

European Union Nation Branding through Humanitarian and Developmental Initiatives

Focus on EU Aid Volunteers

Biljana Popovska, Phd Candidate
Hochschule Furtwangen University, Germany
Ministry of Defense of the Republic of North Macedonia

MSc. Julie Darcq,
International Relations and Cultural Diplomacy
Hochschule Furtwangen University, Germany

Abstract

Diverse from the Erasmus program, amongst other EU international interactions, Humanitarian and Developmental initiatives resulting in Nation Branding is a field that is hardly explored. This paper has tried to analyze the concept of supra-nation branding through the EU humanitarian and development program named EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, through focusing on how a supranational organization such as the EU would go about a nation branding initiative that promotes its collective values in Humanitarian and Development Aid.

In order to explore the concept of supra-nation branding, it firsts gives a brief introduction about the initiative and identifies the key elements of EU nation branding as well as its humanitarian and development initiatives. Then, it analyzes it through Anholt's lens and a SWOT analysis, followed by critiques and a conclusion.

This analysis proved fruitful in terms of enabling a structural understanding behind the processes employed by the E.U Aid Volunteers Initiative and how it shall enable the E.U to advance its image as a supra-national entity both locally, regionally and internationally.

In addition, as the European Union is an entity unlike any other it generates comprehension for future organizations motivated by a collectivity in idealisms and cultural identities, enabling the application of their country's image abroad through a means of which embodies a form of cultural-humanitarian diplomacy.

Keywords: EU; supranational; supra-nation branding; values; initiatives; cultural-humanitarian diplomacy.

Introduction

Our contemporary world is exposed to constant change, consequentially our era exposed to new challenges, threats and risks. Threats and security challenges range

from those caused by human activity to those of a more ecological nature, hence environmental and human made disasters require fast and customized responses. This engulfs constant education and up to-date training of personnel in a wide range of activities. In this context, humanitarian organizations come to play an important role. More so, humanitarian organization have a high demand for professionally trained people to carry out practical action towards helping communities affected by disasters.

The EU Aid Volunteers initiative enables Europeans to contribute to humanitarian assistance in countries where help is needed. The majority of existing volunteering schemes in Europe have a domestic focus and few provide opportunities to support humanitarian aid. The EU Aid Volunteers initiative has been projected to bring volunteers and organizations from different countries to work together in joint projects in areas such as resilience, infrastructural development, early warning and disaster risk-management, as a practical expression of solidarity with communities vulnerable to humanitarian crises. In this regard, the European Commission is setting up a European training program for humanitarian volunteers and has developed European standards for humanitarian organizations to work with volunteers in EU-funded projects worldwide to help strengthen and support local capacities to prevent, prepare for, and recover from disaster. Investing in capacity building of humanitarian organizations, local communities and first responders in disaster-affected countries is an essential pre-requisite for creating a more effective, principled humanitarian response and is further supported under the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

Accordingly, by setting up the initiative EU is sending key messages to the EU citizens thus promoting the aid work as some of its core values. Also, the scope of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative provides opportunities for volunteers to engage in humanitarian aid. Consequently, in the period from 2016 to 2020, 4 000 individuals will be deployed by humanitarian organizations to support projects worldwide (ECHO).

The initiative *“is open to a variety of profiles from newcomers to experienced humanitarian experts, opportunities will also be provided for staff and volunteers from local organizations and local communities to strengthen their capacities to deal with disasters”* (ECHO).

Additionally, it is *“strengthening the humanitarian system and the capacity of humanitarian organizations and local responders to be more effective and principled in the delivery of humanitarian assistance”* (ECHO).

Finally it is *“an innovative instrument to complement the delivery of humanitarian aid, strengthen resilience and build capacities of local communities”* (ECHO).

