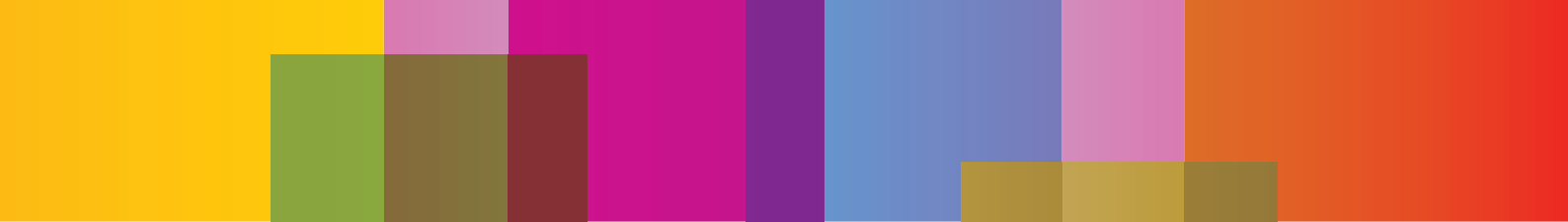


European Parliament - Brussels 8th November 2011

# SOLIDARITY WITH THIRD COUNTRIES: WHAT PERSPECTIVES FOR THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING SECTOR?





Within the framework of the European Year of Volunteering, France Volontaires, CLONG Volontariat and GIZ co-organised a conference and debate on international volunteering for solidarity sector, on 8th November 2011.

How can Europe impulse new dynamics in that field through its support to volunteer-sending and hosting organisations – for instance, by supporting their effort to offer a broad range of volunteering opportunities to people from various social backgrounds, to leverage new human resources, and to democratise the access to international solidarity and to aid professions? How can Europe facilitate mutual exchanges and more balanced partnerships between volunteers from different regions across the world?

This conference witnessed a real mobilisation, meaningful discussions, and encouraging perspectives, although a long path lies ahead toward the accomplishment of their outcomes.

● **A VOLUNTARY,  
● COMMITTED GROUP  
● OF PARTICIPANTS**



*“Volunteering, through the values of solidarity in which it is rooted, is one – if not the – crisis recovery solution.”*

Ms. Karima Delli, Member of the European Parliament

The presence of nearly 200 people, in addition to approximately twenty speakers, all of whom represented over 25 nationalities, has contributed to the success of this event. These included delegates from non-profit organisations from various countries, both EU and non-EU (including members of the volunteering, international solidarity and youth sectors), institutional actors from Member States and the EU (the Commission and the Parliament), and volunteers. After opening addresses by Ms. Karima Delli, Member of the European Parliament (MEP - *The Greens*), by Mr. Jacques Godfrain, President of France Volontaires and former French Minister for Cooperation, and by M. Martjin Pakker, Director of the European Volunteer Centre and facilitator of the conference, the stakes of existing international volunteering programmes in Europe were discussed.

During the afternoon, after a valuable synthesis of the morning's debates by Ms. Suzanne Gentges (GIZ), the main European volunteer-sending schemes were explained (such as the European programme “Youth in Action”, which includes the European Voluntary Service). The last session of the afternoon was dedicated to the feedback and propositions from some MEPs: Ms. Marian Harkin, Ms Michèle Striffler (PPE), M. Marc Tarabella (S&D), Ms. Marie Christin Vergiat (GUE), in the presence of Ms. Karima Delli.



● **CONVERGING VIEWS,  
APPEALS,  
AND QUESTIONS**



*“Volunteering, as a vehicle for solidarity, is a universal value [...] Volunteering is a way of learning from other societies.”*

Ms. Marian Harkin, Member of the European Parliament



*“The question of international volunteering will hopefully give us the opportunity to re-focus public policies on human rights, solidarity and cooperation”*

Ms. Karima Delli, Member of the European Parliament

An effort toward the clarification of the place of international volunteering is highly desirable, given the variety of existing actors, actions, and conceptions of volunteering in Europe. Such diversity makes it difficult to understand every individual vision of what volunteering is, hence Member of European Parliament Ms. Karima Delli's call to clarify the role of volunteering, and the values it defends in international solidarity.

