German Humanitarian Aid: More "Europeanisation" As A Way Forward?

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Introduction

This paper investigates how to enhance the amount of attention that humanitarian issues receive within German public discourse while at the same time shielding the German humanitarian system from undue political interference. Such a question is tackled through an analysis of both primary and secondary sources as well as through the carrying out of dozens of semi-structured interviews with humanitarian stakeholders both in Germany and abroad. Thanks to this approach, on the one hand the first half of the paper investigates the challenges arising from the twin problems of unwarranted political interference and low political profile of humanitarian issues within German public discourse. On the other hand, the second part of the paper moves on to explore possible avenues through which the German humanitarian aid system could shield itself from unwarranted political interference while at the same time enhancing the profile of humanitarian issues within German public discourse. In light of the evidence collected, this paper argues that a greater degree of Europeanisation of the German humanitarian aid system could be key to achieving these twin objectives.

Reasons for the low profile of humanitarian issues in German public discourse

The German humanitarian system is currently undergoing a period of rapid transformation. Indeed, the shifting of the overwhelming majority of competences pertaining to humanitarian assistance from the German Development Ministry (BMZ) to the German Foreign Ministry (AA) that took place in 2012 has, if anything, provided a catalyst for rethinking of the way German humanitarian assistance is organised and delivered. Within this context, most of the humanitarian stakeholders surveyed acknowledged to the author that significant changes are in the making and shared their hopes for seizing the opportunity to reinvigorate the German humanitarian system. Having said that, key humanitarian actors constantly highlighted to the author two primary concerns: the need to protect the German humanitarian system from undue political pressure and the necessity to raise the profile of humanitarian issues within the country's public discourse. This section of the paper wishes therefore to present the difficulties experienced by the German humanitarian system in dealing with these twin challenges.

A first reason why various stakeholders claim that German humanitarian assistance enjoys a low profile in national public discourse relates to the fact that political attention within the German Bundestag lays with issues pertaining to human rights and development assistance to the detriment of questions affecting humanitarian affairs. Upgraded from subcommittee to full committee in the 14th legislative period (1998 – 2002) and currently chaired by Tom Koenigs (Alliance 90 / The Greens) and his deputy Michael Brand (CDU/CSU), the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee of the German Bundestag is made up of 18 permanent members. These MPs can table motions to Parliament, order hearings of experts and members of the epistemic community called upon on an *ad hoc* basis, draft resolutions, order reports and oversee the government's activity in the field of humanitarian and human rights policy. [1] Within the context presented above, a multitude of actors from the NGO community have complained to the author that the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee of the German Bundestag dedicates overwhelmingly more attention to human rights issues than to humanitarian ones.

While sources within the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee themselves acknowledge that almost 90% of the Committee's work deals with human rights issues, [2] there are at least two specular reasons accounting for this situation. On the one hand, the Committee itself is partly responsible for such a state of affairs. Indeed, the Committee tends to decide by consensus on which subjects to concentrate the average 22 meetings per year that it held in the last legislative period. Because the role of German humanitarian assistance on the world stage is viewed as a far more divisive issue between political parties than that of human rights policy and because "the Committee is already politically very divided as it is", [3] the 18 MPs from the 5 political parties were for most of the past legislative period rather pleased with a "gentlemen's agreement" to keep humanitarian affairs off the Committee's agenda as much as possible. On the other hand, German NGOs themselves are to share part of the blame for this unsatisfactory state of affairs. Indeed, key figures within the NGO community were quick to point out the uneasiness with which they are willing to interact with the German Bundestag due to on going fears of "politicizing themselves" as well as the limited attempts that they have made to do so until now. Because of that, in a context whereby German MPs themselves state that "we [they] react to the external input that we receive from key stakeholders and the media", [4] it is not surprising that

1 German Bundestag (2011).
2 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

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humanitarian assistance has so far taken a backseat in the list of German politicians' priorities vis-à-vis human rights issues.

