

The United Nations and the European Union: An Ever Stronger Partnership

18 May 2004

Palais d'Egmont – Egmontpaleis, Brussels

SESSION 4: The UN, the EU and the role of civil society

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Ms. Kathrin Schick

Thank you very much. I would just like to say something more about Voice. Voice is a European network of humanitarian NGOs: Caritas, Oxfam, Save the children, etc. We organize 90 organisations who are working especially on humanitarian aid. Our member organisations are partners with ECO, of the EU, the humanitarian office, and many of them are also partners to the different UN organisations like UNHCR, WFP, Unicef and UNDP. Being the first civil society representative and having followed these interesting debates about the different areas, I think that more and more of them are inter-related with humanitarian aid. I would like to make some points, which I think are important to consider in relation to crisis management and to the EU and the UN, of course from the perspective of human society, because that is the area I am most familiar with. I think that it is quite important for humanitarian aid that the EU has chosen to work both through NGOs, through the UN and through the Red Cross family as partners. In that way, we can complement each other and actually use the strength of our systems in the field, for the sake of the beneficiaries. I think there are of course big differences between how NGOs work and how the UN system works, and it is probably not without reason that the UN is increasingly contracting NGOs for doing their work. In the case of Iraq, humanitarian aid would not be possible if it would not be the NGOs to actually implement it for the UN. I think that is quite important, because NGOs in that way take quite big risks and actually, that takes us back to the notion which was mentioned this morning on the importance of looking at NGOs as partners, more than implementing contractors. That is quite an important concern for us.

On the other hand, we have a lot of common challenges when it comes to humanitarian aid: the issue of security for aid workers, the issue of access to vulnerable populations, the relevance of international humanitarian law, which was also mentioned earlier this morning, and the issue of humanitarian space, forgotten emergencies and protection. Especially the first three ones are at the moment the biggest limitation to our work, both to the UN and the NGOs, and of course the EU, and therefore these three entities have a common challenge to tackle that issue. Recently, Mr. Egeland, who organised a high-level UN meeting on humanitarian issues, invited all the NGOs in order to see how these issues could be addressed, and of course we welcome that very much because dialogue is the start of this partnership process. I would also like to draw your attention to the issue of the integrated approach, which in a way came up with the Brahimi report. I think that the integrated approach seems to be something which has come in the UN to stay. From the civil society and NGO point of view, I think the integrated approach is one of the reasons why we actually have the problem of security and access. The blurring of concepts, due to the combination of military and humanitarian issues and political issues, is something that has not made the situation any easier in the field. Therefore I think it needs a lot more debating, because from the NGO-side,

we consider this to be one of the main reasons why we are actually confronted with these common problems. On the EU-side, we have the same possibilities, we did not get that far but we have the Constitution, the crisis management procedure and because of the way in which humanitarian aid is embedded now in external action and closely linked to the Common Foreign Security Policy, we also risk a politicization of humanitarian aid. As you all know, humanitarian NGOs, the Red Cross family and also the UN follow the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and with a politicized humanitarian aid, this is quite difficult to actually maintain, because with that falls the basis of humanitarian aid.

The European Union, with ECO, the European Parliament and us, have worked very closely together to strengthen the issue of international humanitarian law and its relevance. But I would really like to ask you a question: why did the Geneva Convention turn up in the media in relation to the torture of prisoners? Why did it not turn up last year when there was a question of not being able to get humanitarian access to the population in Iraq, to pick one example? Suddenly, lately I have been seeing it more in the newspapers. And that is something to think about, that maybe the humanitarian community as such has actually failed to in a way bring the respect for humanitarian law up earlier, because we did not have so many problems.

Another issue, the MCDA guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets, are a big step ahead for the UN and civil society. Member states worked the guidelines out together, determining how military and civilian humanitarian actors should collaborate in the field. But it is also clear that they are not binding, we all agree that the military is not a humanitarian actor, could not be doing humanitarian aid unless their capacities are stretched, and anyway, it should be under civilian auspices. Again, we have collaborated quite a bit with the UN on this issue, and with the EU.

So, we are faced with the same challenges and the same positions on quite a bit of issues, but it is also clear that there are issues between the NGO community and the UN, which still need to be developed. One I mentioned already, namely the integrated approach and the impact it has on the issue of humanitarian space. I think that for the issue of IDPs (Internally Displaced People) steps have been taken, but the problems are far from being solved, and since we know there are more IDPs than refugees today, I think it is an issue which needs to be addressed, as well as the coordination in the field. Of course, one says very often that NGOs are difficult to rule, but maybe big bureaucracies are also used to rule, so there is a challenge there for both sides on how collaboration is possible. I think that I will leave it here in order to leave enough space for my colleague. Thank you.