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**Research Report**

## A European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps: Learning from the Americans

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# A European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps

Learning from the Americans

*Annegret Bendiek / Anne Schmidt*

**Like the tsunami in Asia at the end of 2004, the earthquake in Haiti at the beginning of this year demonstrated the shortcomings of European crisis response capabilities. Drawing on the Lisbon Treaty, the responsible European Commissioner has therefore announced her intention to make a concrete proposal in the second half of the year for the rapid establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps. The design of the Corps's mandate, funding and management structure will determine its success. With 2011 earmarked as the European Year of Volunteering, the member states would be wise to enlarge the European crisis management capacities with a European Voluntary Corps modelled after the US Peace Corps.**

The earthquake in Haiti on 12th January 2010 reopened the debate about the expansion of effective European crisis response capabilities. Before the end of the year, Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, intends to make the proposal for the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (based on Article 214 (5) TFEU, a novelty of the Lisbon Treaty). Already at the end of January 2010, Greece had promoted the idea of establishing just such a European Volunteer Corps. Volunteers from the EU should be able to carry out common projects in the EU and third countries in the fields of development aid,

humanitarian aid, environmental protection, climate change, education and civil protection. In the Greek conception, the Corps would stress the principles of international solidarity and volunteering and make the EU "as a positive force" more visible on the global scene. At the beginning of April, the then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown expressed his support for the idea of a "European Peace Corps" modelled on the *US Peace Corps*. This European Voluntary Corps, he said, should be well integrated into the multi-level European crisis management structure.

## **Comprehensive Approach: Civil Crisis Response**

For some time now, there has been pressure for greater coordination in the use of the EU's instruments to respond to crises in third countries. These instruments have traditionally ranged from Community funded crisis response projects which support, for example, mediation and confidence building, to measures under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), housed under a separate, more intergovernmental setup. The Commission's contribution to crisis response is channelled via the Union's external aid instruments, be this in response to natural disasters or political crisis in third countries, the latter often in combination with Joint Actions in the framework of CFSP.

The European Voluntary Corps would represent an important complementary component to the existing community instruments – the Stability Instrument, humanitarian aid and civil protection (Monitoring and Information Centre) – as well as the regionally targeted financial instruments of the Union's external action if rededicated in urgency procedures in response to crises.

Of course, this initiative remains distinct from the Lisbon Treaty's mutual defence and solidarity clauses, despite their common preoccupation with crisis response (Article 42 (7) TEU and Article 222 TFEU respectively). The mutual defence clause guarantees each member state in case of an armed aggression on its territory the other member states' "aid and assistance by all the means in their power". The solidarity clause lays down that the Union should in case of a terrorist attack or a natural disaster in one member state mobilise "all the instruments at its disposal, including military resources" (cf. *SWP Comments* 9/2010). Whereas these clauses have a clear internal and military dimension, the European Volunteer Corps is a civilian initiative for external use.

It is not simply that there is a legal obligation to ensure the coherence of the Union's external measures (Article 21 TEU). European citizens and indeed the rest of the world expect the Union to enhance its crisis response capacities. The willingness to do so could be demonstrated with a European Volunteer Corps.

## **Implementation Questions**

It is not just these issues of coherence and coordination that must be respected in the formulation of the Corps's mandate, legal status, budget and management structure.

*Mandate:* The Commission aims to limit the Corps's tasks to humanitarian aid and civil protection. Non-governmental organisations such as VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) point out, however, that inexperienced volunteers are unqualified for humanitarian aid activities in crisis areas. Whereas the US Peace Corps Volunteers are, for example, deployed in long-term development projects in "secure" countries, returned volunteers also work in humanitarian assistance projects. If the Corps's mandate is to include humanitarian aid, then training and safety issues will take on particular importance. According to VOICE, the relevant areas of intervention, time plans and safety standards should thus be carefully set out and the conditions for the volunteers' training, support and employment status fixed. With the European Year of Volunteering about to begin, there is cross-committee support in the European Parliament for the establishment of the Corps. However, according to the Parliament, volunteers should not be used to replace activities usually performed by professionals but should rather offer complementary aid measures.

*Legal Status:* Until the Lisbon Treaty came into force, the Union's humanitarian aid was based on Council Regulation 1257/96 and was thus part of development policy. The new legal basis for humanitarian aid is laid down in a separate chapter under Title III on Cooperation with Third Coun-

tries (Article 214 TFEU). Humanitarian aid should comply with the principles and objectives of the Union's external action (Article 21 TEU) but is to be separated from the "humanitarian and rescue tasks" of CSDP (Article 43 TEU). Humanitarian Aid also remains a competence shared between the EU and its member states (Article 4 (4) TFEU) with the aim of "enhanc[ing] the efficiency and complementarity of Union and national humanitarian aid measures" (Article 214 (6) TFEU).

*Budget:* Commissioner Georgieva announced in the European Parliament (EP) that she would not use money from the EU's humanitarian aid budget for the establishment of the Corps: the resources of the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) are not sufficient for the volunteers' recruitment, training, support and evaluation. Given their domestic budgetary situations, however, it also seems unlikely that the member states will allocate additional money. It therefore seems inevitable that the Corps will be financed through a separate strand of the EU budget. The EP's development committee apparently came to the same conclusion and requested for the establishment of the Volunteer Corps an appropriate allocation of money from the 2011 budget. A Commission report gives an estimation of at least 170 million Euro.