A second reason why humanitarian issues struggle to claim a prominent role within German public discourse has to do with the fact that the overwhelming majority of non-governmental organisations operating in the field of international solidarity are characterised by a double mandate which encompasses the provision of both development and humanitarian assistance. Founded in 1995, bringing together 118 NGOs and itself a member of the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD), the Association of German Development NGOs (VENRO) is the umbrella organisation through which most double mandate NGOs represent their interest vis-à-vis the Federal government. In order to carry out its mandate, VENRO can count on the regular input of fifteen standing working groups one of which is dedicated exclusively to humanitarian assistance. With a yearly budget of €1.231.000 made up for 44% (€543.000) by members' fees, for 39% (€476.000) by subsidies from public sponsors (i.e. including state funding), for 10% (€127.000) by subsidies from private sponsors and for the remaining 7% by one-off *ad hoc* contributions from its constituting organisations, VENRO can count on the work of a full-time secretariat. This accounts for 45% or €556.000 of VENRO's budget expenditure and deals with third party projects primarily concerned with European policies for Sub-Saharan Africa (19% or €240.000 of budget expenditure) and the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (16% or €201.000 of its budget). [5] Also thanks to these relatively significant financial resources, VENRO is recognised as a key actor in the field of development and humanitarian assistance both by the German government and European actors.

Having said that and within the relatively positive context presented above, VENRO's staff itself was quick to point out to the author that the overwhelming majority of the work carried out by the organisation focuses on developmental issues to the detriment of humanitarian ones. [6] Indeed, while many German NGOs can count on the work of dedicated humanitarian departments, overall these tend to be significantly smaller, both in terms of financing and human resources, than those ones dedicated to the provision of long-term development assistance. As a result of this state of affairs, the developmental discourse carried out within individual NGOs tends to take precedence over the humanitarian discourse present within the very same NGOs. Because of that, double mandate NGOs tend to expend significantly more political, financial and human capital addressing developmental questions rather than humanitarian ones. Such a situation inevitably sees VENRO operating as a service provider to its constituent NGOs by dedicating the bulk of its resources to developmental questions rather than to humanitarian ones. A situation exemplified, among other things, by the fact that only one of VENRO's fifteen standing working groups is exclusively dedicated to humanitarian questions. Within this context, it shall come as no surprise that Ärzte ohne Grenzen, probably the largest and most influential single mandate humanitarian NGO, both in Germany and worldwide, has renounced the observer status that it had for a long-time held within VENRO itself.

A third issue contributing to keep contentious humanitarian questions from surfacing into German public discourse is the very nature of Humanitarian Aid Coordinating Committee (KOA) meetings. KOA is the body tasked with bringing together all stakeholders of the German humanitarian aid system. Established in 1994 and convening regularly either at the Federal Foreign Office or at the premises of one of its member NGOs, the Humanitarian Aid Coordinating Committee acts as a forum to both discuss the long-term strategic perspectives of German humanitarian aid policy as well as to coordinate the federal government, the specialised agencies and the NGOs response to sudden humanitarian emergencies. In order to do so, the Committee's 30 to 40 members convene once a quarter for a regular meeting, once a year for a special two-day retreat focussing on a topical issue and on an *ad hoc* basis in case of major humanitarian crisis. Within this context and throughout its work, the Committee strives to adhere to the Twelve Basic Rules of Humanitarian Assistance Abroad, [7] the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid [8] and the principles laid down by the Good Humanitarian Donor Initiative (GHD). [9]

While originally conceived as a key dimension of a "partnership approach" bringing together state institutions and non-governmental actors, KOA meetings are, according to many stakeholders within the NGO community, short on real debate and exchange. Indeed, while most actors from the NGO community would readily acknowledge the value of KOA as providing a platform for the "partnership approach" and as a potential venue for seeking common solutions facing the humanitarian community, these same stakeholders recall that "[KOA] is a constructive and important meeting point. However, we find ourselves in a difficult situation because NGOs depend for funding from the *Auswärtiges Amt* (AA). Most NGOs are therefore very cautious and thread carefully in terms of criticism of the Foreign Ministry". [10] Furthermore, others would go as far as saying that "KOA was designed as an institution for debate but, in reality, there is no real and substantial discussion. It is now about automatic questions and answers" [11] and that "the *Auswärtiges Amt* is not used to controversial discussion. Many NGOs are ready to go along with positions put forward by the AA just in order to keep getting funding." [12]

5 VENRO (2010).
6 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
7 Federal Foreign Office (2013).
8 Council of the European Union (2008).
9 Good Humanitarian Donorship (2011).
10 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.

