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LESSONS

FROM VISEGRAD DEVELOPMENT

COOPERATION PRACTICES

Recommendations for Hungary

Introduction

Following its re-launch in 2003, the Hungarian international development cooperation (IDC) policy worked without any mid- or long term strategy in the past decade.ⁱ At the same time, the legal and operative framework of the policy remained vastly unregulated, and until this day there is no overarching legislation that would have created a transparent legal environment for the policy. Considering this situation, the first Hungarian IDC strategy since the regime change, which currently, in 2013, is under formation, will mean a great leap forward. Its goal is to set clear priorities for the policy that are, unlike before, easier to follow, and building on which planning and programming is more feasible.

On February 25, 2013, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Hungarian Parliament submitted the parliamentary resolution proposal Nr. H/9414., entitled 'On the issue of the Hungarian international development cooperation policy,' by the adoption of which the Parliament called upon the government on March 5, 2013, to submit the finalized IDC strategy to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament by June 30, 2013.¹ During the general debate of the proposal, multiple speeches mentioned that while developing the strategy it would worth paying attention to the development activities of the other Visegrad countries,ⁱⁱ and outlining the Hungarian development strategy in line with those in order to provide an opportunity for cooperation.² The finalized framework strategy was presented to the Committee on June 17, 2013, calling for the preparation of an impact study, a general action plan, and a concrete action plan based on the framework strategy for the 2014-2016 period, as well as the submission of a proposal about the development of a legal act on international development cooperation and humanitarian aid.³

While practical cooperation with the Visegrad countries is also worth consideration, Hungary could, without doubt, learn from the experience of its Visegrad partners concerning the development of the IDC system itself, given that all its partners have more elaborate legal and strategic policy frameworks. Thus, the present paper aims at providing practical recommendations for the development of the legal, institutional and strategic framework of the Hungarian IDC policy by taking into account the Visegrad experience and practice as well as the views of non-governmental actors active in international development. The paper seeks to answer the following questions: *What lessons can be learnt from the IDC practice of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia? What are the main elements Hungary should consider adopting during the development of its new IDC strategy and the legislative as well as potentially a new institutional framework?*

i. The Hungarian government created the first, and until today the last, concept of the country's international development cooperation policy in 2001, but only charged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with its launch in 2003. Since then, IDC activities were implemented on a year by year basis not following any broader mid- or long term strategy or action plan.

ii. The Visegrad cooperation was founded in 1991 between Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. After the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, from 1993, the Visegrad Group has officially four members.

Albeit the Visegrad countries were mentioned under one umbrella throughout the parliamentary debates, it has to be noted that their IDC practices are significantly different. Therefore, in order to answer the questions, knowing the different systems is also elementary. To help understanding the differences, the paper will proceed as follows: it will provide an overview of the main legal, institutional and strategic specificities of the IDC systems, as well as of the civil participation in the development and implementation of the IDC strategies country by country. Along the way, it will incorporate the evaluation of the individual systems from the non-governmental perspective, building on reports published by non-governmental actors and interviews conducted with staff members of national umbrella organizations grouping non-governmental development organizations (NGDO), so-called national NGDO platforms.ⁱⁱⁱ The evaluation highlights elements of the IDC policies that are regarded as strengths by the civil actors, and the adoption of which could be considered during the formation of the Hungarian legislative framework and strategies. In order to avoid them, the main shortcomings will also be mentioned.

To conclude, the author recaps the ‘lessons learnt’ from the Visegrad partners to give concrete recommendations, and hence contribute to the discussion concerning the Hungarian IDC policy and the development of its institutional and regulatory framework.

iii. The NGDO platforms bring together non-governmental organizations active in international development cooperation from the respective countries. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted in April-May 2013 with staff members of all Visegrad NGDO platforms, apart from HAND in Hungary: Czech Forum for Development Cooperation (FoRS) and the Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights (DEMAS) in the Czech Republic, the Zagranica Group in Poland and the Slovak NGDO Platform (MVRO) in Slovakia. Albeit the low number of the interviews inevitably hampers the representativeness of the research, the contacted organizations, providing a platform for NGOs active in the respective countries, have potentially the widest civil perspective on IDC. Additionally, an interview has been conducted with an employee of one of the major NGOs in the Czech Republic. When referring to the interviewees, I opt for the label “staff member” or “employee” instead of “representative” in order to avoid suggesting that the stated views are representative of the organization as a whole. Due to the request of some, all interviewees remain anonymous in the paper.