To support this we have related the above described context to a ‘Ted Talk’ held by Simon Anholt entitled *Which Country does the most good for the World* (published in

2014). Anholt introduces a “Good Country Index”¹, which he commends to be part of his new campaign to enhance a global debate focused on determining whether countries exist on a self-interest basis (Marxism) or whether they seek to contribute to the entirety of both humanity and the world ecological health². Based on diverse data ranging from various international organizations of which includes the United Nations, the Good Country Index measures each country’s contribution to the good of humanity. Following this train of thought, 18 out of 30 of the Overall Rankings index list are European Union member states (Anholt, 2014)³.

Further on, we have applied the Anholt’s lenses to analyze the E.U. Aid initiative as a nation branding effort. However, to analyze it we first provided some theoretical backgrounds about nation branding as a concept.

Nation branding

Branding is an idea whose roots lie in the commercial world of product marketing. Applied to nation branding it implies the total impression people carry of a place through beliefs, associations, images and other information, ultimately simplifying the associations connected to a place to key in on essential data. Nations and regions are using these concepts and precepts to brand and sell themselves in terms of travel, tourism and leisure activities. Simon Anholt has provided a lot of impetus to these efforts through his research and yearly publications of nation rankings through a nation branding lens. Anholt’s national brand concept (Anholt,1998), however, is a concept in a notional, reputational sense.

McClory has extended Nye’s ideas on soft power to nation branding on a global scale. In this view nations can brand themselves on their soft power (McClory, 2011). McClory’s view of soft power extends Nye’s three pillars consisting of culture, political values and foreign policy to five dynamics which include culture, government, diplomacy, education, business/innovation, consequentially evaluating countries on the basis of these five categories and ranking them (Nye,2004)..

Looking back historically the need for nation branding in the context of Europe arose in importance due to the degradation of Western Europe’s powerful image in relevance to the First and Second World Wars, further catalyzed by the demeaning image as an International player during the cold war this created a demand for it to strengthen its reputation as a global player in the post-cold war era.

Moreover the European Union has done a lot more as a collective in terms of Supranational Branding and evidence of EU Nation branding consist of but are not

¹ Main page; <http://www.goodcountry.org/>

² Intro; http://www.goodcountry.org/index_intro

³ Overall Rankings; <http://www.goodcountry.org/overall>

limited to; the European flag with the 12 stars in a circle which symbolize the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony among the peoples of Europe. Secondly, the EU currency and several EU symbols make the EU recognizable internationally; further the circle of yellow stars on a blue background extends its recognition. Further more, there is the European anthem, the melody used to symbolize the EU, which stems from the Ninth Symphony composed in 1823 by Ludwig Van Beethoven. Additionally the ideals behind the European Union were first put forward on 9 May 1950 by French foreign minister Robert Schuman. This is why 9th May is celebrated as a key date for the EU and it is also the Europe Day. "United in diversity" is the motto of the European Union. It signifies how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages. Lastly, EU has become a symbol for a quality label⁴ (Europa.eu).

Finally, and in order to analyze all of the above in a more profound way we further provided more background information on the E.U. Humanitarian and Developmental Initiatives.

Humanitarian and developmental initiatives

It has been projected up until 2020, 4000 EU Aid Volunteers to contribute to humanitarian projects worldwide. 10 000 'online volunteers' will support with tasks that can be done from home on a computer, for example helping out with translations, graphic designs or providing advice and support. 4 400 people from local organizations in non-EU, disaster affected countries will also benefit from the chance to undertake capacity building. To make sure this would work EU carried out a test phase.

Under the initiative's pilot phase (2011-2014), 70 organizations participated in deploying nearly 300 volunteers from across Europe to crises-affected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Working with local organizations and local communities the EU Aid Volunteers participated in a range of humanitarian projects, including disaster management planning, flood risk mapping, needs assessments and information management.

Based on the lessons learned the projected budget for the EU Aid Volunteers initiative is €147.9 million for a period from 2015 to 2020. This funding will be used to put in place an extensive capacity building, training and support package for EU Aid Volunteers, for volunteers and staff in third countries and for the deployment of volunteers to implement practical actions. Novelty is that all organizations wishing to send or host volunteers under the EUAV initiative must be certified under the initiative. The certification process verifies that the high standards and procedures of volunteer

⁴ EU Symbols; http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/index_en.htm

management set to protect and manage volunteers during their deployment under the EUAV initiative can be fully realized and met by all participating organizations⁵.

