Official Development Assistance
in the Visegrad Countries

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- "Polska Pomoc Rozwojowa" Grupa Zagranica, Warszawa 2007
- "Jak Česká republika pomáha - studie o zahraniční rozvojové spolupráci ČR za rok 2007". FoRS, Praha 2008
- "Informácia o oficiálnej rozvojovej pomoci poskytnutej Slovenskou republikou v roku 2007". MINISTERSTVO ZAHRANIČNÝCH VECÍ SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY Bratislava 23. apríl 2008

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The beginnings of the engagement in development issues

Late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by a strong flow of development funds to the countries of the region. It was a time when civil society ideas were strongly promoted and many NGOs were set up in order to conduct development projects within their own countries. They enjoyed both financial and substantial support of foreign donors (such as NED, USAID, Westminster Foundation for Democracy etc.) who were especially interested in supporting democratic changes in the region. Today Visegrad states and societies are themselves involved in the development processes of various countries in the world. The paths to that engagement were many.

One of them started in the mid of 1990s, when the beginning of the accession processes to the NATO and the European Union has started. Recognizing positive changes in the region many donors withdrawn their interest from the states of the Visegrad Group (V4). However that was not the end of the cooperation between those partners. Many donors appreciating the work of the Eastern European NGOs and acknowledging their efforts in the field of civil society building invited them to the collaboration in the similar field of activities, but this time in the post soviet countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia. For many NGOs that was a first involvement in foreign countries – among which many were enlisted at the ODA recipient list of OECD/DAC.

The other route was directly linked to the relief aid for victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts. The events in Yugoslavia and later in Chechen revealed that V4 societies strongly sympathize with those in the need of humanitarian aid. Emergency responses, fundraising campaigns for relief actions have been initiated by NGOs but also supported by governments. These humanitarian campaigns, which often rendered into long-term involvement and engagement in the post-conflict rehabilitation, lead to increase of the interest in the development issues.

With time, the issues of development were getting more attention. Next to the initiatives focusing on democratization efforts, specific development projects were designed and implemented. Often they were undertaken by organizations dedicated to environmental issues which due to

their scope of activities were regional leaders in taking up problems of sustainable development (for instance BOCS Foundation in Hungary, Polish Green Network).

Simultaneously religious (predominantly Christian) organizations (especially Polish and Slovak) working in the developing countries were continuing the work they started in the socialist era, increasingly involving development projects in their activities. They were attracting relatively many volunteers being the one out of few offering work opportunities in the Global South. These organizations however had to adjust their work methods to the changing standards of the development practice. They also had to learn how to cope with the new socio-economic realities of the V4 countries.

Other organizations, such as national committees of the UNICEF or Red Cross which for years have been focused on the work for the benefits of V4 nations, faced similar challenges. With the rising living and economic standards in the Visegrad states those organizations redirected their interest to the other regions, repositioning V4 countries from being recipient to being a donor of the development assistance.

Legal frame for Official Development Assistance (ODA)

Meanwhile, the V4 states were also slowly involving in the development issues. First official initiatives were taken up in the second half of the 1990s (for example for **Czech Republic** that was the Czech Government Decision no. 153 of 15 March 1995 which approved **the** *Principles for Providing Foreign Aid*, while first official Polish Aid projects took place in 1998). The processes were sped up by the approaching EU accession which required acceptance of international documents such as the *Cotonou Agreement*[1], *Monterrey Consensus*[2], and the *United Nations Millennium Declaration*[3] together with *Millennium Development Goals*[4] (MDG). They obliged states to get involved as donors in bringing aid to less developed countries. The V4 states were also committed to create the institutional structures of an Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The creation of those institution prove, however, to be a big challenge and each country has been taking it up in its own manner and time. For instance, the **Slovak** Government approved the *Concept of Development Assistance* as soon as on 7 July 1999. The Government of Hungary approved the Concept Paper of the **Hungarian** *Development Cooperation Policy* in 2001. In 2003 International Development Cooperation Interdepartmental Committee has accepted the resolution on its operating order including the list of strategic partner countries and sectors for cooperation[5]. The **Czech** Republic, on the other hand, only in 2002 presented *The Concept of the Czech Republic Foreign Aid Program for the 2002 – 2007 Period*. The document was defining Czech Aid's territorial and sector priorities. It also offered some hither to evaluation of the Czech development assistance and offered suggestions for the future[6]. The **Polish** attempt to fulfil international development commitments was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2003 *Strategy for Poland's Development Co-operation*[7].