Having said that, some self-criticism was also recorded. In this respect, it is therefore interesting to observe that the NGO community itself admits that "in certain instances, NGOs themselves do not give to their representatives in KOA meetings the mandate to speak or to openly and clearly present their organisation's position. Rather, they are simply instructed to present themselves and their projects in a good light without openly criticizing the AA." [13] This state of affairs significantly decreases the likelihood of seeing contested humanitarian issues breaking free into the public realm.

A fourth issue contributing to limit the extent to which humanitarian issues can be successfully mainstreamed in German public discourse has to do with the relatively limited degree of interconnectedness of key humanitarian players at both the German and the European levels. Within this context, a recurring complain arising from the German NGO community is that "meetings of the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) are a closed shop" [14] and that "we don't get any standardised and regular feedback from the German representative or the foreign ministry about what is going on in there [in COHAFA meetings]." [15] While key humanitarian stakeholders acknowledge that the German representative in COHAFA meetings might at times share the content of these in KOA meetings, such reporting appears to be of a sporadic and *ad hoc* nature. Having said that and while the criticism presented above might to a certain extent and on certain occasions be warranted, all humanitarian stakeholders are to share the blame for the poor transmission of information between NGOs, the AA and the "Brussels dimension". Indeed, key NGO actors themselves explained to the author that "German NGOs do not engage much with COHAFA", that "we approached the German COHAFA representative a couple of times but never in a structured way" and that "nobody ever developed a proper strategy to make the most of COHAFA meetings." [16]

To this sorry state of affairs, it shall be added the seemingly limited "horizontal interaction" observed between German humanitarian actors and their counterparts in other EU member states. Indeed, while all actors acknowledged the importance of the role played in Brussels by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and Voluntary Organisations In Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE) in shaping European policy-making, few claim to have built strong links to key humanitarian stakeholders in other European countries. Indeed, while the *Auswärtiges Amt* has now for a long time enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the governmental humanitarian departments of selected European countries (notably The Netherlands, the UK, Switzerland, Finland and Sweden) on specific issues of common interest, little seems to have been established in terms of long-term strategic cooperation. This state of affairs is mirrored by a similar situation pertaining to the German NGO community and the relationship this enjoys with its European counterparts. Indeed, while the largest and most "international" of German NGOs might develop *ad hoc* common positions with their sister organisations in other EU member states, little seems to exist in terms of structured cooperation between VENRO and the national platforms of other countries' humanitarian NGOs. [17]

A fifth and final reason why humanitarian assistance enjoys a rather limited profile within German public discourse is to be found in the fact that, unlike with other policy areas such as human rights and development assistance, humanitarian issues cannot count on being "put on the agenda" by a single, well-known, authoritative and independent research institution. Indeed, while the *Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte* (German Institute for Human Rights) and the *Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik* (German Development Institute) provide constant and authoritative intellectual input and policy advice in their respective fields of expertise, no comparable institute exists for what concerns humanitarian affairs. [18] Such state of affairs is not ameliorated by the fact that, while Germany can count on the tremendous expertise of specific individuals, the experience of world renowned non-governmental organisations and the intellectual input of a variety of think tanks and academic bodies, no single research institution is by itself in a position to firmly place selected humanitarian issues at the centre of German public discourse. Because of the situation mentioned above, both institutional as well as non-governmental stakeholders complain that "there is very little in terms of strategic humanitarian discourse" and that "the issue [of humanitarian aid] comes up in public discourse only when a new crisis emerges". [19]

Following up on the point mentioned above, it shall also be noted that there are relatively few occasions, other than when a sudden humanitarian emergency breaks out, for humanitarian stakeholders to present humanitarian issues to both key political actors and to the general public. On the one hand, the frequency with which comprehensive humanitarian reports are made available represents a key challenge. In this respect, the German humanitarian report is published every four years (i.e. once for each legislative term of the German Bundestag). Such timing stands in sharp contrast with reports published in related policy areas (the human rights report of the German Bundestag is published every two years) or by European institutions (ECHO publishes its humanitarian report on a yearly basis). The limited frequency with which Germany publishes its humanitarian report provides therefore an opportunity only every four years for humanitarian issues to be firmly placed at the top

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
18 Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte (2013) and Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (2013).
19 Author's own semi-structured interviews.

of the political agenda. On the other hand, the very nature of the humanitarian reports published so far by the federal government also presents a key challenge. Indeed, reports have so far tended to consist mainly of reviews of humanitarian trends over the four years preceding the publication of the report. Such an approach, in the words of a prominent member of the NGO community "makes sense to bring up to speed new people dealing with humanitarian aid within the AA but it does not serve meaningful purposes as a way to focus and catalyse new ideas and improve humanitarian practices." [20]

