

NGOs

and EU humanitarian aid policy: continuity or change?

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The context of global emergency actions consists of different types of actors, institutions, agencies, procedures, norms, decisions and practices. This condition makes the study of global relief and reconstruction policies also important to understand the current change in global politics.

The interaction between state governments, international organisations and non-state actors is more balanced in the formation of these than of any other policies and is based on declared goals and principles.¹

Among the non-state actors, NGOs are a relevant player in emergency policy-making and implementation, they are able to deploy a wide range of materials and logistics and to make use of apposite capabilities while acting in peace building and reconstruction missions. NGOs have their own approach to reconstruction and services provided to people affected by natural disasters and conflicts. In principle, this approach is complementary with the states' and International Governmental organisations' (IGOs) approach. Practice can however considerably differ from it. Consequently, NGOs' actions often clash with the programmes states and IGOs develop on the site of humanitarian interventions.

In case of the EU humanitarian aid policies, the relations with institutions and the NGOs influence have been strongly developed over the years through aid programmes and within the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) activities. At the same time they have developed and strengthened direct relations with member states, that, in other policy areas like civil protection services, have nonetheless produced some interesting results and contributed to shaping the EU humanitarian aid policy.

Based on the assumption that in the current phase of world politics the global institutions are undergoing a process of change and the promotion of good relations in humanitarian policies needs to be strengthened, this paper aims at analysing trends and changes in the EU humanitarian aid policy – in terms of dependency or development promotion – by focusing in particular on NGOs' performances.

The article aims at replying to the following research questions: How is the EU humanitarian aid policy changing and what are the current trends? Are NGOs playing a role in shaping the relations with developing countries? Does the EU policy fit into the global changing process affecting humanitarian aid?

¹ Attinà 2013.

The article is divided into three main parts. The first part discusses the literature on humanitarian action and raises the question of how and to what extent do humanitarian NGOs play certain roles relevant to international interventions. The second part analyses the relations NGOs have developed with EU institutions in the framework of the EU humanitarian aid policy. The third part offers a preliminary analysis of NGOs funding in order to see whether there are new and old trends in the geographic regions which are at the core of aid policy. Data has been taken from EDRIS (European Disaster Response Information System), which contains real-time information on contributions to humanitarian aid by the European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and the EU Member State. Data is used for making analytical reflections on the policy itself.

THE ROLE OF NGOs WITHIN THE "HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM"

The International Relations literature has comprehensively debated on the ways through which the world governmental system has tried to provide security by solving conflicts and assisting people in need. The set of tools and mechanisms which have been developed is quite far from ideal. It is rather pervaded by the main contrast between the responsibility to deal with human suffering and the need to safeguard state interests and priorities. The end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War saw an enormous proliferation of actors in the humanitarian movement. After the end of the Cold War the persistence of a big 'community' in which thousands of individuals work around the world for a wide variety of organisations required also some definitional efforts.² The more diffuse definitions stress, on the one hand, the 'environment,' that is to say, the framework of competences and rules which govern relief activities. In this case scholars use the concept of a humanitarian space, as "an environment where humanitarians can work

² Irrera 2013.

without hindrance and follow the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity."³ It is also a conducive operating environment, in which a clear distinction between civilian and military actors should be maintained in terms of competencies. On the other hand, definitions focus on the nature of involved actors and the amount of interactions among them. Here, scholars prefer the term 'network,' particularly a 'network of actors' namely an "amalgam of non-binding contacts, sustained by various channels of communication and by awareness of who is around."⁴ Additionally some practitioners started to discuss the 'humanitarian enterprise' for describing a multi-layered machine in which different actors encounter the approach to face current challenges and some of them strive to maintain fidelity to their ideals.⁵ The debate is contentious and the peculiarity of this topic contributes to further divide the scholars. Even though there is no universal consensus, the constant interactions between academics and practitioners are conveying interest in the term 'humanitarian system.'

Given the fact that the environment is more than its technical set of competencies and it is shaped by its actors, and that the level of relationship between NGOs and IGOs cannot be easily summarised only through the network structure, 'humanitarian system' is considered a more effective and comprehensive label. In this article, the term is used to indicate the set of principles, actors, policies, practices, rules and procedures which are shaping interventions as a result of recent global trends.⁶ This term does not avoid criticisms, but it helps in operationalising them. It is appropriate, for instance, to affirm that it refers to a system as a 'set of parts coordinated to accomplish a set of goals.'⁷ This instantaneously reminds one of the challenges in the coordination between different humanitarian actors and the unclarity of goals due to the diversity of priorities. Nevertheless testing the system through its components (prin-

³ Spearin 2001: 22.

