



Edgar Thielmann

For sure you can help “EU can aid” (ECA)!

ECRIN : Mr. Thielmann, first of all, could you describe who you are, what was your professional career and what has led you to join “eu can aid!” - formerly called Europe - Tiers Monde.

ET: Well, I have just retired after a very rich professional career at the European Commission. I have been involved in cooperation projects with ACP countries, have been a founding member of ECHO, the European Community Humanitarian Office and also in charge of the reconstruction efforts in the Western Balkans after the terrible wars in 1992 and 1995. So in a sense, I am returning to the sources, i.e. show Interest for the people in countries which did not have the chance to be in the northern hemisphere and show solidarity. I think it is an obligation for all of us - and especially for those who have well secured their daily life, to think of the people in developing countries and to do something. We can achieve a lot with relatively little means. And we should not only follow the governmental approach, which is also needed, but complement it on a grass root level: contact between human beings! In other words, help the most vulnerable.

When I retired, I thought immediately to join ECA which I knew from the seventies, when I joined the European Association for Cooperation and then the European Commission. I have always been impressed by their approach: to finance or co-finance micro-projects, which fall out of scope for big donors and for many international NGO's. And the fact that members of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council are willing to spend time and money on this activity seems to me a real contribution to people in need. I am also impressed by the time and money dedicated by staff and 'stagiaires' to this activity. The project group, where I became a member of, meets every Tuesday over lunch-time in order to discuss project proposals, to follow up on projects until their very end and to ensure that 'value for money' is achieved.

Inhabitants of a village in TOGO, where EuCanAid has recently decided to support 12 women in the production of tomatoes, onions and red pepper

ECRIN: Could you please explain to the members of AIACE, what you see as an advantage of ECA in view of the many actors on the field? What makes it special and what is its 'raison d'être'?

ET: ECA has a unique position in the world of NGO's. Through the voluntary commitment of our members during the last 10 years the average administrative costs have been kept under 3%.we are able to keep the administrative cost below 5% and therefore all the resources are put into real projects. We are very close to our colleagues in the EEAS and the Delegations in the field. We know most of them personally and can call upon them when we feel that a personalized input is needed. This happens again obviously in their free time and without any service obligation. The staff of the European Institutions is able to show their dedication not only to care about the future of the European Union but also to show their solidarity and the human face of it to the world. Obviously this is only a relatively small contribution - compared to the governmental efforts and that of international NGO's. However, I feel that our contribution is well appreciated by the beneficiaries as well as the donor community. Our medium size contribution to projects is around 5,000 € and we try very hard to make sure that this money is well spent and gets to the beneficiaries without reductions.

ECRIN: What type of projects do you usually finance and where?

ET:Just to give you a few examples: creation of a well in TOGO, development of agro-ecology in SENEGAL, provision of furniture for a school in UGANDA, emergency aid for the PHILIPPINES, medical equipment for BHUTAN. You can see that we are helping in all regions in need - as far as our financial means allow this.

ECRIN: How does ECA finance itself and what can our members do to assist ECA?

ET: ECA has annual funds of about 200.000 € coming mostly from contributions of its members and from occasional donations. We have presently over 500 members, who pay a financial contribution to our projects. Frequently, officials invite their colleagues not to make the effort of a present for an anniversary or a farewell party - but to give the money to ECA.

This is a very good alternative and we appreciate such donations very much. Also we have partnerships with other organizations and raise money through stands or exhibitions.

On the other side, we receive always more and more project proposals for financing. The gap between the funds at our disposal and the good projects we could finance is always growing. We receive every day a request for financing - but with the limited financial resources we have - we cannot finance all projects which have been positively evaluated. Not even 10 % of the projects proposed can be financed. This is a serious problem and we need more financial means in order to support more valuable projects. I would like to invite your members to donate a part of their pensions to that great work which ECA is doing so that more funds could be made available to this sort of grass root level projects, which really help people in need to cope better in a very difficult environment.

ECRIN: Thank you very much for this interview. More information about the work of ECA can be found on their website: www.eucanaid.eu. ECA is also on facebook: www.facebook.com/EuCanAid

To make a donation : <http://www.europethird-world.eu/en/make-donation.html>

Bank account :

ING – 310-0240244-61

IBAN : BE62310024024461

BIC : BBRUBEBB