1. International Development Cooperation in the Czech Republic

Judging from its international recognition, the Czech Republic seems to have the most developed IDC system from among the Visegrad countries. It joined the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD DAC) in May 2013 after undergoing an accession review during the preceding months.⁴ With regards to its IDC system, the Czech Republic significantly differs from the other V4 countries: as opposed to having a unified framework that covers all aspects of development cooperation, it opted for a division between the classic, hard areas of development policy, also laid out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (e.g. poverty reduction, health, education, social development), and transition policy (democratization and human rights) – an area typically highlighted in the new EU member states' IDC policy. This division, which first occurred in 2004 and is institutionally in place in its current form since 2007, is apparent both in the legislative framework, on the level of official policy planning and implementation as well as on the level of the non-governmental development organizations (NGDO).

1.1. Legal and institutional framework of development cooperation

The first overarching legislative act about classic development cooperation and humanitarian aid was only adopted in 2010.⁵ As opposed to the practice of other Visegrad countries, areas of transition policy are not subject to this Act, and are hence conducted under different rules and procedures.⁶ The Act defines the terms and the goals of development cooperation and humanitarian aid. While it also lists the promotion of democracy and human rights among the aims, poverty eradication and the MDGs are listed in the first place. Such definition of the goals is generally in line with the internationally accepted definitions favoring development support for the least developed countries as opposed to democracy and transition support typically for middle-income countries, which are frequent targets of the new donors of Central Europe.

The Act allocates the competences in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian aid and names the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as the main actor responsible for strategic and annual planning, coordination of development activities of other ministries^{iv} and making financial decisions within the government-allocated fiscal limits.⁷ With regards to humanitarian aid allocation, countries outside of the EU are under the MFA's competence, while the Ministry of Interior decides about the allocation of humanitarian aid within the EU. In practice, it means that the Department of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid was put in charge of the policy area in the MFA, and decision-making and the financial flows concerning IDC

iv. The Act does not specify it, but according to Concord Europe's Aid Watch Report 2012, some aid modalities are controlled by other ministries: scholarships by the Ministry of Education, health insurance for foreign students by the Ministry of Health, modalities concerning security and migration by the Ministry of Interior, Aid for Trade by the Ministry of Industry and economic technical assistance by the Ministry of Finance.

became significantly centralized. This resulted in a clearer institutional setting and meant that the line-ministries lost their direct control over the allocation of aid. This step seems to affect the work of the Council for Development Cooperation, an inter-ministerial consultative body working towards policy coherence. The fact that the budget became centralized resulted in the line-ministries losing their interest, not sending high-enough representation, and thus not contributing effectively to the conduct of the policy.⁸

While the MFA is in charge of strategic planning, coordination and control, implementation is the task of the Czech Development Agency (CzDA)^v re-established under the provisions of the Act in 2010. The CzDA, running both grants schemes and tenders, is responsible for full project circle management of bilateral development projects, independent from the MFA. This independence is regarded positively by the interviewed civil actors as they believe it guarantees that the Agency is not subjected to direct political interests, what might sometimes be the case with the Ministry. Nonetheless, despite the good impressions about the division of tasks, it was highlighted by the interviewees that closer links would be necessary between policy planning and the selection of projects, as sometimes there seems to be no clear linkage between the two phases of the IDC policy. Moreover, currently the Agency can only manage grants for projects. It cannot finance longer, multi-year programs,⁹ even though the latter would be more effective in creating the linkage between planning and implementation.

1.2. Strategic framework of development cooperation

The current IDC strategy,¹⁰ addressing mainly the bilateral development cooperation of the Czech Republic, is valid for 2010-17, which is a uniquely long period in the region. Nevertheless, all Czech interviewees argued that the longer period the strategy covers, the better, since such long-term planning is necessary to achieve something visible and to have a stable, predictable system. Although the strategy covers a long period, it still leaves room for the review of geographic and sectoral priorities. Thus, there is a certain degree of adjustability encoded in the system.

Without going into much detail about the strategy, it shall be noted that Czech bilateral development assistance differentiates between program and project countries. The former includes five partners (Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Moldova and Mongolia), among which we find both least developed, developing and middle-income countries. Nonetheless, in this framework development assistance is spent on addressing classic development goals in all countries. For these five countries, country strategy papers have been developed outlining in detail the sectoral priorities of the cooperation.^{vi} Even though, theoretically,

v. Discussions about a development agency were on-going since 2004-05 in the Czech Republic, however, the real work concerning the establishment only started in 2006. The Czech Development Agency was first set up by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2008 and was then re-established by the Act of 21 April 2010 on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, and Amending Related Laws. Some say that the thus strengthened Agency could only start to operate with its “full potential” in 2012. This little detour is here to illustrate what a lengthy process the establishment of a development agency might be.

vi. Country strategies are available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic with the exception of the strategy for Afghanistan.

the strategy papers were developed in cooperation with the recipient countries, in practice, the platforms would welcome the stronger involvement of stakeholders.¹¹ Having country strategies, though, does not necessarily make the work and the planning of the Czech NGOs easier. Their activities and activeness in the given country is first and foremost dependent on whether the priority area identified is accessible for the NGO sector and not whether it was identified in a country strategy.

