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More Effective Aid, More Prestige

Why Germany should europeanize its humanitarian assistance

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by [Matteo Garavoglia](#)

If Germany would like to play a more active role in international affairs, improving the country's international humanitarian aid efforts should be top on the list. Working toward deeper European integration in this field would boost its own profile.

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In the field of humanitarian assistance, [Germany punches below its weight](#). Be it in absolute terms (\$757 million, for sixth place in 2013), be it as a share of total international humanitarian aid (5.9 percent, behind countries such as Turkey and Sweden), be it in terms of humanitarian aid provided per citizen (\$9, for 15th place), be it as a total share of its total official development assistance (5.4 percent, for 22nd place), or be it as a percentage of its gross national income (0.02 percent), Germany never makes it to the top of humanitarian aid tables. However, as [a recent IP-Forsa poll](#) suggested, a vast majority of those supporting a more active German role in international affairs believes Germany should gear up its humanitarian assistance efforts. How would that work, and how best to go about it?

Greater strategic emphasis on humanitarian aid could compensate for the limited leverage that Germany can muster in military affairs – especially *vis-à-vis* France and the United Kingdom. The Nordic countries have been following this approach for some time quite successfully, albeit on a more limited scale. Within this context, the further europeanization of German humanitarian assistance would make a lot of sense. Indeed, this could shield aid from being

provided solely according to foreign policy considerations, while also enhancing the efficiency of the German humanitarian system itself.

There are various ways to more deeply integrate German humanitarian aid efforts into European structures. To begin with, those with stakes in humanitarian assistance could push for a stronger relationship between German and European policy makers. To do so, the chair of the Bundestag's human rights and humanitarian aid committee could initiate regular meetings with its counterpart in the European Parliament. German MPs from the committee could also informally approach their peers in the EP on an *ad hoc* basis.

As a second step, Germany's humanitarian NGOs could seek the advantages of scale that europeanization would offer. While the Association of German Humanitarian NGOs (VENRO) acts as a service provider to humanitarian NGOs within Germany, individual NGOs do not have the human and financial resources to do something similar in Brussels. Pooling resources into a "European branch" of VENRO could beef up the existing European platform of humanitarian NGOs (VOICE), with stronger input from Germany.

In addition, greater europeanization of the humanitarian *modus operandi* could shield humanitarian NGOs from potentially unwarranted political interference. To do so, Germany's Foreign Office could draw inspiration from the EU's Framework Partnership Agreements and provide regular annual funding to humanitarian NGOs, as opposed to the current crisis-specific funding mechanisms. The establishment of a financing desk for humanitarian NGOs to help these obtain funding from Brussels would also help emancipate humanitarian NGOs from the Foreign Office.

Furthermore, opportunities for horizontal policy transmission on a European scale could be better exploited. Within such an understanding, VENRO could be provided with the necessary resources to establish and sustain a regular policy dialogue with its counterparts in other EU member states. At the same time, the Foreign Office could hire external consultants or set up a permanent position to systematically establish and sustain policy exchanges with the humanitarian task forces of other European foreign ministries.

Last but not least, the europeanization of the intellectual input available to German humanitarian stakeholders could bring long-term benefits. In order to reap these, the establishment of a single German humanitarian institute forging institutionalized links with cutting-edge research centers in other European countries would be an important step. Groupe URD in Paris, PRIO in Oslo, and London's Overseas Development Institute would be natural partners in this endeavor.

Adopting such strategies to amplify its humanitarian aid efforts would tangibly exemplify Germany's willingness to play a more active role on the international stage. Through the initiatives outlined above, German stakeholders would have the opportunity to raise the profile of humanitarian issues both at home and abroad. Above all, the europeanization of humanitarian aid presents new opportunities for Germany well worth exploring.

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