An appeal was launched for a more in-depth analysis, and for an objective evaluation of effects and of impacts of those various forms of volunteering, especially in terms of employment, human resources training, including with regards to the provision of services which bear an economic value. This analysis would be a welcome addition to the advocacy and support activities which promote this form of commitment.



*“European citizenship also stems from international solidarity”*

Ms. Isabelle Durant, Vice President of the European Parliament



*“It is necessary to strengthen structures in the South so that they should be positioned as equals in their exchanges with the North”*

Mr. Augustine Robinson, Sierra Leone

Partners in the South have called for exchanges to be more balanced and based on reciprocity. They have reaffirmed their intention to develop their own volunteering platforms, and to collaborate with European programmes in order to depart from a mere aid relation.

It was strongly recommended that there should be a better articulation between the volunteering sector and international cooperation policies, and that this should aim, especially, at strengthening civil societies. Volunteering should not be isolated from other forms of cooperation, be it through the discovery of international life, mutual help, exchange, of humanitarian relief, or solidarity-based development.



*“We ought to reaffirm that international volunteering is a fully fledged actor of international cooperation. Volunteering is completely relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century: it is a practice of the future!”*

Mr. Oliver Consolo, CONCORD

# A DEBATE OVER THE FUTURE EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN AID CORPS



*"This programme addresses a demand by Europeans who wish to commit themselves to the humanitarian sector."*

M. Markus Held, DG ECHO, European Commission

The discussions reflected a recurring concern regarding humanitarian action and the European voluntary corps: which scope, and which objectives should be attributed to humanitarian aid?

Also of concern was the question of which links and which distinctions should be made between humanitarian aid and developmental cooperation policies. A first review of this programme is expected as early as 2012 in order to clarify its role within European humanitarian policy.

## PRIORITIES FOR ACTION



*"There ought to be outreach activities directed at Member States and at their policies, so that they realise that the volunteering sector is first and foremost a positive opportunity."*

Ms. Isabelle Durant, Vice President  
of the European Parliament

The foundations of a new collective dynamic were laid on 8th November 2011 at the European Parliament. It would be a significant progress if a more proactive European policy committed to supporting this endeavour, including as a tool to overcome the current crises. The message delivered by the Members of the European Parliament and by the Commission delegates was clear. They encouraged the participants to pursue this collective process, concomitantly with the preparation of the European budgets for the period 2014-2020.

The **top priority**, which is highly symbolic, is in conformity with the Communication of the European Commission of September 2011, which recommended that States should *"eliminate the last remaining obstacles, direct or indirect, to volunteering in general and to cross-border volunteering in particular."*



*"Volunteering creates the citizen. It can make the difference in our societies. Volunteering is an educational tool."*

Mr. Claus H. Sorensen, ECHO

How is it possible to capitalise on this recommendation to make it effective, in order to address the need for circulation and exchange between partners from different parts of the world? How can we act alongside our States and the EU?



*"The circulation of volunteers remains a major issue today. It is necessary to act upon this issue: a Europe that is open to the outside is an important political objective at a time when the temptation of closure is very strong."*

Mr. Lucien Cousin, President of CLONG Volontariat

The **second priority** is to carry on the advocacy activities within European institutions, so as to promote European policies that encourage all forms of voluntary commitment. Beyond existing EU volunteering platforms, the task will consist in sustaining the effort toward convergence, synergy and collaboration building between national volunteering devices in EU Member States in concrete areas, such as:

- Quality of volunteering missions
- European citizenship awareness-raising through sensitisation to development and global openness opportunities,
- Legibility and visibility of the EU's international cooperation policy and practices.

**CONTACTS** **CLONG** : Aurélie Beaujolais | [clong@clong-volontariat.org](mailto:clong@clong-volontariat.org)

**GIZ** : Suzanne Gentges | [suzanne.gentges@giz.de](mailto:suzanne.gentges@giz.de)

**France Volontaires** : Agnès Golfier | [agnes.golfier@france-volontaires.org](mailto:agnes.golfier@france-volontaires.org)

Detailed minutes of this meeting will be published in early 2012, in French and in English, and will be available for download from the web page <http://www.france-volontaires.org/Conference-au-Parlement-Europeen.html>