The strategy is implemented on the basis of annual Development Cooperation Plans containing a 2-year outlook, and with the use of aligned annual budgets. After the NGO platform was consulted, the annual IDC budget plan is submitted to the government for approval well ahead of the start of the budgetary year in question (ideally already in May).¹² The development assistance outlined in the annual plans is allocated through the following modalities: 1) technical cooperation, which is the preferred form of assistance; 2) grants and public procurement managed by the Agency; 3) small-scale local projects, based on local needs, and profiting from the local knowledge of the Czech mission, the implementation of which is monitored by the Czech representations in the target countries. To support the local, small-scale projects, NGOs regularly raised that the diplomatic missions should be strengthened by Agency staff, who are managers and have expertise in development projects.¹³ This initiative, however, did not gain political support, but nonetheless is reiterated in the Aid Watch report about the Czech Republic.¹⁴

The country also uses trilateral support, albeit, according to civil actors, it should be strengthened as it is clearly not a favored modality at the moment, despite its potential for becoming a learning tool and multiplying the effectiveness of Czech development aid. Scholarships, which are provided through the Ministry of Education, are viewed critically from the development perspective, as their role in poverty reduction is not significant, given that students often do not return to their countries of origin to use their knowledge there.¹⁵

1.3. Civil participation

The division of classic development and transition policy brought separation among the NGOs. They have organized themselves under two platforms over time: the Czech Forum for Development Cooperation (FoRS) and the Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights (DEMAS). Bringing together several dozens of NGOs, these platforms play a major role in the cooperation between the governmental and the non-governmental sector. Despite this cooperation is not regulated by official documents in either case, such as by a Memorandum of Understanding, all non-governmental actors asked regard it as rather successful. They argue that this way there is more flexibility and neither side is bound to follow a certain procedure when communicating with the other. In fact, the overall perception of civil-governmental cooperation by those asked was generally positive and was considered progressive.

FoRS has a significant role in contributing to the debate about IDC policy through its various working groups (WG). Mostly, it is the Board of the platform that represents the pre-agreed position of the WGs towards the decision-makers, although the WGs can also get directly involved in developing strategies. However, the extent of involvement varies from topic to topic, and depends to a great extent on the available human capacity of those affected. For

example, the WG on development education could participate directly in the development of the Czech Republic's global education strategy.

During the formulation of the 2010–17 development strategy, and now during the review, the civil sector was and is consulted. Concerning the selection of the main target countries and sectoral priorities, the platform had a say in establishing the selection criteria and can now present its views during the review process. However, there are competing interests within the platform due to the different profiles of the member organizations, and hence, the impact is limited. Regional roundtables were also organized during the review process for organizations active in the different geographic regions, thus, officially, NGOs are provided with the fora to give feedback. Additionally, the platform is present at the meetings of the previously mentioned Council for Development Cooperation.

As a shortcoming of civil participation, it was highlighted by interviewees that no cooperation exists between the NGO sector and the Parliament. While the lack of formalized consultations turned out to be advantageous in relations with the MFA, in this case it is a significant disadvantage. The establishment of cooperation would be beneficial from the NGOs' point of view, as it could give a higher visibility for the policy in front of the decision-makers.

1.4. Transition policy

The Czech Republic runs a transition policy program that is smaller in size compared to the classic development cooperation. Due to the regional specificities, this policy area can be considered as a form of development assistance, so we mention it here briefly, even though it is treated separately both by the governmental and the non-governmental actors involved. This area is addressed by the equally 8-year long Transition Promotion Program 2010–17 (TPP), run by the MFA's Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy, which is responsible for planning, coordination and financial management.¹⁶

The program runs regular grant schemes and targets civil society organizations both from and outside the Czech Republic, which implement annual and multiannual projects in the ten target countries in order to strengthen their civil society, youth, media and human rights defenders as well as cooperation with local authorities. Even though everything is managed by the MFA, the priorities remained the same despite government changes, which reflects a consensus on the topic.

The NGO platform, DEMAS, is the main non-governmental actor working on the relations between the MFA and the NGO sector engaged in democracy promotion and transition policy. Their cooperation with the MFA's relevant department is considered very effective and meetings are held frequently, according to a staff member of DEMAS. It was also noted that the un-institutionalized form of cooperation serves the parties' needs better and provides more flexibility. The interviewee added that some of the MFA employees working on the topic have civil experience, and due to the personnel's rotation in the MFA, they can gain experience in the target countries.¹⁷ In the author's opinion, this professional background might have contributed to the development of the current situation, where good cooperation can be maintained between the governmental and non-governmental sector even without institutional guarantees.