1. Africa Caribbean Pacific – European Union, *Partnership Agreement*, Contonou, 2000, Luxemburg, 2005.
2. United Nations, *Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development*, Monterrey 2002. http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/Monterrey_Consensus.htm
3. United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, New York, 2000.
4. United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals*, New York, 2000, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary, Hungary: *a New EU Donor Country – a Short Survey of the Hungarian International Development Policy*, Budapest, 2006. http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/933C1461-8F65-403A-B841-B0A37C755BF4/0/061206_newdonor.pdf
6. Czech Republic Government, resolution no. 91, *The Concept of the International Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic for the 2002-2007 Period*, Prague, 2002.
7. Ministry of the Foreign affairs of the Republic of Poland, *Strategy for Poland's Development Co-operation, Warsaw*, 2003. http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/files/dokumenty_publikacje/Strategy%20for%20Polands%20Development%20Cooperation.pdf

At the time of the EU accession all V4 states had their Development Policy Statements ready. These documents were however criticized for the lack of a broad-based consultations, as well as for focusing on neighbouring countries and prioritising political stability and regional security over the poverty reduction[8]. All countries integrated the ODA structures into the Ministries of Foreign Affairs through a particular departments. According to the Development Strategies/IDC report from the 2003[9], the biggest constraints of those development co-operation directorates were ad-hoc institutional arrangements, poor legislation set-ups and lack of capacity. They were also often understaffed and suffered from a lack of expertise in development matters (the notable exception was the case of the **Czech Republic** who, according to the IDC report[10], due to the longest national involvement in development benefited from the well-qualified staff). The problem was also a limited co-ordination of fragmented systems: for instance in 2001 the Czech ODA consisted of 79 projects, conducted in 49 countries and managed by twelve different ministries or agencies (see table 1.). This resulted in a small transparency of the ODA, not clear rules of its provision, inefficiency and managing difficulties. The weakness of the system was also lack of the consultation processes with public, NGOs and partner countries.

Table 1. The Size ODA in the V4 countries in 2001.

Country	Size of ODA program (2001, US$ Million)	No. of Countries	No. of Projects	Number of Staff at MFA	Average ODA per staff (US$ m)
Czech Republic	26.5	49	79	12	2.2
Hungary	8.5	>10	N/A	20	0.4
Poland	35.5	>15	>15	7	5.1
Slovak Republic	11.7	>10	N/A	5	2.4

Source: *Development Strategies/IDC 2003, The Consequences of Enlargement for Development Policy, p. 8.*

At that time, it was hoped that the systems should be soon simplified, and specific legal frames introduced. The process of building strong ODA structures however, has proved to be progressing very slowly. In all of the V4 countries the main constraints was very poor government commitment, as well as lack of a public support that would enforce changes.

8. See: Development Strategies and IDC, The Consequences of Enlargement for Development Policy, Cambridge 2003.
9. Op.cit.
10. Op.cit.

Table 2. The ODA scale in between 2000 – 2007.

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
2001	$26,490,000.00	N/A	$35,570,000.00	$8,280,000.00
2002	$45,390,000.00	N/A	$14,260,000.00	$6,680,000.00
2003	$90,550,000.00	$21,210,000.00	$27,190,000.00	$15,080,000.00
2004	$108,170,000.00	$70,140,000.00	$117,510,000.00	$28,230,000.00
2005	$135,130,000.00	$100,330,000.00	$204,790,000.00	$56,090,000.00
2006	$160,860,000.00	$149,490,000.00	$296,790,000.00	$55,110,000.00
2007	$178,880,000.00	$103,490,000.00	$362,840,000.00	$67,200,000.00

Source: *http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA_DONOR*

The EU accession enforced increase in the ODA numbers (see table 2). Especially in 2005 the significant grow of the **Czech Republic's** and **Poland's** figures resulted from the increased contributions to the EC development budget. Even though the ODA has increased, until very recently the situation in the governmental institutions has not improved significantly. Currently, weak ODA structures within the MFAs have been pointed out by the NGDOs originating from the Visegrad countries as the main obstacle in the efficient provision of the development assistance. In spite of the poor political support and almost non-existence of the development issues in the political agenda, some countries managed to introduce positive changes.

The example of such improvements is **Czech's** case. Until now development cooperation has been coordinated by the Competences Act (Act No. 2/1969, as amended) in which *the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the Czech Republic's central public administration authority in the field of foreign policy; as such, it is responsible for creating the concept of and coordinating development cooperation and coordinating external economic relations*[11]. The MFA was responsible for the overall ODA coordination, but the actual managerial responsibilities were fragmented among other nine line ministries. The ODA system was lacking transparency, real coordination and predictability. Facing difficulties in conducting development projects, Czech NGDOs associated in the FoRS platform were pushing the government for changes.