⁴ Kent 1987: 69.

⁵ Minear 2002; Donini 2002.

⁶ Irrera 2013.

⁷ Kent 1987: 68.

ciples, actors, policies) may highlight the fact that, despite all, consensus is prevalent over fragmentation.⁸

The principles of the ‘classical humanitarianism’ are based on Henry Dunant, who in his book *Memory of Solferino* described the violence and suffering inflicted on soldiers and civilians. After his experience he decided to promote the provision of aid through neutral civilian agencies. This approach was developed through the Red Cross Movement and humanitarian law and was officially declared in the UN General assembly Resolution 46/182, which contributed to starting a harmonisation process in the ways various actors manage crises. According to this Resolution humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity (to be addressed to the most vulnerable, wherever they are), neutrality (without engaging in hostilities or taking sides) and impartiality (without discrimination). The IR literature has discussed the ways such principles have been applied and interpreted. The majority of international humanitarian organisations espouse them as fundamental principles that underpin their activities. However, the need for humanitarian action to be as independent from political processes as possible posits an implicit dichotomy between politics and humanitarianism. Realists do not deny the intergovernmental nature of collective intervention, but they emphasize the fact that it reflects national interests and the settlement of security goals. Constructivists and neo-institutionalists, on the contrary, discuss the rationale of cooperation, stressing the role of norms and practices and the processes through which new norms are implemented.⁹ Actors’ reactions to world events continued to affirm and consolidate principles, making them universally accepted. However, the constant recourse to interventions exhibited some of the most glaring problems and failures, in addition to the realization that principles can contradict each other in practice. Therefore, the humanitarian system started to be characterised – especially since the end of the Cold War – by a process of re-definition which, although faithful to its principles, tries to manage the

⁸ Irrera 2013.

⁹ Crawford 2002; Finnemore 2003.

most salient political aspects, namely power relations, the questions of response effectiveness, and the ethical, legal, and moral consequences and challenges of humanitarian crisis response. This ongoing process may produce new norms (the Responsibility to Protect is probably the most famous and striking example) and is strictly linked to actors’ interactions and, as a consequence, to practical interventions.¹⁰

The first definitions of humanitarian interventions have been shaped by state-centric realist doctrine. According to this doctrine, states are the most important actors since intervention is the threat of use of force across state borders by a state (or a group of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of individuals’ fundamental rights without asking for the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied.¹¹ Other approaches introduced additional actors and engage new debates on the roles different kinds of organisations can play within the ‘humanitarian system.’ The relevance of IGO is at the core of significant literature on the UN as the formal peace provider, as officially stated in the Charter, but the interest towards regional organisations and their ability to promote stabilisation is increasing.¹² The Dunant’s call “to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers” is at the basis of the ‘special identity’ of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which is not an IGOs nor a non-state actor, but derives its legitimacy from international law. Even humanitarian NGOs have shown to be able to occupy a specific place within the system thanks to their own organisational capacities.

The humanitarian system recognizes at least six international categories of actors which can be listed as follows:

- UN agencies, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World

¹⁰ ICISS 2001.

¹¹ Holzgrefe 2003: 18.

¹² Attinà 2012.

Food Program (WFP), OCHA (Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

- Regional organisations, like the EU, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union, etc.
- Governments of states other than those affected by crisis.
- International Red Cross actors, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.
- International NGOs.
- Local NGOs and civil society organisations in affected countries, working in cooperation with the UN or international NGOs.

This part of the article focuses on international NGOs. Since they are mainly and traditionally involved in relief assistance and in human rights' and minorities' protection, they have also developed and professionalised their tasks, enlarging their areas of expertise and the impact of their action.

According to mainstream literature, NGOs participate in humanitarian intervention as moderate actors and specialised groups of experts, they believe that the system must be reformed from the roots and accuse capitalism and globalization for fomenting civil conflicts.¹³

However, there are also various nuances through which NGOs interact with the humanitarian system. Operational and campaigning NGOs exercise actions through different methods. Operational NGOs work directly on the site of the crises by mobilizing human, financial and material resources; carrying out projects and programs and offering expertise and advice. Campaigning NGOs participate indirectly by seeking wider public support for direct operations and also by fundraising on a smaller scale.¹⁴ A better typology of NGOs, however, is needed to aptly analyse the NGOs' approach to conflict management and humanitarian intervention. To this end,

¹³ Rucht 2006.