2. International Development Cooperation in Poland

The Polish system of international development cooperation underwent its most recent reform in 2011/2012, which after several failed attempts, have brought about the adoption of the country's first overarching legal act on IDC. This means that experiences are relatively fresh under the current system, which in many aspects is still developing. Nonetheless, it is worth considering the strengths and the weaknesses of this new framework and linking back to previous experiences when relevant, since the current environment is more elaborate than the previous one.

2.1. Legal and institutional framework of development cooperation

The Act on Development Cooperation entered into force on January 1, 2012, which also marks the start of the current mid-term Development Strategy, valid until 2015. The Act was certainly necessary since previously no legislative framework existed that would have regulated the policy area. In this legal act, development cooperation was defined, the forms of development assistance were listed, annual planning was introduced and the responsible bodies were identified for the first time.¹⁸ The overall IDC system definitely became more transparent, but the NGOs voiced their criticism in several matters. First of all, the definition of development cooperation adopted is not in line with the standard provisions enacted in other countries. Instead of making poverty reduction the main priority in line with internationally accepted goals and provisions, the Polish IDC policy identifies the promotion and support for democracy and civil society as the main goals of development cooperation.¹⁹ This preference is clearly reflected also by the allocation of funds under the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme, where 60-70% of all bilateral development assistance is channeled into democratization and transformation, while the rest is simply labeled “other measures.”²⁰

In Poland's case, the modalities of development cooperation are listed in the Act and not in the strategy like in the Czech Republic. The list is quite wide and mostly viewed positively, e.g. providing the possibility of direct budget support is praised as in the platform's opinion it can strengthen the acknowledgement of the recipient country's needs during the use of the aid. Nevertheless, loan activities and operations on partner countries' debts are criticized, being activities that should not be considered development assistance in the opinion of NGOs and the European Commission.²¹

The main institutional body responsible for IDC is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is in charge of both strategic planning and implementation. While before the Act there were two departments covering these two tasks, currently there is only one: the Development Cooperation Department under the National Coordinator for Development Cooperation. The National Coordinator has the position of Under Secretary of State that aims to highlight the importance of the policy area. Even though all activities are under one department, the tasks are divided among several units within – one being in charge of planning and two in charge of implementation. (The division is between the countries of Eastern Europe and everything else, showing well the geographic priority.) This means that the Polish IDC system

works without development agency. According to a staff member of the Zagranica Group, the Polish NGDO platform gathering 58 Polish non-governmental organizations, right after the reforms the civil sector does not consider it such a pressing issue, and there is no debate in the NGDO sector about whether there would be a need for one.²² MFA officials interviewed also indicated that it is not on the table right now, because running an agency would not be cost effective until development assistance is such a small sum.²³

Another implementing body, apart from the Foreign Ministry, is the International Solidarity Fund (ISF),^{vii} an institutionally independent re-granting organization that supports democratization projects conducted by civil society organizations in a set of countries defined specifically by the Fund. Like the MFA, the ISF also uses public money allocated through the government, but there is no clear division of labor yet between the activities of the MFA and the ISF. At the moment, for example, the very same non-governmental organizations can apply both to the MFA and to the ISF to conduct development projects in the same countries. There are, thus, overlaps acknowledged even by interviewees in the MFA. In the future, this matter shall be clarified in order to strengthen the transparency of the system. What seems to be the added-value of the ISF at this stage is that, for example, it can support opposition groups in authoritarian countries without the Polish government's direct involvement – something that might be more problematic, if it was done through the MFA.

While the MFA is the most important actor of IDC, the line-ministries also conduct activities, which can be classified as official development assistance. The Act established the Development Cooperation Policy Council as an advisory and consultative body, where all ministries are represented on the level of under-secretary of state, joined by six representatives of the civil sector. Nonetheless, according to the NGDO platform's staff member, communication between the ministries is not sufficient, and in this regard the Council, established only in 2012, has not lived up to its potential yet. But in his view the potential is clearly there.

vii. The Development Cooperation Act refers to the International Solidarity Fund as the Polish Foundation for International Development Cooperation “Know How”. The legal basis of the two organizations is the same. The ISF took over the registration of the latter and was (re-)launched in 2012.

