massive exodus and the hell of the camps: 1994 was marked by the immense tragedy of the Rwandan people

African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) accounted for 42 % of the total, and the former Yugoslavia 35.3 %. Some 11.9 % of the total went to the former Soviet Union. Most ECHO aid — about 85% — is distributed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies that have signed a Framework Partnership Agreement with ECHO (150 of them have signed the FPA until now).

«An explosion in the number of man-made crises made it essential to boost resources devoted to humanitarian aid,» said Emma Bonino, calling for preventive action to be built into planning the European Union's response emergencies in future.

Over the past four years, EU humanitarian aid has increased sevenfold, the report itself noted. *«Continuous and open-ended growth in funding is neither a realistic nor a satisfactory strategy. There is no acceptable alternative to a preventive strategy,»* it added.