The further "Europeanisation" of the system as a possible way forward

The second part of this paper explores the avenues through which the German humanitarian system could enhance the degree of attention enjoyed by humanitarian affairs in the country's public sphere and better shield humanitarian questions from unwarranted political interference. To begin with, ways to enhance the profile of humanitarian issues within the German Bundestag are investigated. As a second step, the issue of protecting humanitarian discourse from being overwhelmed by the developmental discourse within the NGO community is addressed. Having done that, this section moves on to propose ways through which public debate among German humanitarian stakeholders could be made more transparent and fruitful. As a fourth step, some proposals on how to enhance policy transmission between national and European stakeholders are put forward. Finally, avenues to put humanitarian issues more consistently at the centre of political discourse are presented. Throughout this chapter, it therefore increasingly becomes evident how a greater degree of "Europeanisation" of the German humanitarian aid system could be key in promoting a higher profile for humanitarian issues within Germany's public life.

First and foremost, the challenge presented by the fact that humanitarian issues receive limited attention within the German Bundestag needs to be addressed if humanitarian questions are to stand a chance to make it to the forefront of the political agenda. Thankfully, a combination of initiatives can be implemented to this purpose. To begin with, each political party within parliament could make sure to delegate responsibility for the humanitarian portfolio to one of its MPs. Indeed, while some individual MPs might already be informally interested in humanitarian issues, more than one of the prominent NGOs approached is proactively arguing its case in favour of a policy that would mandate such a practice for all political parties within the Bundestag. [21] Were such a practice to become the norm, the selected MP would then join the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee and become specifically tasked with overseeing humanitarian affairs on behalf of its party. Such a policy would be welcomed by a variety of actors within the NGO community in that it would provide "focal points" for civil society to address German political parties on humanitarian issues. [22] Having done that, it is suggested from different quarters that two Deputy Chairs support the work of the Chair of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee. [23] While current institutional arrangements within the German Bundestag make such a set up impossible to achieve for the time being, should such a state of affairs be possible to envision in the future, it would make sense for these to be each one of them responsible either for human rights issues or for humanitarian affairs. [24] Thanks to the work of a dedicated Deputy Chair, it would then become easier for humanitarian issues to enjoy a regular and institutionalised opportunity to be addressed by the Human Right and Humanitarian Aid Committee.

Within the context outlined above and in order to ensure that the instances of the German NGO community are adequately relayed to Brussels, a stronger relationship between the German Bundestag and the European Parliament could be envisioned. Within such an understanding and to begin with, the Deputy Chair of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee responsible for humanitarian affairs could establish regular and semi-institutionalised consultations with counterparts within the Development Aid Committee of the European Parliament specifically dealing with humanitarian affairs. Secondly, MPs belonging to the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee of the German Bundestag that have been entrusted with the humanitarian portfolio could be asked to informally but regularly liaise with their German counterparts sitting within the Development Aid Committee of the European Parliament. Such an informal but regular interaction could provide the necessary "lubricant" for a smooth exchange of input on humanitarian questions between the two parliaments. Last but certainly not least, the secretariat of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee of the German Bundestag could take it upon itself to establish a formal relationship with its counterpart within the Development Aid Committee of the European Parliament. Such an arrangement would ensure that the wealth of institutional memory available within the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee's secretariat is retained and shared with the European Parliament independently of the changes affecting the composition of the Committee following the beginning of each new legislative period of the German Bundestag. Having said that and for these steps to be taken, additional resources would have to be found for the secretariat itself.

20 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 All committees of the German Bundestag currently have only one Chair and one Deputy Chair. Such an arrangement makes it possible to sustain a delicate institutional balance whereby when the Chair of a committee is a member of the ruling coalition, the Deputy Chair is a member of the opposition and vice versa.