2.2. Strategic framework of development cooperation

The most important change the new Act brought about was the introduction of multi-annual strategizing and IDC implementation based on annual plans accepted ahead of the calendar year. Previously, this was missing and made the system less predictable and transparent for the NGDO sector. The first Multi-Annual Program was accepted for the period of 4 years, for 2012-2015. This is the shortest period the Act allows, and in fact, has advantages compared to the Czech 8-year-long strategy. Since this is the first time Poland's IDC works on a multi-annual programming basis, the short period seems to be useful as it allows for relatively quick corrections. Additionally, since a new multi-annual program needs to start in 2016, the adjustments can surely appear in the strategy. This might not be the case if only a review was scheduled without guarantees for incorporating the results.

The Multi-Annual Program covers three main areas: development cooperation, humanitarian aid and global education. The main goal of global education, an area that is

treated separately in the Czech Republic in its own strategic framework, is to raise awareness about international development through formal education, and also through financing a volunteering program for Polish citizens in developing countries. According to a staff member of the Zagranica Group, the area functions quite well, a memorandum of understanding, easing the cooperation, exists between the involved ministries and NGOs, and all in all, the topic is rather visible.

The Polish strategy does not differentiate between program or project countries. Theoretically, all target countries have the same importance, but the financial allocations outlined in the annual plans clearly show that the priority is the six countries of the Eastern Partnership.^{viii} Apart from these six, thirteen other countries are listed as development targets, among which we find least developed and under-aided countries as well as countries of the Arab Spring. Two broad, cross-cutting thematic priorities have also been identified: the first and more significant is support for democracy and human rights; the second is political and economic transformation. To narrow down the scope, three specific sectoral priority areas have been identified for each partner country to orient the allocation of aid. In this sense, these specific priorities take the place of country strategies. Maximizing the priority areas in each country's case is certainly a logical step, especially with such a high number of targets. Nonetheless, this does not make up for having country strategies, since even the annual plans where the priorities are laid out in more detail, are not as specific and targeted as the mutually agreed country-specific development plans could be.

viii. The Eastern Partnership is an EU program launched in 2009 to bring closer the six countries of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) to the EU. Poland was and remains a strong advocate of the initiative.

As mentioned before, the multi-annual program is implemented on the basis of annual plans. The main modality applied in bilateral development cooperation, open to NGOs, is open calls for proposal under several activity areas listed in the annual plan.²⁴ Since these plans are published before the start of the calendar year, they can significantly help the work of the NGO sector by informing them in time about the upcoming opportunities. Nevertheless, a criticism was voiced that the results of the ground calls are often not delivered early enough and NGOs can only start to work on the project much into the calendar year, having limited time for the implementation.²⁵ The selection procedure of ground competitions is considered transparent as the Zagranica Group has the opportunity to observe the evaluation and selection process. This added-value is limited, though, because the NGO platform has no access to the project proposals.²⁶ Another problem with the selection of the projects is the lack of local and topic-specific expertise during their assessment. Additionally, the lack of systematic evaluation of implemented projects is also very problematic and should be addressed.²⁷

Another modality civil society organizations might benefit from is the Small Grants Program of Poland conducted through the diplomatic missions in the target countries. The downside, though, is the same as in the Czech case: the embassies have no expert staff on development issues.

2.3. Civil participation

One of the main arenas of civil participation is the previously mentioned Development Cooperation Policy Council, where the Zagranica Group has 2 seats out of the 6 held by civil actors and out of the 21 all together. This Council provides an opportunity to the civil representatives to have a say in the selection of geographic and thematic priorities as well as in the formation of multi-annual and annual development programs and plans.²⁸

Furthermore, there is an additional guarantee for the civil sector to have their voice heard. After the adoption of the Act, a new document was accepted that identifies the terms and conditions of cooperation between the civil actors and the MFA. It introduced obligatory, at least two-week long public consultation on a wide range of IDC related documents. The MFA has to summarize the feedback it received during these consultations and explain why or why not it incorporated it into the revised version of the documents.²⁹ The public consultation was put in place for the first time during the formation of the Multi-Annual Program, and while from an institutional point of view it worked smoothly, the final document did not address all NGDO comments.³⁰

The document about the terms and conditions also outlines regular consultations (at least two a year) between the National Coordinator for Development Cooperation and civil actors involved in IDC activities. The interview with a staff member of the NGDO platform confirmed that the consultations do take place. He assessed the regulation of cooperation positively, underlining that this way regular contacts are guaranteed for the civil sector. Whether their recommendations are taken into account is another question: for this, obviously, there are no guarantees as the results of the meetings are non-binding.³¹ Nevertheless, the document is viewed as a good starting point and just like the Development Cooperation Policy Council, it has a good potential to become more substantive.

Like in the Czech Republic, lack of direct access to and partnership with the decision-makers was a complaint in Poland, as well. Development cooperation is discussed in the Foreign Policy Committee of the Sejm and there is also a Committee on Eastern Partnership and one on Africa, but this makes the attention fragmented and the NGOs have no direct contact to a distinct group of decision-makers. An institutionalized sub-committee dealing specifically with international development cooperation would already make collaboration more permanent and transparent.