11. http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/development_cooperation_and_humanitarian/basic_information_on_the_czech_republic$2548.html?action=setMonth&year=2009&month=2

Recognising the need for the transformation of the ODA system, on 1st January 2008, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Czech Development Agency (CZDA) was established as the implementation institution. It gradually takes over the responsibilities of the ODA projects management. Next to the CZDA, the International Development Cooperation Council (IDCC) was created as an advisory body preserving coordination with other ministries, proposing new mechanisms for the CZDA work and identifying new projects fields. Apart from the representatives of the various ministries, IDCC includes also associated membership for the representatives of NGDOs and business.

The other meaningful example might be the **Slovak** reform of 2008. Special Acts[12], give legal framework for the Slovak ODA. Most importantly they set up the Slovak Agency for the International Development Cooperation replacing the Slovak-UNDP Trust Fund (in work since 2003) and the Bratislava-Belgrade Fund (functioning since 2004). The process of preparing the law included a good practice of NGO – government cooperation embodied in the established by the MFA a cross-sector working group with representatives of the various MFA departments, MoF and other line ministries as well as the Platform of Non-Governmental Development Organisations (MVRO). The working group was meeting regularly, 1-2 times monthly from December 2006 to June 2007, when the document was moved on to the cross-sector comments-making process. The bill was passed by the Slovak Parliament in November 2007, coming into the legal force on February 1st 2008.

In the case of **Hungary** the MFA has done some promising work on the legal frame for the ODA. It is drafting a law to provide adequate governmental support to ODA system. Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and Humanitarian Aid (HAND) provided its input into the bill, which will be hopefully considered in the drafting. After all the necessary in-governmental consultations the bill is expected to be tabled in Parliament in 2009. The consultation process is still going, the government considers the HAND as a civil consultative partner during the lawmaking.

12. Slovak Government, Act No. 617/2007 Coll. *Official Development Assistance*, Bratislava, December 2007; Act No. 575/2001 Coll. *The Organisation of the Government Activities and the Organisation of Central State*

Due to the lack of political will, limiting regulations in the Public Finances Act and strong resistance from the Ministry of Finance, Polish MFA faces the strongest difficulties with reforming the ODA structures.

The work on the Development Assistance Act has been in progress since at least 2005. The drafts of the act have been sent for the consultations to the Grupa Zagranica platform. When discussing the reform, NDGOs are mostly pointing to the problems with annual short-term financing restricting implementation of projects to the period between May and December, which limits the possibilities for effective realisation of development tasks. Furthermore, in the opinion of many NGO leaders, the ODA structures should be separated from the MFA which would give a hope for a more efficient work of the potential ODA institution and lesser politicization.

The quantity of ODA

In May 2005 the General Affairs and External Relations Council for EU (GAERC) resolved that Member States that joined the EU after 2002 – which is the case of all Visegrad countries – will strive to increase their ODA in order to reach (within their respective budget allocation processes) a level of 0,17% ODA/GNI by 2010, and their ODA/GNI to 0.33% by 2015[13]. These commitments were repeated in the *European Consensus on Development* signed by all EU states in December 2005. Moreover, the *Monterrey Consensus*, also signed by the V4 countries (in March 2002), urges them *to make concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) as ODA to developing countries*[14]. For those reasons developing countries can have legitimate expectations that these commitments will be fulfilled by all donors, including V4 countries.

NGDOs of V4 countries are carefully observing the efforts of their states in fulfilling those commitments (see for example monitoring reports of the Grupa Zagranica or FoRS[15]). At present the scale of the V4 ODA/GNI is as following:

Table 3. The scale of ODA in reference to the GNI of the V4 countries.

	Czech Republic ODA/GNI %	Hungary ODA/GNI %	Poland ODA/GNI %	Slovakia ODA/GNI %
2004	0.11	0.07	0.05	0.07
2005	0.11	0.11	0.07	0.12
2006	0.12	0.13	0.09	0.10
2007	0.11	0.08	0.09	0.09

Source: *http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA_DONOR*

The short glance at these numbers gives little hope for the achievement of the targeted 0,17% in 2010, not even mentioning the level of 0.7%. None of the four states has official, clear roadmap towards achieving that goal. In the debates with NGDOs, government representatives responsible for the ODA, express intentions to do everything that is possible to reach the target.