¹⁴ Willetts 2001.

a typology has been created by merging two NGO attributes.¹⁵ These are:

- The NGO's identity and principles of action.
- The NGO's concept of conflict management and humanitarian intervention.

According to Stoddard,¹⁶ three types of NGOs can be distinguished by identity attributes. The Wilsonian organisation, so named after the American President Woodrow Wilson's ideas, accepts the principles of cooperation and multilateralism as practised by governments and international institutions. The Dunantist Organisation, so named after the social activist Henry Dunant, adheres to the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. The faith-based organisation acts in harmony with religious principles.

By distinguishing NGOs along with their approach towards crisis management, including willingness to work with local partners and/or international institutions, the following typology is created and applied here below to the analysis of NGOs roles in peace and humanitarian operations:

- The pragmatist Wilsonian NGOs: these organisations are familiar with multilateral approach as applied through highly-politicized missions.
- The principle-centred Dunantist NGOs: these organisations participate on condition that conflict management will respect the basic principles of humanitarianism.
- The solidarist NGOs: these organisations are more focused on the root causes of conflict.
- The faith-based NGOs: these organisations participate responding to charity and compassion values.

These NGOs' attributes translate into a richness of roles which mark the whole humanitarian process before, during and after the crisis. Thus preventive action and mediation, tradi-

¹⁵ Irrera 2011.

¹⁶ Stoddard 2003.

tional relief and assistance and the increasing long-term peace builder capacity serve drive to several specific roles. The NGOs may develop and divulge skills and expertise; deal with the innovations of crises management, the increasing of complex emergencies and the strengthening of civilian dimension of intergovernmental intervention and finally they may perform on the field, showing a good ability to obtain the confidence of the local population.

Within the humanitarian system the roles played by NGOs have, therefore, increased in number and developed in parallel with other relevant actors. Their performances should be analysed in the broader framework of relations with international and regional organisations and states. The EU example is particularly interesting and constitutes the subject of the next part.

NGOs AND EU HUMANITARIAN AID POLICIES

Within the humanitarian system, the EU has developed its peculiar role (based on a dominantly civilian approach to conflicts) as well as a set of structured policies towards natural emergency and crises response.

In the field of security and humanitarian intervention the EU considerably increased its support to NGOs, especially during the 1980s and 1990s. It started to provide foreign assistance through funding NGOs in the mid-1970s. The EU co-financing program and the humanitarian aid program played a pivotal role in its development. The funds for these two programs largely grew in the late 1980s and 1990s. The work done by ECHO and most of the refugee work done by other Directorate-Generals was essentially implemented by NGOs.¹⁷ As Manners claims, the EU conflict prevention policy had been radically changed during 1995 as a result of the constant dialogue between the Commission and NGOs with respect to some crucial areas, namely Africa for development policy, south-eastern

Europe and post-conflict rebuilding in Bosnia after Dayton Accords.¹⁸ The dialogue between the Commission and the NGOs, in particular, contributed to the development of some of the conflict prevention norms and schemes that explicitly strengthened the relationships between the structural causes of instability and violence and the need to link aid and foreign policy.

The relationship between NGOs and the EU Commission has been significantly shaped and strengthened through the aid policy and humanitarian assistance in developing countries, especially on the African continent. By participating in official programmes, European NGOs have promoted many initiatives in humanitarian aid, especially in Africa.¹⁹ These efforts achieved concrete results by creating, in 1976, the Liaison Committee (Comité de Liaison), the representative body of all European NGOs engaged in cooperation actions in collaboration with the Community institutions. The pressure exerted by NGOs working on cooperation has swayed the EU towards strengthening humanitarian aid, pushing to develop specific policies and programs, and creating an important standard of consultation.

Funding NGOs' initiatives and projects directly to promote and implement policy in communities in need has, therefore, become the privileged method for transferring competences from the top and bringing knowledge to non-state actors. ECHO was established in 1992 to handle the EU's evolution of relief operations (Council Regulation No. 1257/96). In 2004 it was upgraded to a Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid with the annual budget of over 500 million Euros and fortified with the inclusion of specific responsibilities in the field of civil protection services in 2010.²⁰ ECHO should first of all monitor the application and compliance with the universally accepted humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence in the deployment of any EU intervention. Secondly, it has to manage a wide range of practical tasks, such

¹⁸ Manners 2004.