3. International Development Cooperation in Slovakia

Slovakia is the smallest donor among the Visegrad countries when looking at the absolute amount of its official development aid. This fact does not keep it from setting rather ambitious goals, though; let that be selecting as many target countries as Poland or defining a rather wide range of sectoral priorities. But what might provide the most valuable lessons, is the institutional and legal framework of the Slovak IDC that has been in place for the longest time in the Visegrad region.

3.1. Legal and institutional framework of development cooperation

Slovakia's first overarching legal act regulating international development cooperation and humanitarian aid is Act No. 617/2007 Coll.,³² which entered into force in 2008, as the first such act in the Visegrad region. The institutional and legal framework outlined in this act is practically in force ever since with some important additions, e.g. Act No. 545/2010 amending the former concerning the granting of subsidies by the MFA for IDC.³³ Act No. 617/2007 defines development assistance and its goals in line with the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, according to the act, Slovakia puts more emphasis on the classic development aspects. The practice is more mixed, though, and democratization as well as sharing Slovakia's transition experience got an increasing role over the years.

Also Act No. 617/2007 defines the competences and responsibilities of the main institutions involved in international development cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is tasked with strategic planning, programming and coordination among the other actors. In practice, it is the Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid that is in charge, which, however, works with a rotating staff who are not specifically development experts. Line-ministries also participate in development cooperation aside from the MFA.

The implementation of bilateral and trilateral development cooperation policy is the task of the Slovak Development Agency established by the very same legal act. It is, however, worth considering that Poland, managing more than four times as much aid in nominal terms (USD 416.91m) as Slovakia (USD 86.02m), regards maintaining an agency not cost-effective, while Slovakia does not.³⁴ In relative terms both spend 0.08-0.09% of their GNI on official development aid.³⁵ Despite this, the legitimacy of the existence of the Agency per se is not questioned, but the Slovak NGDO platform, MVRO, did point out that in the current format too much administrative burden is put both on the Agency and on the NGDOs applying for grants. The complaint was raised already in 2011 in the Slovak Aid Watch Report written by the platform, and was reiterated in the interview with an MVRO staff member in April 2013.³⁶

The increasing interest of the official IDC policy in sharing the Slovak transition experience and supporting political and economic transition led to the establishment of the Centre for Experience Transfer in Integration and Reforms (CETIR) in 2011 with the aim of "intensifying contacts of Slovak experts with representatives of state authorities in countries of the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership or other transition countries."³⁷ While it formally does not

exclude civil society organizations from the circle of the beneficiaries, it is first and foremost targeted to public administration.³⁸ Hence, in this regard, CETIR differs from the Polish ISP and the Czech TPP.

3.2. Strategic framework of development cooperation

The strategic goals of the Slovak IDC policy are laid out under the at least five-year-long Medium Term Strategies as regulated in Act No. 617/2007, and they include the strategy for bilateral, trilateral and multilateral development cooperation as well as humanitarian aid and global education. The implementation of the Medium Term Strategy is based on annual plans, so-called National ODA Programs, which give a detailed overview about the specific annual goals and tasks in the different target countries and thematic areas for the given financial year with clear benchmarks and indicators.

The forms of development funding are divided between the multilateral and bilateral forms in the current Medium Term Strategy for 2009-2013. Among the bilateral modalities, the system of calls for proposals, run by the Agency, is the most significant.³⁹ With regards to the calls for proposals, a staff member of MVRO pointed out that the administrative procedure is way too complicated even though manuals are provided. The evaluation of proposals is done by officials and not development experts – a complaint raised in Poland, as well. This practice is assessed negatively by NGDO actors and was addressed in MVRO's recent evaluation of Slovak development assistance.⁴⁰

Establishing the main directions of Slovak development cooperation, the bilateral section identifies three program and sixteen project countries. The three program countries (Afghanistan, Kenya and Serbia⁴¹) are officially considered as priority, and country strategies should have been developed and signed between them and Slovakia. However, these papers have still not been formulated and even the National Program for 2013 lists this task to be done in 2013.⁴² The number of the target countries is surprisingly high for a country with such limited financial means available for its bilateral ODA policy. This has been most likely recognized by the officials, as well, because the yearly National Programs focus on less than nineteen targets, and in most cases they prioritize the less costly technical assistance in sharing Slovakia's transition experience in the project countries. In the program countries, it does continue to work on classic development goals: health, education, and poverty related issues.⁴³