If we at this point put the nation branding lenses again we could see that the themes EU tries to make operational its efforts are along the lines of value branding and promoting a sense of E.U identity abroad. In the context of the above said the implementation of these themes will follow the next six guidelines: raising awareness, informing interested parties, promoting EU values on solidarity, creating a shared identity, engaging with the public and demonstrating the impact of volunteering.

By doing so E.U. firstly raises awareness on the EU Aid Volunteers initiative both inside EU and in countries where volunteers will be deployed. Secondly, interested communities are to be informed about the opportunity to engage in the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. Thirdly, this shall promote the value of EU solidarity in both applied action, as well as the theoretical values of the EU's humanitarian aid principles. Further, this shall create a shared identity both on the part of the volunteers as well as the actively participating organizations. Additionally, this shall engage the public by generating support for the idealism and action behind volunteerism in both European countries as well as the world. Lastly, through demonstrating the values, different actions and professional contribution of the EU Aid Volunteers the initiative shall embody the contributions of EU citizens, member states, potential participating organizations and host communities.

The driving force behind the EU supra-national branding can be further identified through key slogans that are identifiable with the initiative. These include: 'We Care, We Act', 'You Can Make a Difference', and 'Power Through Local Action'. The 'We Care, We Act' slogan represents the EU Aid Volunteers initiative's tangible expression of European solidarity with people in need boosts the capacity of the EU in providing humanitarian aid. The 'You Can Make a Difference' slogan opens up the initiative to a variety of profiles, from young people to experts, with the skills to help meet the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable people. Lastly, the 'Power Through Local Action' slogan aims at strengthening the capacities of local communities and organizations to deal with disasters⁶. Hence, the branding target audience is largely focused upon youth generation of both international and domestic nations.

In order to communicate the core messages of the EU identified above, two different approaches can be identified. The first is providing information, which seems to be based upon a perception that foreign audiences need 'neutral' information about what the EU is and what the EU does. This approach is seen in various publications explaining EU policies, or in the web pages of the delegations and the different EU bodies. This

⁵ *Factsheets*; http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/eu-aid-volunteers_en

⁶ *EUAV Communication Plan En'*. Pdf; http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/eu-aid-volunteers_en.

is the much criticized ‘facts and figures’ approach to public diplomacy, which is in the process of being replaced by a focus on narratives about the core messages and linkages among them. The EU seeks to tell success stories about itself and its external activities by highlighting concrete cases. This second approach is used both in written publications, web pages and speeches. Narratives generally highlight the positive effects of EU activities on an area of central importance, thereby linking the message of the EU as an effective actor with nodal points related to human rights, democracy or multilateralism. Still, there is a limit to how propagandist the communication can be, as noted by a DG Development official. When the Commission communicates, it needs to take into account the interests of other actors in the network doing EU public diplomacy, such as members of the European Parliament and member states’ representatives. A concrete example offered was that of communication related to the pursuit of the Millennium Goals, where the majority of awareness-raising content was about the Millennium Goals themselves and development issues, and only a smaller part about EU achievements.

In order to contextualize the cultural diversity and interaction between the European Union and the disaster struck nation states of which it’s Humanitarian and Development Aid initiatives address two such case studies shall be presented below.

First Case Study

During the EU Aid Volunteer pilot project, Erika Bozzato – an Italian national – worked with *Alianza por la Solidaridad* in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. Her main focus revolved around assisting refugees from Syria living in informal tented settlements and unfinished buildings, this extended to supporting the hygiene promotion team, awareness campaigns on safe water storage and sanitation facilities to help prevent water-related diseases, as well as, working on communication and developing new methodologies and evaluation tools.