13. General Affairs and External Relations Council for EU, *Conclusions - Accelerating progress towards MDGs*, Brussels, 24 May 2005, §4.ii. http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_4714_en.html
14. United Nations, *Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development*, Monterrey 2002, §D.42. http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/Monterrey_Consensus.htm
15. Reports available at: http://globalnepoludnie.pl/IMG/pdf/polska_pomoc_zagraniczna2007_dystrybucja-2.pdf and http://www.rozvojovestredisko.cz/download.php?id=55

NGDO's activists, however, are not so optimistic in calculating possibilities for fulfilling the commitments. Concluding from the budgetary discussions, they recognize that governments have other (interior) priorities – the good example might be the case of **Hungary**, who is struggling to reduce budgetary deficit. The other problem is the weakness of ODA departments within the state structures, resulting in their poor political power to influence changes. In general, in all countries the lack of political will is recognized by NGDOs as the main problem in dealing with the ODA issues. In **Slovakia**, for instance, at the parliamentary discussion following the first reading of the *Development Act*, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Kukan (now opposition MP) openly doubted reaching the target saying: *Nobody will get mad if we will not fulfil the targets and we have to defend it internationally that we cannot be compared with Scandinavian and other countries active in this area for years and that we can reach required percentages gradually*[16]. Until know, both in **Czech Republic** and **Poland**, officials were claiming that over the value of aid should be prioritised its quality, and special emphasis should be put on the improvement of the ODA structures.

16. See: The minutes of the Parliamentary discussion following the first reading of the Development Act bill at the 14th session of the Slovak Parliament, October 17th, 2007.

Bilateral and multilateral ODA

The percentage of the bilateral aid distributed from the ODA funds is as shown below:

Table 4. The percentage of the bilateral aid within ODA in the V4 countries (calculations based on the data provided by http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA_DONOR).

	Czech Republic % of bilateral ODA	Hungary % of bilateral ODA	Poland % of bilateral ODA	Slovakia % of bilateral ODA
2004	58.70%	47.95%	21.18%	35.00%
2005	47.70%	39.41%	23.42%	54.00%
2006	48.30%	56.41%	40.09%	49.90%
2007	45.25%	31.91%	42.92%	41.00%

Table 5. The value of the bilateral aid. http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA_DONOR

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
2004	$63,480,000.00	$35,490,000.00	$24,890,000.00	$10,750,000.00
2005	$64,390,000.00	$39,550,000.00	$47,960,000.00	$30,700,000.00
2006	$77,700,000.00	$84,340,000.00	$118,990,000.00	$24,750,000.00
2007	$80,950,000.00	$33,030,000.00	$155,740,000.00	$27,580,000.00

In the period between 2004 and 2007, the percentage of the bilateral aid in all V4 countries was fluctuating. The reasons behind such changes might be better understood after clarifying what stands behind those figures. For that reason it might be useful to deconstruct bilateral aid in terms of inflated assistance[17].

Table 6. The percentage of Inflated Aid within Bilateral Aid (NGDO estimations based on the information provided by the relevant ODA institutions).

	Czech Republic % of inflated aid	Hungary % of inflated aid	Poland % of inflated aid	Slovakia % of inflated aid
2004	19.62%	Lack of data	N/A	N/A
2005	16.58%		70%	37.73%
2006	17.35%		70%	29.37%
2007	19.71%		88%	30.01%

17. The inflated aid is usually understood as the actions and money only indirectly dedicated to the developing countries. For instance it includes debt relief, tied aid connected with preferential credits, the costs of studies in the donor countries of the students coming from the beneficiary regions, spending in the immigration sector related to the immigrants from the developing countries.

Table 7. The approximate value of the inflated aid
(NGDO calculations based on the information provided by the relevant ODA institutions).

Inflated	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
2004	$12,454,776.00	Lack of data	N/A	N/A
2005	$10,675,862.00		$33,572,000.00	$11,583,110.00
2006	$13,480,950.00		$83,293,000.00	$7,269,075.00
2007	$15,955,245.00		$137,051,200.00	$8,276,758.00

Figure 1. The approximate value of the inflated aid
(NGDO calculations based on the information provided by the relevant ODA institutions).