¹⁹ Ryelandt 1995.

²⁰ EU Commission 2003.

¹⁷ Reinmann 2006.

as the mobilisation of resources on the scale required to deliver emergency relief supplies and to provision rescue teams, setting up emergency measures and the installation of temporary communication systems. The delivery of emergency supplies – including tents, food, medical equipment, water purification systems – requires not only the selection of partners able to rapidly provide logistics and skill, but also huge coordination efforts to bring very different actors together. Thus, ECHO relies on several humanitarian partners including NGOs, the ICRC and UN agencies, like UNHCR and WFP.²¹

Since its creation in 1992 ECHO has always worked on the basis of the Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA) as the instrument which sets the principles of partnership between ECHO and humanitarian organisations, defines the respective roles, rights and obligations of partners and contains the legal provisions applicable to humanitarian operations. Agreements are concluded both with humanitarian NGOs and with international organisations having a humanitarian mission, including UN agencies to which the FAFA (EC/UN Financial Administrative Framework Agreement) is applied. The first ECHO FPA was adopted in 1993, the second in 1998, the third in 2003. Under the current FPA (2008) 203 partners are associated and actively involved.

As Fig. 1 demonstrates, about half of the EU's relief aid has been channelled through ECHO to NGOs, together with UN agencies and other organisations, like the ICRC and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

If obtaining EU funds is important for the NGOs' work in the field, so the roles that civil society can exert are strongly requested and often claimed to be crucial as well. Roles played by NGOs can often serve as a bridge between the EU interventions and the local communities, especially in countries with low levels of trust in national authorities. Cooperation with civil society can provide an important mechanism for increasing public trust and even legitimating any EU external interven-

tions and, as a consequence, for enhancing their effectiveness. Thus, in the recent years, NGOs have gradually but intensely conquered a privileged place on the ECHO agenda.

Figure 1: ECHO Funding Recipients²²

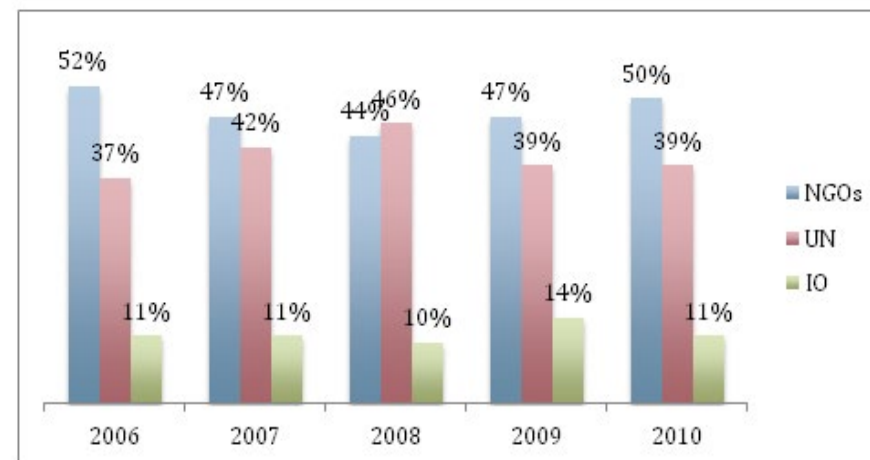
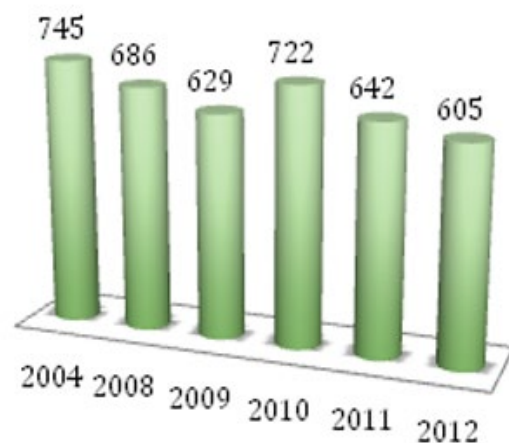


Figure 2 presents data on the number of accepted applications made by NGOs and it appears that, despite the effects of the financial crisis and an increasing involvement of UN agencies, they had been more or less constantly growing. According to scholars, the support to NGOs and NGO programmes on crucial aspects such as community policing, mediation, and peacebuilding constitutes the real strength of ECHO activities.²³ Where concerted action in monitoring or capacity-building was required, NGOs may be constructive during the comprehensive planning processes to ensure the complementary application of EC funding instruments.

