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European Emergency Coordination

Discussion Paper

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Christos Stylianides was the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management as well as EU Ebola Coordinator between 2014 and 2019.

He was elected Member of the European Parliament in the May 2014 European elections where he served until October 31st 2014. He was twice appointed Government Spokesperson of the Republic of Cyprus (in 2013-2014 and in 1998-1999). He was responsible for the management of the Government's communication strategy and was the head of the Government's centralised Press and Information Office.

During the period 2006-2013 he served as a Member of the Cyprus House of Representatives (elected in 2006 and 2011). During his tenure he served as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign and European Affairs (2011-2013) and member of the Committee on European Affairs, the Committee of Internal Affairs and the Committee of Employment and Social Affairs (2006-2011). Between 2006-2011 he was a member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and he was elected Member of its Bureau in 2012.

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The European elections in 2019 sent two messages. Firstly, Europe is stronger than what its opponents thought it would be. Despite major challenges like Brexit and migration, the results of the election demonstrated strong European cohesion. Therefore, Europe was the true winner of the elections. Secondly, citizens demand a more proactive, responsive and accountable Union that provides concrete answers to major challenges, such as adaptation to climate change, sustainable growth, clean energy or social cohesion. Both, the new Commission and the Parliament got the message. They have committed to work more for a greener, more inclusive and more competitive Union. A Union that is there for their citizens and for the rest of the world. A Europe of solidarity and humanity.

Through the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, the European Commission has always had the priority to protect and save lives, inside and beyond its borders. Through humanitarian aid and civil protection, the European Commission has made a significant effort to uphold the European value of solidarity. The daily business of Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management demonstrates the benefit of strong European cohesion, while facilitating the European People's demand for a proactive, responsive and accountable European Commission. Despite new and old challenges within Europe and beyond, the Commission has a strong track-record of delivering relief to where it is most needed. Several examples may underline this argument.

For instance, the Ebola crisis in West Africa was a milestone. It has changed the way we think about health emergencies. And, most importantly, the way we respond to them. As the EU Ebola coordinator, I visited the affected areas

Internet resources, last date of access: November 22, 2019.

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in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in November 2014. It was a painful experience. We mobilised over one point two (1.2) billion euro in humanitarian assistance, developmental aid, and medical research in the affected countries and facilitated regional cooperation on the ground.

The Ebola crisis in West Africa was a test for the international community. It taught us that we cannot be complacent with Ebola. The European Union proved to have learned from this emergency. As a direct response to the challenge of mobilising medical teams immediately, the European Medical Corps was established.¹ When another Ebola outbreak occurred in 2018 in Democratic Republic of Congo's province of Equateur these measures proved successful. This time, we managed to contain the virus within three months. The European Medical Corps strengthened the EU's emergency health capacity as a whole, demonstrating the concrete benefit of strong European cohesion and representing an example of a proactive European Commission. Nevertheless, the fight against Ebola continues. We are currently facing the second largest Ebola outbreak in history in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The circumstances are fundamentally different this time. Because we do not only have to fight against time, but also against chronic instability. The situation therefore requires a very different approach and, of course, time. Ebola was not the only major challenge that was successfully addressed thanks to strong European cohesion. As soon as I took office in 2014, I realised that a critical sector for development, resilience and peace, was not getting the attention it deserved. We therefore united efforts to foster education in emergencies.

Education is not a privilege. It is a fundamental human right of every child, particularly in emergencies. During my many visits on the ground, I saw the passion and the need of children for education and promised to protect children in conflicts. To protect them against violence, radicalization, forced labour, early marriages, forced recruitment and to defend their undeniable right to education.

The European Commission honored this promise. Within the last five years, funding for education in emergencies increased from one to ten per cent. Between 2015 and 2019, we invested more than 450 million Euro on

1 Online at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/content/launch-european-medical-corps_en.

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education in emergencies, reaching over 6.5 million children in 55 countries. Finally, in May 2018, the first ever EU policy on education in emergencies was adopted.² It provides guidelines for our programmes on the ground, our global partnerships and establishes a predictable, flexible and more coordinated funding model. Children's lives and hopes cannot be put on hold. Education must be continuous, accessible, inclusive and of quality. Education is a precondition for peace and an investment in prosperity. Thanks to the proactive approach of European Coordination of Humanitarian Aid, we were able to contribute to the ultimate goal: Every child should be where it truly belongs – in school. Particularly during emergencies.

The benefits of strong European cohesion are not only tangible when facing challenges of violence and conflict as major drivers for suffering and displacement.

Climate change is another major threat. Climate change is the cause of increasingly complex, intense and unpredictable natural disasters. Confronted with this new reality, we have to be ready to respond and to be better prepared to save lives when an emergency could not be avoided. Thereby, we show our citizens and the rest of the world that no one is left alone when disasters strike, be it devastating forest fires, floods or droughts. Strong European Cohesion proved crucial when upgrading the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, by establishing rescEU. I may call it a “safety net” of European solidarity during emergencies. rescEU legislation entered into force last March.³ The decision to establish a transitional aerial forest fighting fleet proved to be critical during summer. Faced with overwhelming forest fires, Greece activated rescEU in August. Italy and Spain responded immediately by sending Canadair aircraft. Cooperation and coordination between the Greek, Italian and Spanish authorities and the European

2 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises, COM(2018) 304 final, 18.5.2018; see also Council Conclusions of 26.11.2018, online at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/20181126_-_council_conclusions_-_eie_final.pdf.

3 Decision (EU) 2019/420 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2019 amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, OJ L 77 I, 20.3.2019, p. 1.

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Emergency Response Coordination Centre in Brussels was a prime example of solidarity among Europeans.

Currently, we are discussing the future of rescEU: A European permanent fleet of firefighting capabilities⁴ and response capacities to large medical emergencies, like Ebola⁵, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear accidents are also on the table. Thereby, we hope to deliver greater and tangible solidarity when it is most needed. This is our response to citizens' demand for more and better Europe.

In my five years as Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, I tried to stay close to people's needs on the ground. I went to refugee camps in Jordan and in Bangladesh. I visited frontline trauma stabilization centres in Mosul. I walked on the Simon Bolívar Bridge together with thousands of Venezuelan refugees. I talked to women who were healing physical and mental wounds of gender-based violence at Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I saw with my own eyes the tremendous suffering and distress of millions of innocent people. However, I also saw the tangible difference that European humanitarian aid makes every day.

Of course, humanitarian challenges will continue to rise, unless viable political solutions to conflicts are within reach. In Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine elsewhere. To overcome these challenges, we need strong European Cohesion to empower a resolute and proactive approach. While various examples from the last years demonstrated the impact of the European Humanitarian Aid, recent policy developments provide the European Commission with necessary tools to meet future challenges. Therefore, I was honoured to represent Europe's face of humanity and solidarity across the world. Europe must have its place in the world. The world deserves a better future.

4 Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/570 of 8 April 2019 laying down rules for the implementation of Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards rescEU capacities and amending Commission Implementing Decision 2014/762/EU, OJ L 99, 10.4.2019, p. 41.

5 Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/1930 of 18 November 2019 amending Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/570 as regards rescEU capacities, OJ L 299, 20.11.2019, p. 55.

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