The Slovak strategic documents discuss trilateral cooperation quite extensively. Given the size of Slovakia's IDC program, it is a very rational decision to engage in trilateral assistance, and for relatively new donors, even for those with higher financial contributions, it is worth considering. The documents also discuss global education, for which a strategy was adopted in 2012, and in relation to this, the same year Slovakia also started its volunteer program.⁴⁴

3.3. Civil participation

Civil participation is strengthened by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) adopted in 2010 between the MFA and the Slovak NGDO platform. According to an employee of MVRO, it has significantly improved cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental

IDC sector. This MoU granted regular consultation opportunity to MVRO with the Ministry on various levels and on various topics. According to the document, the platform can consult the Foreign Minister once a year, the State Secretary twice and can meet the Head of the development department, as well. The memorandum proved to be very beneficial to secure the position of the platform, especially in times of government change.⁴⁵

Representatives of the NGDO sector also participate at the meetings of a Coordination Council, a formal body meeting yearly to discuss and comment on the National Program in its preparatory phase. The NGDO platform also participates in these discussions, but in the view of one staff member, this forum has a limited impact. The general impression is that the civil society is listened to the most in those instances when decisions have to be made about those target countries where Slovakia does not have an embassy. Otherwise, the platform is involved in the development of the strategy, and is currently even supported by the MFA to hold public consultations in the process of strategic planning for the period after 2013.⁴⁶

4. Recommendations and Lessons Learnt for the Hungarian International Development Policy

The previous overviews and evaluations showed that the Visegrad countries have big institutional and strategic differences between their IDC systems. All of them have strengths and weaknesses, thus when developing its own institutional and legal framework as well as strategic documents, Hungary should adopt those good practices from the different systems which fit its own specificities and goals the best. The following section will collect some lessons learnt from Hungary's three Visegrad partners in order to contribute to this work in progress. The lessons will be arranged thematically, following the structure of the country introductions.

4.1. Development of the legal and institutional framework

Conversations with the representatives of NGDOs showed that the adoption of an overarching legislative framework was considered by the civil sphere active in development assistance to be a significant improvement. Having a legal basis for the policy gave more stability to the system and added to the acceptance of the policy area's importance. In all cases, it is now less subjected to the changing political motivations of the governments in place. Additionally, the legal act shows the country's commitment to international development, and for this reason, serves as a reference point for the civil sector.

Naturally, the content of the legal act regulating development cooperation matters at least as much as the existence of the act itself. The basic definitions and principles of development assistance and humanitarian aid shall be in line with those international commitments, values and principles the country signed up to. This is also valid for the goals of development cooperation, where the Visegrad countries have a tendency to put increasing emphasis on democratization and sharing their transition experience instead of on the classic development goals. Hence, already when defining the goals, a balance should be found between the two areas because the implementation of IDC will build on these.

The act should identify the circle of actors involved in the conduct of international development cooperation from the stages of strategic planning and programming to that of implementation and evaluation. Regardless of the differences the IDC systems hold, the main actor of IDC policy is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in all three Visegrad partner countries. Presumably, this will not be different in Hungary either. The question is rather how to divide competences and whether there is need for a separate development agency responsible for implementation. Judging from the experience of the Visegrad partners, there are arguments for and against. All in all, having a structurally independent implementing agency that deals with the managerial tasks of development cooperation might give more stability to the system by encountering less direct political influence on the selection and implementation of projects. As long as line-ministries also participate in development assistance, channeling all the development activities originally conducted by them and the MFA to the agency, and then implementing them through this independent body, would reduce burden on the ministries. At the same time, it would significantly facilitate the coordination of all development activities.

However, authorities might find that at this stage there is no political will, capacity or financial reason to establish a separate agency, as it was the case in Poland. In such case, considering the Polish model might be an option. Within the responsible MFA department, the introduction of the division between country-related planning, programming tasks on the one hand and implementation tasks on the other might be a viable solution to optimize the functioning of a small department. From the NGDO perspective, such a structure might be beneficial, as it could clearly define responsables and contact points concerning the different geographic targets.

The act should also list the modalities of development assistance and should respect those international developments which exclude certain activities from the list of potential modalities, e.g. loans and debt related activities. Support for development projects implemented by NGDOs should be continued, and the establishment of a clear and predictable system of calls for proposal would be also crucial. Continuing the involvement of Hungary's diplomatic missions in IDC activities in the target countries through a small grant program would also be beneficial, but it would be worth considering the placement of development experts in these missions, at least in the most prioritized countries.

4.2. Development of the strategic framework

Apart from the basic definitions of terms, principles, goals, modalities and the institutional structure, the act also needs to determine on what strategic document the implementation of the policy should be based. It is important to decide about the main characteristics of this document in the legislative act as this makes the steps of the strategic planning process more predictable and enforceable. Such characteristics are e.g. the length of the period and the forms of development assistance the strategic document covers; the type of document that orients the strategy's direct implementation; and the frequency of review processes, which adjust the specific goals and means of the strategy to the changing policy environment.