²¹ Irrera 2013.

²² Source: Echo, 2012

²³ Gourlay 2006.

Figure 2: Number of NGOs projects supported by ECHO under FPA²⁴

ECHO constitutes one of the most useful instruments within the EU humanitarian aid policy to the NGOs' purpose. The new mechanism created in 2004 was also the channel through which the long and established experience already collected by NGOs in developing countries was conveyed.

Therefore, in order to measure trends and perspectives in the NGOs actions within the EU humanitarian aid policy, this analysis makes use of more recent data contained in EDRIS dataset and differentiated by region.

EDRIS (European Disaster Response Information System) contains real-time information on contributions to humanitarian aid by the European Commission' Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and the EU Member State. Its core objective is to capture all humanitarian aid contributions, according to the definitions provided by the Council Regulation (EC) No. 1257/96. Humanitarian aid is here intended as a comprehensive concept which:

“shall comprise assistance, relief and protection, operations on a non-discriminatory basis to help people in third countries, particularly the most vulnerable among them, and as a priority those in developing countries, victims of natural disasters, man-made crises, such as wars and outbreaks of fighting, or exceptional situations or circumstances comparable to natural or man-made disasters.”²⁵

Thus EDRIS offers all information related to aid provided by EU member states and ECHO to a wide range of crisis and countries, confirming and deepening traditional practices, but also, opening to new trends in humanitarian aid.

In this paper, analysis is made on aggregate data, i.e. at the level of international regions and focus on the number of projects funded by ECHO and EU member states and implemented in the field by NGOs. It aims at understanding firstly whether there is a difference between the support provided by ECHO and the one given by states; secondly, which member states are more active in humanitarian aid and acting through NGOs; thirdly, whether the recipient regions confirm traditional trends in EU policy or rather raise a change.

ECHO, NGOs AND MEMBER STATES: COMPETITION OR CONVERGENCE?

As already seen, ECHO constitutes one of the preferred channels for NGOs to access EU funds and develop their projects on site. At the same time, the activities NGOs have developed over the decades fit into the overall policy framework shaped by EU institutions and member states. As stated by Article 214 of the TFEU,²⁶ the EU's actions in the field of hu-

²⁴ Source: ECHO, 2012

²⁵ EU Council 1992: 2.

²⁶ Part Five Title III Cooperation with Third Countries and Humanitarian Aid, Chapter 3 Humanitarian Aid; Treaty of Lisbon.

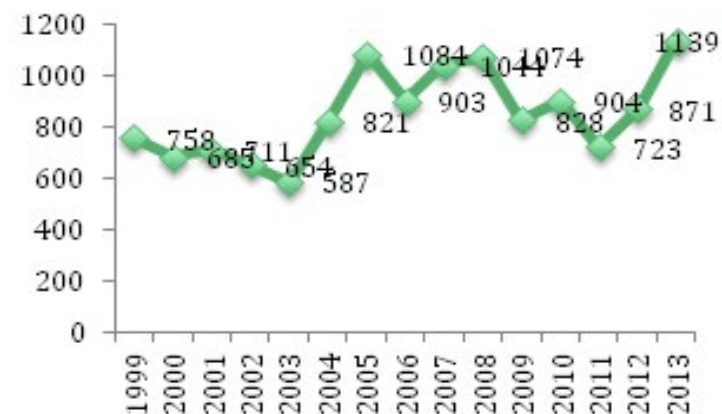
humanitarian aid aim at matching the humanitarian needs of people in third countries who are victims of natural or man-made disasters. Such interventions should be complemented and reinforced with those of the Member States, and within the framework of the humanitarian principles, international law and the common EU objectives. Thus, humanitarian policy has been built through common efforts and attempts to identify shared ideas and practices. Some emergencies, in particular, have a long tradition of common policy-making and a rich set of programmes and resources, which add to the national ones.²⁷ Member states have extensively exploited the expertise of NGOs – either national or international ones – to implement projects and execute humanitarian policies.