Secondly and while the result of long-term historical trends and, in some instances, an asset to the NGOs themselves, the double-mandate (humanitarian and developmental) nature of most German non-governmental organisations poses some serious questions with respect to the extent to which humanitarian issues can be promoted into the broader national public discourse by the NGOs themselves. Within this context, the challenge for German NGOs lays with rethinking the nature of their humanitarian operations and departments so as to enhance their visibility, relevance and effectiveness, while at the same time retaining the close affiliation with the core "developmental dimension" of the broader NGOs within which these are often embedded. In order to achieve these twin goals, a few initiatives could be considered. To begin with, the humanitarian departments of double mandate NGOs could be provided with their own legal personality. If carefully crafted from a legal perspective, such an arrangement could provide both the newly created "humanitarian entities" and the their (older) sister organisations with the best of the two worlds. Thanks to such an arrangement, newly legally established humanitarian NGOs could argue in favour of a higher policy profile for humanitarian issues within VENRO while still being able to rely on the expertise, financing and administrative support of the developmental non-governmental organisations from which they originate. At the same time, humanitarian NGOs could argue in favour of a similar arrangement to be secured for an "independent but connected legal personality" for the working group of VENRO specifically dedicated to humanitarian affairs. This development could then in turn encourage single mandate NGOs that have so far felt inadequately represented by VENRO to join the newly created "humanitarian VENRO". While each double mandate organisation would have to negotiate with itself how to achieve this new *status quo*, the recent arrangement currently established for instance between Brot für die Welt, Diakonie and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe could in time perhaps provide an interesting template for other NGOs to explore. [25]

From a more European perspective and within the context presented above, a few remarks are also appropriate. To begin with, German NGOs could achieve economies of scale for what concerns their efforts to approach the European dimension of humanitarian assistance. More specifically, on going efforts such as those pursued by Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe with the posting of a permanent representative in Brussels could be enhanced. Indeed, should individual humanitarian or double-mandate NGOs represented within VENRO agree to pool their efforts at dealing with their representatives in Brussels, the work of individual NGO representatives could be framed within a semi-formal structure that would see these working under a common mandate through VENRO. Indeed, while very few humanitarian NGOs have today the financial and administrative capacities to do so individually, shared representations in Brussels (both in financial and administrative terms) could provide them with the opportunity to more effectively lobby European institutions. Furthermore, such an arrangement would make it even more straightforward for VOICE to get a coherent picture of the positions being expressed by the German humanitarian community.

Thirdly, the challenge posed by what is often considered by many non-governmental actors to be the rather "too consensual" nature of KOA meetings has to be dealt with in order to boost the independence of humanitarian NGOs vis-à-vis the *Auswärtiges Amt* and to encourage a more vibrant and constructively critical dialogue between the former and the latter. [26] Having said that, this third challenge should always be viewed within the context represented by the need to protect the "partnership approach" typical of German policy-making in this policy area while at the same time ensuring the German NGOs' capacity, when appropriate, to constructively criticise the AA. [27] Indeed, while the *Auswärtiges Amt* is from many quarters commended for trying to foster a "partnership approach" bringing together all key stakeholders of the German humanitarian system through KOA's plenary meetings, providing more room for constructive criticism of governmental policies would strongly contribute to enhance the reputation of the AA's humanitarian taskforce as a true champion of humanitarian principles. In order to stimulate a more lively debate among key humanitarian stakeholders, a number of initiatives could therefore be considered.

In light of the considerations mentioned above and to begin with, the experience of having *ad hoc* working groups on specific thematic issues (such as the one on nutrition already co-chaired by the AA and Welthungerhilfe) could be institutionalised through the establishment of standing working groups on all major humanitarian policy areas. A legally binding agreement institutionalising such practice would "lock in" the role of NGOs within the broader "partnership approach" championed by the *Auswärtiges Amt* and strengthen their "right to speak up" on all key policy areas. Furthermore and on condition that such meetings were to remain of an eminently technical nature, such an arrangement could provide "specialised *fora*" for targeted, meaningful and lively debate. Such a development would therefore go some way towards addressing NGOs concerns that "KOA has grown too large" and that "it should be cut by half and limited to those stakeholders that really have something to say in it". [28]

Having done that, VENRO's role could be expanded to provide German humanitarian NGOs with a "shielded and shielding" speaker for their views. More specifically, further

25 Brot für die Welt and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe have set up an interesting form of cooperation that, while allowing them to retain separate identities, still enables them to closely cooperate in a number of areas. For more information, please visit: http://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/ueber-uns/personen-strukturen/strukturen.html.