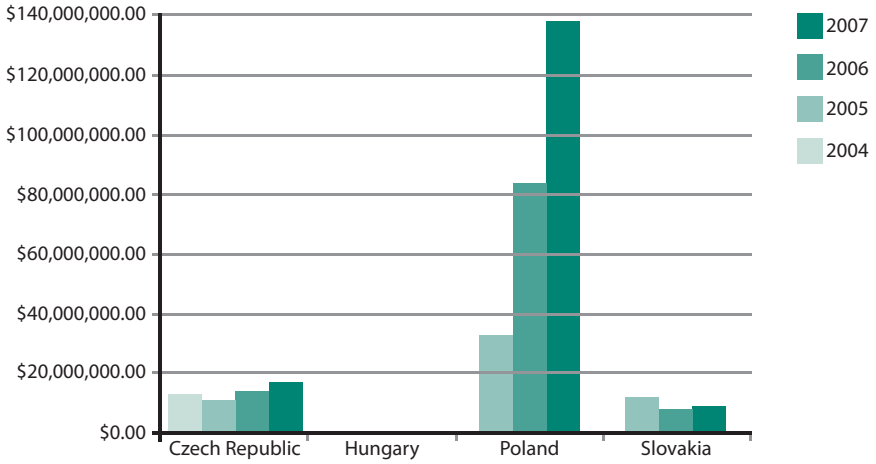
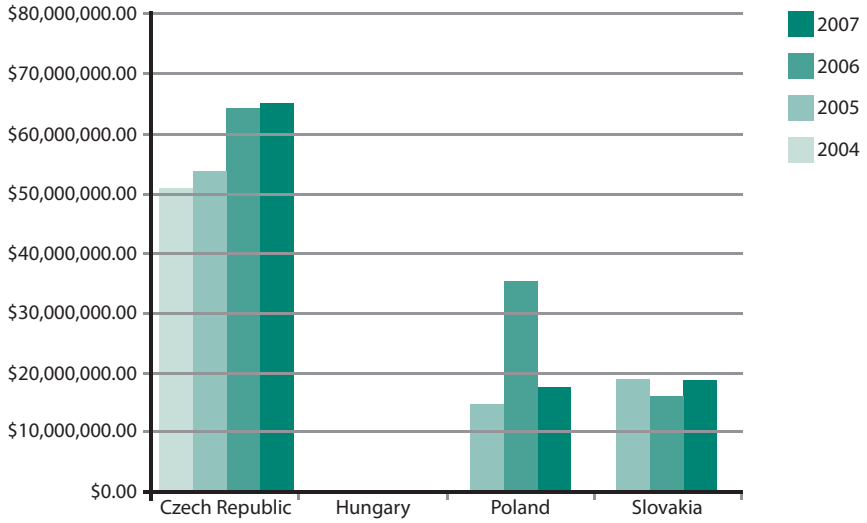


Table 8. The approximate value of the not inflated aid
(NGDO calculations based on the information provided by the relevant ODA institutions).

Inflated	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
2004	$51,025,224.00	Lack of data	N/A	N/A
2005	$53,714,138.00		$14,388,000.00	$19,116,890.00
2006	$64,219,050.00		$35,697,000.00	$17,480,925.00
2007	$64,994,755.00		$18,688,800.00	$19,303,242.00

Figure 2. The approximate value of the not inflated aid (NGDO calculations based on the information provided by the relevant ODA institutions).



From the comparison of the overall value of total ODA a conclusion can be made that **Poland** is the biggest donor within the V4 countries. Also, in terms of reported bilateral aid Poland appears to have the highest contribution to development assistance. However, the survey of the so called "inflated" aid[18] shows that Poland owe its position mostly to the high value of inflated aid – especially debt cancellations and preferential credits with a grant element. In 2006, the high ODA numbers resulted from the Angola's debt cancellation (USD 91,9 mln), while in 2007 from the credit contract with China (USD 67, 97 mln). Similarly, the fluctuations of the **Slovak** bilateral ODA (in terms of percentage) resulted from the Sudanese debt cancellation (programmed for the 3 years period) and simultaneous gradual increase of the multilateral ODA component. Actually, the non-inflated aid remains at the stable level of approximately USD 19 mln.

In comparison to all V4 countries, **Czech Republic** seems to have the best results in terms of the value of not inflated aid. However, like **Poland**, **Slovakia** and **Hungary**, also Czech Republic in its ODA reports includes debt relief, students' scholarship costs and assistance to refugees in a donor country. The big controversy in **Czech Republic** brings about the inclusion of the aid projects implemented by the military service at their foreign missions (for instance

18. The inflated aid is usually understood as the actions and money only indirectly dedicated to the developing countries. For instance it includes debt relief, tied aid connected with preferential credits, the costs of studies in the donor countries of the students coming from the beneficiary regions, spending in the immigration sector related to the immigrants from the developing countries.

in Iraq). According to the NGDO representatives, it is hard to assess what part of the military missions are to be counted (also Czech MFA admits that these figures are sometimes unclear). The value of military projects counted as the component of the ODA are likely to be increased due to the established in 2007 Provincial Reconstruction Team in Logar, Afghanistan.

In all Visegrad countries NGDOs urge officials not to include inflated aid in the bilateral/ODA reports. For instance **Hungarian** HAND and **Polish** Grupa Zagranica in their monitoring reports have been advocating for not including the debt relief, or at least to keep a separate register for it. However, such suggestions are difficult to accept for the V4 officials responsible for the ODA. They are obliged (by the above mentioned international treaties) to perform an increase in the ODA spending, while at the same time, they are receiving no additional funds from the governments. Ironically in all four states there are little debts remaining, leaving an open question of how this issue will be treated in a future.