By using data from EDRIS, it is possible to name the number of projects supported by member states and implemented on site by NGOs in the period 1999-2013. They are compared to the ones directly supported by ECHO, but limited to the period starting since 2005 (after the new mechanisms came into effect).

Since the majority of internal civil conflicts is characterized by civilian population being increasingly exposed to violence and suffering, the need to employ NGOs' help and expertise stems from the fact that, most of the times, they can deliver aid even in situations in which access to beneficiaries is difficult due to logistical or security constraints. The increasing use of military actors – on the part of the EU – for providing relief assistance increases the need for more civil-military coordination. These factors may explain the reasons why member states support projects which are implemented on site by NGOs.

Direct funding from ECHO constitutes, as already seen, the improvement of an already established tradition of cooperation between the EU and NGOs within the framework of humanitarian policy. According to Fig. 3 the support by member states follows constant and stable trends. A general up and-

Figure 3: No. of NGOs projects supported by MS²⁸



down trend can be observed, which makes 2005 a crucial year for the establishment of new mechanisms. Even before that year, in the period 1999-2004, support is moderately constant, even though it appears more limited in quantitative terms.

Compared to ECHO, in quantitative terms, member states are significantly more generous and persistent (Fig. 4). At the same time, the up and down lines are not very different and reflect similar trends. The financial crisis and its various impacts on states have surely had implications to state performances, but it has not limited the constant adherence to humanitarian aid policy, nor the support for the ECHO mechanism. The consolidated relationship with NGOs and the preference for their employ as executive players constitute additional factors of convergence.

Data on direct support for the NGOs also add some additional features to the nature of member states as donors, to their level of commitment and availability to work through NGOs. Figure 5 presents data on the number of projects directly supported by states and implemented through NGOs in the period 1999-2013. A group of major donors can be observed,

²⁷ Attinà 2013.

²⁸ EDRIS 2014.

which includes the first eleven countries of the chart, supporting a similar amount of projects (within a decreasing range of 2,000-150). Germany is undoubtedly the most supportive, followed by a group of Northern countries (Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Netherlands) which support a similar range of projects (1,000-700). The UK, France and Luxembourg share very similar figures (ca. 400) and lastly, Belgium, Finland and Spain. A large gap presents itself between the most supportive states and these placed at the end of the chart.

Fig. 4 No. of NGOs projects supported by MS and ECHO (2005-2013)²⁹

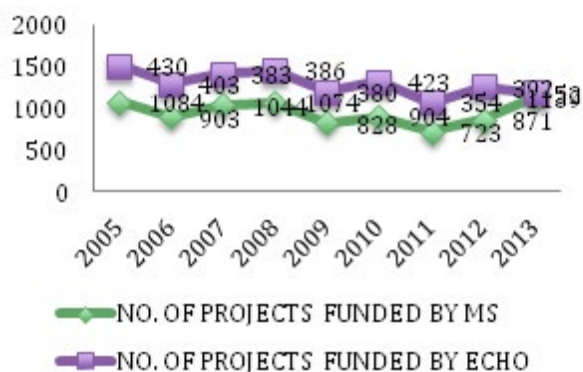
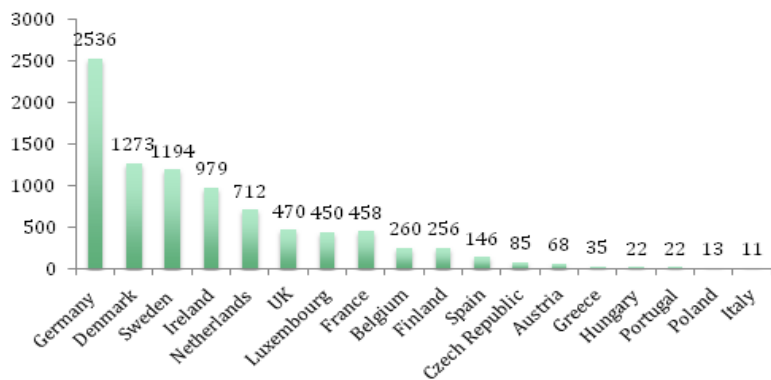


Fig. 5 No. of EU member states funded projects implemented through NGOs (1999-2013)³⁰



29 EDRIS 2014.
30 EDRIS 2014.

The group of major donors includes very different countries in terms of economic conditions, size and tradition of cooperation with NGOs. In terms of economic conditions, the major contributors are included (with the only exception of Italy) but the smallest states (Ireland, Netherlands, Luxembourg) show an increasing propensity to support projects, and as a consequence, a more consolidated partnership with NGOs. While Germany and the Nordic countries have a longer tradition of cooperation with civil society organisations (through national partnerships or in sustaining EU mechanisms), the rising involvement of Luxembourg constitutes an innovation.