### **Principles of Humanitarian Aid**

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have demanded that the establishment of a European Volunteer Corps should be in line with international principles of humanitarian aid and should avoid overlapping with military missions. In humanitarian aid activities, the EU Institutions are legally obliged to comply with the principles of international law and with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination (Article 214 (2) TFEU). This obligation was affirmed before-

hand by all member states in the joint declaration "European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid" of January 2008. However, there are difficulties involved in separating humanitarian aid from "humanitarian and rescue tasks" in the framework of CSDP (Article 43 TEU). In order to meet stricken individuals' essential needs in emergency situations, the humanitarian and rescue tasks of CSDP envisage the deployment of the military. Organisations operating in the field such as *Medico International* criticise the combination of military and humanitarian aid measures since a combination of humanitarian aid and CSDP would increasingly blur the lines between civilian and military measures. Aid workers in crisis areas would thereby be endangered and duplication hardly avoided.

### **No alternative**

Despite these daunting challenges, there is really no alternative to the establishment of a European Volunteer Corps. In the context of limited domestic budgets and the need for more efforts in crisis response the Corps would prove useful for both budgetary and normative reasons.

*Concentration of resources:* The financial crisis has only strengthened the trend to cut national official development aid. The establishment of a European Volunteer Corps is a way to comply with international obligations since it contributes to the responsibility of economically stronger countries for weaker countries. The concentration of volunteer work could be more prominently adapted to the field-based demand for human resources in emergency situations. Lessons learned from national and international volunteer programmes could be better used and synergies in both manpower and budget exploited.

*Professional networking:* International Organisations hope that the Corps will provide them with a human resources pool for international programmes such as *United Nations Volunteers* (UNVs) and *Junior*

*Professional Officers (JPOs)*. Volunteers from DG ECHO's partner organisations could furthermore be included in EU projects. Graduates from the *Network on Humanitarian Assistance (NOHA)* master program on international humanitarian action would get further training options in the field.

*Countering the global erosion of solidarity:*

In September 2000 all UN members agreed on the eight Millennium Development Goals in pursuit of global sustainable development. The 27 EU member states are thus obliged to reduce international poverty, to promote human and equal rights, and to contribute to peace, democracy and ecological cooperation. A European Volunteer Corps could sharpen young Europeans' awareness of living conditions beyond the OECD world. The establishment of a Corps with a broad mandate modelled after the US Peace Corps would also raise the public's awareness of the necessity of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

### **The US Peace Corps as a model**

Founded by John F. Kennedy at the beginning of March 1961 the US Peace Corps was established as a politically independent agency in the US Foreign Ministry. Since then more than 200,000 volunteers have worked in 139 countries. At the end of September 2009 approximately 7,600 Volunteers (60 per cent women, 40 per cent men) were active in 76 countries; their average age is 28 years.

As regards the realisation of the European Volunteer Corps, a glance at the US Peace Corps offers a variety of ideas:

1) Like the US Peace Corps, the European Volunteer Corps should have a clear mandate and, in case humanitarian aid is part of the Corps's mandate, operational areas going beyond this area. In the case of the US Peace Corps these extra operational areas include HIV/AIDS awareness and environmental protection. The European Volunteer Corps should thereby enlarge the EU's crisis management capabilities and thus be involved in the whole cycle of crisis

management. The Corps's operational areas would be clearly separated from the military humanitarian and rescue tasks in the framework of CSDP. A clear line must also be drawn to operations foreseen by the Lisbon Treaty's solidarity clause. All the same, also humanitarian organisations such as VENRO say that the discussion about civil-military cooperation in conflict response must continue. In the area of civil protection the subsidiarity principle is to be respected.

2) The EU member states should comply with their obligations and rapidly implement the Lisbon Treaty provisions. After the Council Decision of April 2010 establishing the European External Action Service (EEAS) it is still to be decided if the European Volunteer Corps should be located in the EEAS or the Commission. The Corps's human resources and budget need to be clarified. Like the US Peace Corps the European Volunteer Corps could be established as an independent agency with an own budget line.

3) The US Peace Corps also offers interesting figures for the budgetary calculations. During their 27 months abroad, its volunteers receive a locally oriented salary as well as an allowance for reintegration after their return to the US. In 2009, the US spent 340 million USD on the US Peace Corps. Compared to other countries, the US spends the most on global humanitarian aid in absolute terms (2.9 billion USD) followed by the EU with 1.6 billion USD. In relative terms, the US contributed 34.5 per cent of global humanitarian aid in 2007, the EU and its member states 50.9 per cent. The effectiveness of humanitarian aid should be increased by the coordination of national aid programmes at European level. Despite national budget constraints – Germany recently cut its humanitarian aid from 102.4 million Euros (2009) to 95 million Euros (2010) – the European Volunteer Corps would enable the member states to fulfil their international and European obligations.

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