26 Author's own semi-structured interviews.

27 Ibid.

28 Author's own semi-structured interviews.

diversifying VENRO's funding sources and emancipating the organisation form any funding from state bodies such as the AA and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) would make it possible for this to openly "speak truth to power" when and if needed. Indeed, being fully financially independent from state institutions would enable VENRO to be "shielded" from most unwarranted political pressure and, at the same time, to "shield" humanitarian NGOs by speaking on their behalf without stating which specific organisations might have most vocally advocated the point being made by VENRO to the AA. Having said that, this state of affairs could come about only under specific circumstances that would see German humanitarian NGOs both wiling and able to provide VENRO (or its newly established "humanitarian branch") with appropriate financial and human resources as well as with the mandate to speak on their behalf on those issues where a broad consensus could be found among humanitarian NGOs.

Last but not least, a European dimension could be injected in the system's *modus operandi* to enhance the financial and political independence of German NGOs vis-à-vis the Auswärtiges Amt. As a first step and in order to be coherent with its repeatedly-stated willingness to support humanitarian NGOs to emancipate themselves from state support, the AA could itself shift some of its funding from *ad hoc* NGO financing for selected crisis to the provision of yearly funding through EU-like Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs). Such an approach would be beneficial in two respects. On the one hand, it would provide a "seal of approval" on behalf of the *Auswärtiges Amt* in terms of the managerial competences of its selected implementing partners. On the other hand, such an arrangement would provide humanitarian NGOs with enhanced financial planning opportunities and a greater degree of financial independence from the AA for what pertains to the selection of which humanitarian interventions to prioritise. While doing so and without having to recur to new burdensome administrative structures or agencies, the AA could also shift a minimal part of its resources currently allocated to the direct support of humanitarian NGOs to the opening of a "financing desk for humanitarian NGOs" on the model of the one currently supported by the BMZ for development NGOs through Engagement Global gGmbH. [29] Such a revised state of affairs would then make it easier for German humanitarian NGOs to seek funding from Brussels as opposed to from Berlin, to further diversify their funding sources and to enhance their independence from German state institutions.

A fourth challenge to be dealt with regards issues pertaining to "policy transmission" between various stakeholders both at the national and European as well as at the non-governmental and institutional levels. In this respect, the challenge lays with fostering better coordination between policy proposals from the NGO community, the AA and the "Brussels dimension". In order to do so and to begin with, German humanitarian NGOs could strive to find common ground on key humanitarian policies and entrust VENRO with presenting these to the AA. Having done that and in classic "partnership approach", a dialogue between VENRO and the AA could take place so as to find synergies between the input brought forward by NGOs and insights provided by the AA. As a next step, KOA meetings could approve the shared position developed by VENRO and the AA and then task the German representative to COHAFA with presenting the above-mentioned position to the European institutions and its national counterparts as a policy-proposal of the whole German humanitarian community. It would then be up to the German representative within COHAFA to make sure to regularly report in KOA meetings the developments taking place within COHAFA. [30]

While the approach presented above would ensure greater coherence in terms of vertical policy transmission between German non-governmental organisations, the German Foreign Ministry and DG ECHO, more should also be done to effectively exploit opportunities provided by horizontal policy transmission processes. Indeed, while for many years the AA has enjoyed *ad hoc* policy exchanges with its counterparts in selected European countries and certain NGOs have attempted to build common positions with their sister organisations in other EU member states on selected issues (for instance as in the run up to the drafting of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid), [31] such efforts still appear to be occasional and rather limited in scope. In order to ameliorate such a state of affairs, German humanitarian NGOs could entrust VENRO (and provide it with the appropriate human and financial resources) to develop a regular dialogue with its counterparts in other European countries. In parallel developments, the *Auswärtiges Amt* could either establish a new post or entrust external consultants with first gathering a thorough understanding of the latest policy proposals and humanitarian initiatives being mulled in other member states and then establishing and developing a structured and coherent strategic dialogue with its European counterparts. While such efforts on behalf of both the NGO community and the AA would require significant willingness to challenge their own pre-set *modi operandi*, the medium to long-term implications of introducing such changes could range from boosting the quality of policy-making to more effectively being able to influence Brussels' humanitarian discourse.