Thus, economic conditions and traditional trends are relevant factors which mark the propensity of states to support NGOs in the EU aid policy. However, political preferences can still play a role in shaping the identity of donors.

Scholars have stressed the fact that European aid policy has been moulded by post-colonial legacies. Thus, member states are pushed to provide help to those countries with which they maintain some sort of relationship. This has produced several implications. On one hand, only countries to which member states had colonial ties were included in the EU framework; on the other, aid policy tended to be defined by economic issues such as reducing barriers to trade and distributing aid packages.³¹ Lastly, others coined the term “Pyramid of Privilege” as a method of prioritising who gets most from Europe, placing the African Caribbean and Pacific countries at the top, Mediterranean states below, and the rest of the developing world at the bottom.³²

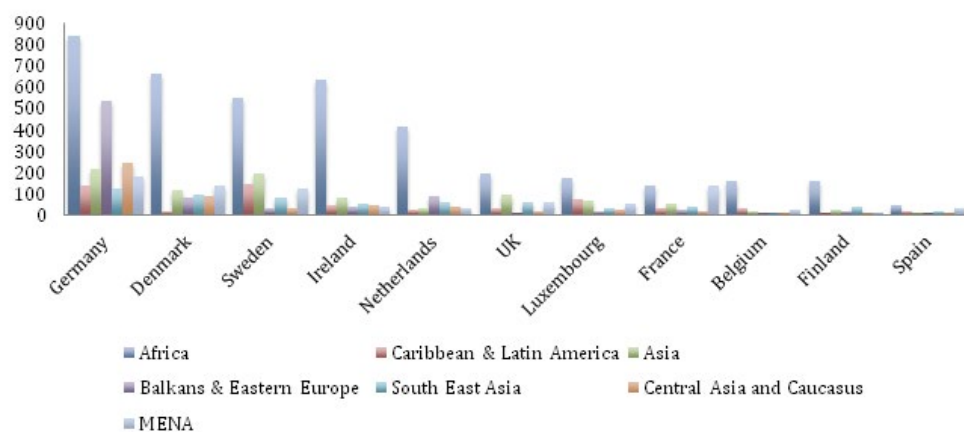
This may contrast with the motivation of NGOs’ action, which is firstly based on humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and humanity. Data from EDRIS confirms some forms of special relationships with former colonies but also demonstrates certain new trends (Tab. 1 - Fig. 6).

31 Chikeka 1993; Farrell 2005; Nugent 2006.
32 Mayall 2005.

Table 1 - No. of projects supported by major donors to projects implemented through NGOs per regions (1999-2013)³³

	Africa	Caribbean & Latin America	Asia	Balkans & Eastern Europe	South East Asia	Central Asia and Caucasus	MENA	Total
Germany	841	134	216	538	125	246	177	2277
Denmark	660	13	117	78	93	83	133	1177
Sweden	549	145	192	27	82	30	122	1147
Ireland	636	45	78	38	51	46	38	932
Netherlands	414	21	32	89	56	34	31	677
UK	196	26	91	3	57	18	61	452
Luxembourg	173	75	65	12	30	21	51	427
France	137	31	48	19	35	16	139	425
Belgium	160	29	13	11	5	6	25	249
Finland	154	3	22	15	37	8	9	248
Spain	42	18	4	5	16	4	31	120

Fig. 6 - No. of projects supported by major donors to projects implemented through NGOs per regions (1999-2013)³⁴