Second Case Study

Chris Van Duuren - a Dutch national – is an active volunteer that undertook a short-term deployment with the Netherlands Red Cross to Kosovo, although he considers himself a life-long volunteer. His main focus aimed towards supporting capacity building of local civil protection authorities. Chris and the team of EU Aid Volunteers, which were deployed to the region, worked interactively with local fire fighters, hospital staff, police departments, the local Red Cross branch, government officials and community service initiatives. Ultimately, a multi-agency disaster-management response exercise was formulated to analyze and improve the existing emergency-response procedures. Further, Chris and his team delivered a wider variety of training in first aid, roof-top

recues, the identification of safety hazards, multi-agency cooperation; all of which are vital front-line skills required in emergency situations.

Most significantly, one lesson that was reiterated by a volunteering organization is that volunteering organization's and volunteers' should not force their skills or knowledge on another organization; but rather it is a prerequisite for these initiatives to first understand the existing situation before recommending and implementing changes.

Anholt's criteria

Analyzing the E.U Aid Humanitarian and Developmental Initiative through Anholt's lens one may notice that the 6 criteria - Tourism, Exports, Governance, Investment/Immigration, Culture and Heritage, and People - overlap each other.

Although tourism may be defined as a leisure activity, humanitarian tourism is a developing thematic, thus the deployment of European staff to countries facing critical humanitarian and development needs and the recruitment international staff from said countries to Europe for training represents a different type of cross-border exchange that possibly equates to visiting places of interest.



The export of humanitarian aid and development aid supplies may not be lucrative in a commercial sense, however, circulating European certified products fits under the description of exports. Further, this disseminates the European Union brand, as the label consists of the twelve stars on a blue background.

Through the initiatives embodiment of European theories on humanitarian and development guidelines and procedures, such an initiative will spread European values on the governance of disaster relief, amongst other forms of aid, as well as humanitarian principles.

In the context of investment and immigration it can be interpreted that through the initiative's budget of €147.9 million over the course of four years this is both an investment in job opportunities abroad and locally for European's as well as infrastructural-investment opportunities in zones afflicted by disasters.

Culture and heritage are largely embodied within the governance criteria. Culture and heritage within the conceptualization of the humanitarian and development

initiatives largely reflect the European Unions institutional values that are integrated within member-states.

Lastly in the context of people, the inflow of international trainees and outflow of European volunteers largely summarizes this criterion. This is as there is an interaction of a diversity of peoples centralized around the European Union's volunteer strategies.

S.W.O.T Analysis

The SWOT analysis is a structured planning method of evaluation that seeks to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a project or a business venture. In this context it is used to analyze the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the E.U Aid Volunteer's initiative in accordance with our personal analysis of the E.U. and its humanitarian and development aid approach.

In relevance to its strengths, we devised four key strengths; peace, democracy, diversity and unique qualities. In relevance to peace, the E.U won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 which portrays the European Union as an internationally depicted peace organization, due to its ability to generate peace within the region, the E.U is accredited to having formalized a mechanism of peace. In terms of democracy, one of the key principles behind the E.U's governance is its value of democracy, which is a main criterion for the admission into the E.U. In reference to its diversity, it is important to note that the European Union consists of 28 member states, which encompass a variety of differences ranging from cultural norms to administrative structures and processes. The uniqueness of the E.U is deeply rooted within its federal administrative structure that is unlike any other alliance globally, part of this is due to its principles of freedom of movement of good, people, services and economy.

Although the four principles highlighted above are largely represented as strengths, at times these strengths can also overlap into weaknesses. For example, it's the Eurocentric perspective on peace and democracy which may limit the outreach of E.U.s aid initiative. This is as infrastructurally the initiative is designed on cooperating with countries that fit its criterion. Secondly, having such a range of diverse nations may inhibit its administrative actions, exemplified by the fact that the 28 languages are not represented within the administrative structure. Further, the uniqueness of its structure by definition lacks precedents which means that the E.U is sailing through a course that has not previously been defined nor mapped.