A fifth and final challenge to address revolves around the question of how to raise the profile of humanitarian issues within German public discourse in general and in the government's policy agenda in particular. Indeed, as highlighted in various conversations with key stakeholders within the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee of the German Bundestag, "putting issues on the map would be

29 Engagement Global GmbH (2013).

30 Key humanitarian non-governmental actors interviewed repeatedly supported such an approach.

31 Council of the European Union (2008).

much easier if we [the Committee] could rely on regular, impartial and authoritative input from research institutions and think-tanks." [32] While plenty of expertise on humanitarian affairs is currently available in Germany, no single institution stands out as a centre of excellence able to bring together research currently available so as to focus academic discourse to inform policy-making. Because of that, it shall come as no surprise that practitioners within the NGO community, academics and institutional actors have for some time floated the idea of a "German Humanitarian Aid Institute". [33] Within this context, rather than if, the question now seems to be how to set up such an institute. In this respect, the input gathered by the author revolves around three overarching themes: intellectual independence, practical feasibility and quality concerns. [34]

To begin with, issues pertaining to intellectual independence are closely linked to those pertaining to financial independence. Any newly created "German Humanitarian Aid Institute" would have to rely on a multitude of funding sources so as to ensure that no single stakeholder could be able to decisively influence intellectual life and policy considerations within the institute. While not necessarily fixating any percentages, it was on various occasions suggested that no single humanitarian actor should account for more than 10% of the foreseen institute's funding. Secondly and according to both institutional and non-governmental actors, care should be put into avoiding "reinventing the wheel". Rather than establishing a new structure with a top-down approach, already existing skills and knowledge should be harnessed. Input provided by in house research departments of major German NGOs, the expertise available within the AA, the BMZ and German Society for International Development (GIZ) as well as the contributions of centres of excellence such as those that can be found at the University of Munster, the University of Konstanz and the University of Bochum or of think-thanks such as the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) should be taken advantage of. Within such an understanding and while concentrating resources "under one single roof" to benefit from economies of scale and from the added value of shared expertise, a new "German Humanitarian Institute" could come together through a bottom-up approach and with relatively limited financial, legal and administrative constraints.

On top of the establishment of a "German Humanitarian Institute" proposed above, more and better opportunities should be put in place to raise the profile of humanitarian issues with both the political establishment and the broader public opinion. With this objective in mind and as a first step, the frequency of the German Humanitarian Report could be changed. While it would be ideal but perhaps not (yet) realistic to have such report published on a yearly basis, it shall be possible to publish this at least every two years as it is already done for the Human Rights Report. Indeed, such publication would ideally take place on those years when the Human Rights Report is not published. Such an arrangement would provide a "focus" for all German stakeholders to concentrate their outreach activities on a specific date so as to ensure "maximum exposure" of humanitarian questions. Having said that and in order for such a "Humanitarian Report" to be more than an opportunity for "taking stock" of current developments, the very nature of the report should be re-conceived. Indeed, throughout his interviews, the author came across a variety of key humanitarian actors suggesting that the report shall be re-conceptualised so as to be much more forward rather than backward looking, that a "topic of the year" could help focussing debate on selected humanitarian questions and that a reduction of the length of the report in favour of an increase in its quality could be considered. [35]

Finally and once having implemented the suggestions presented above, the German humanitarian establishment could take advantage of the "European dimension" to both enhance the quality of the intellectual input available as well as to promote humanitarian issues within the German public discourse itself. On the one hand, on going research on humanitarian affairs in Germany should be firmly linked to the most vibrant and cutting edge developments taking place elsewhere in Europe. In order to achieve this vision, institutionalised partnerships with DG ECHO, The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), COHAFA and VOICE in Brussels as well as with specialised national research institutions such as the Groupe URD in France, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London or PRIO in Oslo could be established. On the other hand, the yearly or bi-annual German Humanitarian Report could be timed to be presented at about the same time as ECHO's yearly Humanitarian Report. [36] Should the key topics presented in the two reports overlap, it would become relatively easy for the German humanitarian community to "leverage" to its advantage the exposure provided by the European Humanitarian Report. Within this context, it would then also become easier for all German humanitarian stakeholders to step up their outreach activities to key policy-makers, the country's media and the general public.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate which mechanisms might contribute to increase the degree of attention dedicated to humanitarian issues within German public discourse while at the same time shielding the German humanitarian system from unwarranted political interference. Such an investigation was carried out thanks to an analysis of both primary and secondary sources as well as through dozens of semi-structured interviews with key humanitarian stakeholders both in Germany and abroad. On the one

32 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Author's own semi-structured interviews.
36 European Commission (2012).

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