Gross of the bilateral, not inflated funds are used for the development projects implemented by the NGDO of the V4 countries. The problem with this type of assistance might be: the limited number of development organisations, their often financial weakness, lack of capacity (most of the organisations have less than 10 – often below 5 – employees, the exception from that are the biggest NGDO i.e. Czech People in Need, Polish Humanitarian Organisation or faith-based organisations with the longest traditions in the development practice). The problem is often the lack of expertise (many NGDOs have short experience in the development field - they started activities in the beginning of last decade). In all V4 countries there are very limited chances for obtaining professional qualifications: for instance in **Poland** only recently a special one year, part-time, post-graduate course in development has been created. Even though today in all V4 countries most of the NGDOs are strongly competing for funds, there is a risk that if the funds are significantly increased the NGDOs might lack capacity to spend them effectively. The positive example of expanding organisations possibilities and encouraging new initiatives is the practice of matching funds as it is exercised in **Czech Republic**. Organisations applying for the European Commission grants may receive financial support of the Czech ODA institution for covering the costs of obligatory in EC projects NGDO budgetary contribution.

The quality of the ODA

Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the ODA agenda

All Visegrad countries have signed **The Millennium Development Declaration (2000)**. However, none of them adopted significant documents or statements focusing particularly on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In general MDGs are mentioned in many documents – especially yearly programmes and ODA reports. Often they are substituted by reformulated postulates – which are in line with the general values of MDGs (the example might be Slovak *Official Development Aid Act* in which MDGs are not mentioned explicitly, but the Act defines several priorities which are very similar to MDGs). Even though the countries work in various regions of the world, it happens that the MDGs are call upon only in the context of the aid for Africa[19].

In none of the four states, there are special funds allocated to the fulfilment of the MDGs. In Poland though, when applying for funds, applicant must point one or more of the goals towards which a project is contributing.

According to the NGDO information, none of the states assesses the impact of national ODA on the fulfilment of the MDGs.

In all countries MDGs are of the significant importance when it comes to public campaigns and educational programmes within the donor states. They are often financed from the funds of the ODA. The example might be The Regional Partnership Programme (RPP). It is a three year programme initiated by the NGDO Platforms of Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. Its overall goal is to strengthen the capacities and the visibility of development cooperation in the respective countries as well as to improve the networking between them. Apart from the awareness/education projects, the programme also welcomes development cooperation initiatives.

Another interesting example might be the Czech campaign: *Czechia against poverty*, or joint project of Polish MFA and UNDP titled *Poland is a Paradise* conducted in 2004 and aimed at Polish society to raise its attention to the issues of the Global South and MDGs. Furthermore, every year Polish Department for Development Cooperation within MFA releases special funds for projects focusing on global education.

19. See: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, *Polish Aid Programme 2008 Administrated by the MFA of the Republic of Poland*, Warsaw, 2008.

Country Strategy Papers (CSP)

The preparation of the Country Strategy Papers remains to be a problem. It seems to be especially a case in **Poland**. Even though the Department of Development Cooperation defines main fields of activities (varying from year to year) for nine of the priority countries, it is not known to the public what are they based on. The Department of Development Cooperation in the MFA declares that the work on the Country Strategy Papers is in progress. The most advanced are preparations of the CSP for Georgia. The paper was announced to be published in the early 2009. The choice of Georgia over other countries might be explained through a significant interest of Polish government in last Georgian-Russian war and followed by considerable involvement of Polish society in the humanitarian aid for the victims of the conflict. The paper is a result of the organised by the MFA assessment visit in Georgia. During this study trip expert team consulted Georgian administration, local leaders and experts in terms of development and humanitarian needs.

Until now **Slovak** Aid had elaborated the CSP only for Serbia. The document was created at the time of setting up the Bratislava-Belgrade Fund. Since then Serbia remains the main priority country for the Slovak ODA. It is worth mentioning that the paper is mainly an effect of the work of the Candian expert from CIDA/ODACE. According to the NGDO judgement it is due to the lack of capacities and expertise which were and to some extent still are characteristic feature of the officials dealing with the Slovak ODA. Since Slovak NGOs have been asked for the input in designing the paper at the very late stage, their contribution to the document had rather a form of commenting than a consultation.

Hungary has CSPs for Serbia, Vietnam and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Currently the paper for Moldova is under the preparation. During the preparation of the first two papers HAND consulted the first draft . Based on the HAND recommendations MFA asked the NGDO platform to provide input into the CSP for Moldova. HAND believes this is a very positive step towards real, substantive consultation.