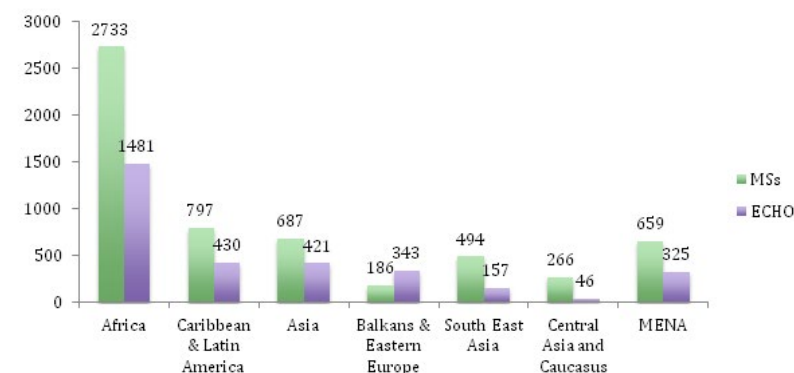


33 EDRIS 2014.
34 EDRIS 2014.

The data summarised in Tab. 1 and then presented in the Fig. 6 affirm that the African states are still the most affected by conflicts. The European neighbours remain important to long-term peace-building initiatives, either in the Balkans, Central Asia or the Caucasus. Asia – as a whole – emerges as one of the areas in which international intervention should be, in the near future, more concentrated. It was already at the core of humanitarian action because of the enduring turbulence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel and Palestine. More recently, South-Eastern countries started to receive a consistent amount of aid, due to the presence of both political conflicts and disasters like tsunami and floods. MENA³⁵ countries commenced to receive more support especially after the Arab Spring in 2011 and they are currently the less sustained. It is worth to mention the fact that almost all regions are provided with aid even through other policies and programmes, like the European Neighbourhood Policy.

If compared to data concerning the number of NGOs' projects directly funded by ECHO these observations appear more coherent.

Fig. 7 - Number of ECHO and MSs funded projects implemented by NGOs per region (2005-2013)



35 Middle Eastern & North African (Editor's note – JVDB).

According to Figure 7, major donors and ECHO tend to be active in all regions in a parallel way, except the Balkans in which there are more NGOs involved on the implementation of projects of field, on their own, than sustained by states.

Africa is the continent in which the majority of funds are allocated but no region is truly underestimated. In sum, convergence can be registered even for the selection of recipient countries. Many things have changed since the first aid programmes have been uniquely shaped by Member States according to their political preferences and colonial past. The issue of who should be responsible for interacting with former colonies – the EU itself, or the Member States to which those colonies once owed their allegiance – is no more at the top of the agenda.

The changes in the humanitarian crises and emergencies, the need to develop a more coherent and common aid policy, the necessity to fulfil the commitment to multilateral rules and procedures, are gradually transforming the whole system.

On one hand, budgetary powers and mechanisms are both managed by member states (and mainly by major donors), but in a more concerted way, involving the EU itself and non-state actors. On the other hand, funds allocation has gained a worldwide dimension, which maintains and protects special relationships, but opens up to all regions in need.

CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?

The main assumption of this article is that, in the current phase of world politics, global emergencies are imposing on the global institutions a process of change which is demanding and producing rules and policies. A humanitarian set of actors, institutions, rules and practices is undoubtedly appearing and strengthening.

The growing participation of NGOs in conflict management and humanitarian intervention is part of the NGOs'

struggle for effective international actorness in world politics and, at the same time, a significant political innovation. They have developed a wide range of approaches, but they managed to preserve – during the years and until today – their independence and neutrality. At the same time, these approaches are tightly connected to the NGOs individual identity and their specific approach to conflict management and humanitarian intervention and easily fit into the governments and international organisations practice, even though they may, sometimes, differ.

In the specific case of the EU, the relations with NGOs have been strongly developed over the years through the aid programmes and within ECHO activities. Additionally, they have developed and strengthened direct relations with member states, that, in other policy areas, like civil protection services, have nonetheless produced some interesting results and contributed to shape the EU humanitarian aid policy.

Data provided by EDRIS concerning the number of projects directly funded by ECHO and supported through member states in the period 1999-2013 – and on a geographical basis – offer the chance to understand those trends which are currently modelling EU humanitarian policy.

It appears that firstly, no significant difference exists between the amount of support provided by ECHO and the one given by individual states. Secondly, there is a smaller group of major donors which do not always overlap with the list of richest and biggest countries. And thirdly, colonial legacies are no more the most striking aspect of the relationship between donors and recipient.

On the contrary, continuity and change mark a coherent framework, in which current emergencies are at the core of the agenda and in which states, EU institutions and NGOs interact, according to different competences and resources. This happens within a complex humanitarian system which is destined to develop.

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