In terms of the opportunities that the E.U has is largely founded upon its existing collaboration with networks and various other initiatives. This wide variety of experience and cooperation enables the E.U's Aid initiative to have a networking resource that can only be deemed as valuable in both the short-term and long-term, although it might rely on its previous connections this with further the amount of

experience of both internal and external parties thus promoting the E.U's supra-nation brand.

A major threat to the E.U's initiative is Euroscepticism. This is due to the fact that with a forever changing environment, the European Union's relevance in the future might be questioned. This is as though it was founded initially as a system of interdependence to deter future conflicts within the region, due to the fact that the region has sustained – for the most part – 70 years of peace the necessity of the institution may be questioned in the future due to certain flaws; as portrayed by the Greek economic crisis.

Critiques

Critiques of nation branding often attribute the flaws of the E.U to the creation of dependency due to the lack of sustainability; this critique is largely aligned to neo-liberal and neo-Marxist critiques (Carbonnier, p. 142)⁷. However the EU aid volunteers have sustainability dynamic that counter's this claim.

Secondly, the EU aid volunteer initiative may perpetuate a sense of neo-imperialism, this is as for the most part the colonial powers shall active as a collective in ex-colonies. Although this may ultimately generate a sense of mistrust, through collaboration it may create an environment distinguishable from exploitation to assistance.

As the E.U lacks a cohesive identity this may be viewed as a false reflection of E.U identity, however although the E.U represents a large diversity of cultures through the values of which each member-state is a consenting signatory, it encompasses the ascribed E.U values. Hence, although the E.U does not have a consistent identity in terms of cultural aspects, it has a collective identity internalized within its main values centered on the freedom of movement of people, services, capital and goods.

There may be the suggestion by populist and realist critique's (Carbonnier, p. 142) that the E.U may prioritize countries of interest in terms of aid, as suspected by France's involvement in Francophone countries such as that of Mali, however due to the initiatives assessment criteria of investment this ought to set a degree of transparency.

Further, the E.U initiative may be critiqued for only aiding 'safe' countries, it ought to be noted that as the E.U Aid initiative sends it's volunteers to fairly stable regions, in a time of crisis this may be critiqued. However, as these volunteers shall encompass people that lack the expertise for crisis zones this would be a flawed critique.

⁷ Carbonnier. 2010. *Official development assistance once more under fire from critics.*

Lastly, considering the fact that five of the top 10 arm's exporters globally are European nation-states including Germany, France and the UK⁸, there is the critique of hypocrisy. On the one hand the E.U initiative is focusing on propagating peace, whilst on the other hand they are enabling the perpetuation of conflicts through the supply of arms.

Scope of E.U. Aid work

In line with this, the context of the EU Aid initiative as a nation branding one could be further extended and other activities EU has done in this respect are to be added to the list. These campaigns highlight the cooperation between the European Commission and its humanitarian partners in delivering relief assistance to people affected by crises around the world. This paper argues that by using them as a vehicle EU is trying to raise awareness and enhance understanding and support of humanitarian aid values among the EU citizens. Evidence could be found by analyzing through Anholt's nation branding hexagon as it seems that these activities embody all six of its criteria.

Moreover, EU has joined its forces with other aid agencies in its efforts to brand values and beliefs. Such is the joint effort with Oxfam in the international awareness raising campaign 'EU save LIVES - You save lives'. By enabling stories of millions of people from Syria, Central African Republic and South Sudan – who are in the middle of a forced exile – to be heard the campaign aims to give a voice to those affected, showing the human side of these crises - and amplifying that voice - so millions of people are made aware of the reality of everyday life in refugee camps and host communities.

In addition, on 4 November 2014, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) launched, in partnership with WFP, a new awareness raising campaign on food assistance, called the 'Family Meal – What brings Us together?'. The 'family meal' concept was chosen as the central theme of the campaign, because of its simplicity, its universality across cultures, the positive emotional associations it fosters, and its relevance to nutrition and well-being both in humanitarian crises and in European households. However, the ultimate goal has been to raise awareness and enhance knowledge around the fact that hunger is the world's most solvable problem.