Czech Republic elaborated CSPs for eight priority countries: Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Mongolia, Serbia and Montenegro (now valid only for Serbia), Vietnam, Yemen and Zambia, valid for the period 2006-2010. Iraq and Afghanistan are medium-term priority countries but have no CSP. The CSPs are to be reviewed between 2009 – 2010, as in 2011 new programming period will start, and the list of priority countries will be revised.

The process of producing Czech CSPs included consultations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other relevant ministries, Czech delegations in priority countries and Development Centre (administration "predecessor" of Czech Development Agency). FoRS was asked for comments but most of them were not incorporated into CSPs (probably due to the different interests of the NGDOs within FoRS and the subject of consultations).

Putting aside the case of Poland, the examples described above draw attention to the poor expertise of the professionals drawing CSPs. Even though CSPs are consulted with the NGDOs of the donor countries (yet, it is important to notice that this very NGOs are later main beneficiaries of the ODA funding), it is alarming that no complex consultations are made with partners in the aid recipient countries.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A weak point of the all ODA systems are monitoring and evaluation procedures.

So far in all countries more attention has been given to the **monitoring**. In **Czech Republic** monitoring criteria include relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impacts and their sustainability – these catchwords are, however, not specified in details. There are no clear responsibilities (and capacities) to deal with their effective application and the existing monitoring results did not deserve the adequate attention. As the previous fragmented system did not allow effective project management (non-transparent system of project identification and formulation in tender scheme, official approval by the government but managerial responsibility at ministries level, etc.), it is expected that the current transformation of the ODA structure should include setting of more effective monitoring.

In **Poland**, until recently, monitoring concerned mostly financial management and correctness (in terms of legality) of spending. This year additional emphasis has been put on the monitoring visits at the chosen project sites. They were conducted by the representatives of the Department of Development Cooperation (for the first time such supervisions have been done at project sites in Africa) As the monitoring process is still in progress, it is impossible to conclude on its impact on the development practice.

Similarly, in **Hungary** monitoring focuses mostly on the financial management. Monitored organisations do not receive feedback with information on the results of the procedure.

Also activities of the **Slovak** organisations implementing development projects are not monitored. They are only obliged to present reports to the funding ODA institution.

In none of the Visegrad countries there are effective **evaluation** procedures at work. Neither **Hungary** nor **Slovakia** have it in its procedures. In the **Polish** Programme of the ODA for the year 2008, special funds have been allocated to the purpose of the external evaluation. Yet, up to date, no information on the application of this procedure have been available.

In **Czech Republic** evaluations started in 2003 but until now the process was complicated and not transparent. Usually, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with or without consultations with line ministries identified projects or programs for evaluations. The responsible institution for managing evaluations was the Development Centre of the Institute of International Relations. The MFA and line ministries not always participated in evaluations. There was a difficulty with the ownership of the taken decisions. Such evaluations were not autonomous, as most of evaluators (beside of few independent experts usually hired for the evaluation of technical issues) came from governmental bodies directly involved in many aspects of ODA management. The problem remained the application of evaluation results in a future ODA planning.

Since January 2008 and the establishment of the Czech Development Agency the transformation process has also included the introduction of an independent evaluation system. The MFA should order evaluations from external evaluators. The results should be public and discussed within the Council for Development Cooperation.

In all V4 countries the NGDO platforms are pushing the ODA officials for the external evaluation. Yet, like in the case of Hungarian MFA, the argument is that the low volume of spending does not allow for the costly independent evaluations.

The government – NGOs – the public in the V4 countries

Access to the Information

The most popular form of informing about the ODA in all Visegrad countries is the Internet and written publications. Each governmental institution has its own webpage[20]. Most of them are used for announcing call for project proposals, yearly reports and annual plans. The subject of concern is the access to more précised information – which is accessible usually only upon official written request (this is especially the case in **Poland** and **Hungary**). Still there are difficulties with obtaining particular type of data (for instance in **Czech Republic** as sensitive information are consider data on debt cancellation or military missions). The access to the comprehensive information is often not easy as the institution in power of releasing ODA funds are scattered among various ministries and agencies – this is hoped to be changed as the processes of transforming ODA systems will progress (especially in the case of **Czech Republic** and **Slovakia**).

Consultation Processes

The information provided by the ODA institutions is usually given *post factum*. However, some positive changes are observed in terms of consulting documents, strategies etc., at the stage of their preparation.

Both **Czech Republic** and **Hungary** have permanent advisory bodies to the ODA structures (The Council of Development Cooperation, and Social Advisory Committee respectively). They consist not only of the governmental officials but also NGDO and business representatives, and – in the Hungarian case – academics.