The length of the period covered by the strategy should be carefully considered. While a relatively long-term strategy, like in the Czech case, might seem a good way to show commitment, it is only acceptable if regular reviews are scheduled, and they entail the adaption of the strategy to the results. For this reason, shorter, 4-5-year strategies might be more advantageous, since this way the policy can be adjusted quicker to the changing environment.

The strategy should cover the bilateral and the multilateral development cooperation, humanitarian aid and global education/awareness raising. While so far it was not an important element of its IDC, Hungary should consider putting more emphasis on engaging in trilateral development cooperation. It would multiply the effectiveness of Hungarian aid, would serve as a learning tool when cooperating with more established donors, and could be a tool for strengthening the cooperation of Visegrad partners in countries and areas of their common interest – whilst, in the latter case, not forgetting about the basic principle of complementarity, either.

With regards to bilateral development assistance, the target countries should be identified in the strategy. Learning from the experience of the Visegrad partners, this list should not be overambitious and should take into account Hungary's financial possibilities. This also applies to the number of sectoral priorities, which should be assigned to the individual coun-

tries instead of setting them broadly. When selecting the geographic and sectoral priorities, it is essential to consult development actors active abroad in order to make an informed decision, and complement the governmental priorities with local, civil knowledge. Moreover, in order to strengthen the ownership of development assistance in the recipient country, country strategies should be developed at least with the main target countries.

The actual implementation of the strategy should be based on annual plans that are adopted before the start of the financial year in question. These documents should be adopted as action plans with clear annual goals and tasks identified for all forms of cooperation and all geographic and sectoral areas. To facilitate the work of the non-governmental actors and the cooperation between the governmental and the civil sector, the annual plan should also outline the timeline and topic of the upcoming calls for proposals. Such an approach would not only make the conduct of IDC policy more transparent, but would also ease the task of the creation of annual reports at the end of the year.

4.3. Lessons for strengthening civil participation

There is an active Hungarian non-governmental sector providing development assistance and humanitarian aid in Hungary's partner countries that accumulated a valuable body of expert and local knowledge. Hence, their involvement in the development of the new legal, institutional and strategic framework of Hungary's international development cooperation policy and in its conduct is in the utmost interest of the governmental sector. It is a question of experience and of culture of collaboration whether there is need for an institutionalized and regulated framework of cooperation between the civil and the governmental sector. However, since the policy area is currently changing, and most likely some adjustments will take place even after the adoption of the new legislative framework and strategy, it would give the civil sector a sense of predictability if the very basic rules and procedures of the cooperation were laid down in a memorandum of understanding.

This document could be modeled on the Polish document on the rules of cooperation laying out the frequency and method of consultations on different governmental levels, and enlisting the type of documents that should be consulted with the civil sector before their adoption. This category should include most importantly the draft of the legislative act and later its modifications, all strategic documents and their modifications, and, if chosen, the annual plans and budget. Respecting a realistic length of public consultation (at least two weeks) and addressing the comments and recommendations made by the civil sector is crucial. However, what is laid out in such a memorandum of understanding should be regarded as a minimum, and it would be desirable to provide an opportunity for ad hoc consultations initiated by representatives of the civil sector.

Setting up a council on development cooperation involving both officials and representatives of the civil society or even reviving and combining the already existing Inter-ministerial Committee on International Development Cooperation and the IDC Social Advisory Body would be beneficial. Such a consultative and advisory body can provide forum for coordination between the ministries, a potential agency and representatives of the non-governmental sectors, especially when determining the actual activities necessary for achieving the goals set in the strategy. Regardless whether an agency is created, representatives of the NGDO sector,

having an important role in the implementation of the strategy, should also be offered the chance to oversee the selection procedure of projects submitted for the MFA's or the agency's calls for proposals after getting to know their content. In order to provide an additional expert support, the selection committee should consist not only of the employees of the MFA or the agency, but also of independent experts with specialized knowledge on development policy and on the priority countries and sectors.

* * *

After considering these lessons and good practices in the areas of the legal, institutional and strategic framework and civil participation in IDC policy, one must admit that the above list, of course, does not cover all aspects of the conduct of international development cooperation. Other studies could most definitely add more to the present analysis. However, we hope that the above recommendations will prove to be a useful addition to the debate about how Hungary's international development cooperation policy should be developed.

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Lessons from Visegrad Development Cooperation Practices – Recommendations for Hungary

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This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union, EuropeAid Programme, in the frame of the “V4Aid –United Support for Millenium Development Goals” project. The contents of this publication can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.