Generally, the scope of the aid work EU Commission includes Humanitarian aid, Needs assessment, Food assistance, Nutrition, Water, sanitation and hygiene, Health, Emergency shelter, Protection, Resilience, Cash and vouchers, Refugees and internally displaced, Gender and age sensitive aid, Children and emergencies, Disaster risk reduction (DDR), Civil- military relations, Logistics, Humanitarian air services, International Humanitarian Law, EU Aid Volunteers, EU Children of Peace, Capacity building, Policy implementing guidelines. It aims to influence public opinion about

⁸ Global Arms Trade Scale; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/killer-facts-the-scale-of-the-global-arms-trade/>

the need for national promotion focusing on a separate aspect of social and cultural activity. Through its international promotion EU is trying to establish a positive image by expanding the list of export products in this case the values, voluntarism being one of them⁹.

Finally, as nearly 60 million people today are deprived of a home, a family and a job, due to the intensification of conflicts to survive, every one of them needs humanitarian aid. Despite its gravity, the situation which displaced people are forced to face often remains invisible to the wider world. Thus, the bottom line of the EU Aid Initiative by promoting the humanitarian values should be commended and seen as a valuable asset in E.U. nation branding efforts.

Conclusion

There is an obvious need for further research into the field of nation branding and international and humanitarian developmental initiative. Although EU Nation branding is likely to face various criticism as highlighted above, despite the criticism fundamentally and ultimately, through such initiatives the E.U can generate positive images of the E.U's identity and culture.

To conclude, as President Baroso during his Humbolt university speech 2014 said "We need to continue branding Europe" and as a food for thought considering the large influx of refugees and the negative depiction of Europe due to the way in which it has reacted to the Refugee Crisis, we wonder whether EU re-branding itself through such Humanitarian and Developmental initiatives will help it counter-balance its international image?

Bibliography

1. Anholt, S. "The Good Country Index". *The Good Country*. Available on: <http://www.goodcountry.org/>
2. Anholt S. (1998). Nation-brands of the twenty-first century. *The Journal of Brand Management*, Volume 5, No 6, pp. 395-406.
3. Carbonnier, Giles (2010). Official development assistance once more under fire from critics. *International Development Policy*. Available on: <https://poldev.revues.org/141>
4. Canon, Peter. (2015). ECHO Factsheet – EU Aid Volunteers. *European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection*. Available on: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/euaidvolunteers_en.pdf

⁹ Campaigns; http://ec.europa.eu/echo/resources-campaigns/campaigns_en

5. EU Aid Volunteers – We Care, We Act. *European Union Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection*. Available on: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=branding+eu+aid++voluntarisam+
6. EU Symbols. *European Union*. Available on: http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/index_en.htm
7. Ham, Peter Van. (2008). Placing Branding: The State of the Art. *American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Available on: http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20080300_cdsp_art_ham.pdf
8. How to Brand Europe: Proposals from a young Professionals Seminar (2.7.15). *United Europe, Competitive and Diverse*. Available on: <http://www.united-europe.eu/news-and-topics/from-the-initiative/a-young-professionals-seminar-on-how-to-brand-europe/>
9. Killer Facts; The Scale of the Global Arms-Trade. *Amnesty International*. (2015). Available on: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/killer-facts-the-scale-of-the-global-arms-trade/>
10. McClory, Jonathan. (2011). The New Persuaders II. A 2011 Global Ranking of Soft Power. *Institute for Government*. Available on: www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk.
11. Musaraj, A. (2013). Intercultural and Interreligious Communication in the Balkan. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 4(07), 36-43.
12. Nye, Joseph S. Jr. *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs, New York, 2004. Available on: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097998>
13. Vrajolli, M. (2018). Role and participation of women in the establishment and implementation of international security policies. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 9(17), 54-61.