In all countries some forms of consultations with the NGDO platforms are being implemented, and are recognized as a positive step towards the future cooperation. Their effectiveness varies, though it can be stated that all platforms suffer from particularly short-term announcement of the consulted documents, lack of political power and social support that would strengthen their position in the consultation processes, ambivalent status of the consulted documents or even "closed regime" of the consultations

20. www.polishaid.gov.pl, www.rozvojovestredisko.cz, www.mzv.cz/aid, www.devcentre.cz, www.slovakaid.sk, http://www.kum.hu/kum/en/bal/foreign_policy/international_development/

(often the documents consulted are qualified as for limited access and cannot be shared with the wider audience, it happen that they are accessible only to the boards/secretariat of the platforms privileging some persons and organisations over others), and finally lack of the feedback to the NGDO recommendations.

It still happens that some documents are circulated and "consulted" through the unofficial channels. This depends on the private networks of social relations of the persons within the NGDO sector and their contacts within the particular ODA institutions.

The current system of consultation within the V4 states might risk exclusion of some groups. Among them might be organizations which are not members of the NGDO platforms[21], organizations in the partner countries, and the public in general – especially individuals who are not members of any institution or organization.

Public Support of the V4 societies

The public support is the great concern for both representatives of the NGDOs as well as the ODA officials. In each country[22] specific public opinion polls were carried out in order to learn about the level of interest and support for the development practice.

It can be stated that in Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic there is a general support for the development assistance (e.g. in **Poland** 77% respondents supports the idea, 73% of **Slovaks** is supportive for this issue). As the main reasons for international aid respondents of V4 countries point to moral call (80% in **Poland**, while 34% in **Slovakia**, 39% in **Czech**), the necessity of helping people in need23 (73% in **Czech**, 60% in **Slovakia**) or the idea of aiding children (65% of **Czechs**, 33% of **Slovaks**). Poles (41%) also call upon the obligation of assisting others resulting from the Polish experience of being aid recipient[24].

21. The reason of not joining particular platform might be lack of the funds for covering membership fee. Also, some NGO choose not to become a member when the platform does not represents its interests or values.
22. All figures in that chapter are coming from the following polls: Ministry of Foreign Affairs CR and SC&C *Research of public opinion 11/2006*, Prague, 2006; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland and TNS OBOP, *Polacy o pomocy rozwojowej*, Warsaw, 2007; Institute for Public Affairs, *Slovak Public and the Development Aid*, Bratislava, 2005.
23. This option was not available in Polish research.
24. This answer was not available in Czech and Slovak researches.

Among the most important areas of possible engagement respondents name education (49% of **Poles**[25], 43% of **Czechs**), combating HIV/Aids and other deceases/improvement of health (69% of **Czechs**, 38% of **Poles**) supporting gender and children equality (49% of **Czechs**), preventing crises and post-conflict rehabilitation (20% of **Poles**), as well as supporting human rights and preservation of peace and security (each receiving 41% approval among **Czechs** – in Polish research this options were not listed).

As the most efficient channels of providing aid **Slovaks** and **Poles** perceive international organizations like UN and Red Cross. Secondly, respondents have the biggest trust for their national NGDOs (Polish case) and NGDOs in the destination countries (Slovak responses). In each of those two countries there is a small support for donating financial aid directly to the foreign governments. It might be informative that 49% of **Czechs** didn't hear of the governmental aid programme, and only 15% correctly named development awareness campaign of Czech nongovernmental organizations. At the same time, as many as 68,5% of respondents would like to obtain more information about the Czech assistance to poor countries. Among **Polish** respondents 55% hadn't heard any information about the Polish Aid during 3 months preceding the research. Still 80% of **Czechs** and 78% of **Poles** didn't hear about the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Even though the support to the foreign assistance is declared, it is not necessarily seen in actions taken. Only two fifths of **Czechs** provided some type of help to poor countries (27,8% donated money, 6,2% time, 5,3% both types of engagements). Among **Slovaks** less than one third contributed time or money to help people in developing countries. As the main reason of not supporting aid to developing countries **Polish** respondents called upon arguments that Poland is too poor to assist others (68%) and that first of all Poles should solve their own problems (45%). In general, Poles did not perceive the situation of their own country positively. Only 14% of Poles stated that in the global scale there is more than 100 countries poorer than Poland. Almost 60% underestimated the condition of their own country at the global scale. In **Slovakia** 42% of respondents agree that ODA is conducted on the costs of living of Slovak people. In **Czech Republic** the argument that the country is developed and has assets to help was named as last among 14 other reasons of providing foreign aid.

25. In case of Poland this figures represents the answer to the question: In which areas Poland have the most to offer? As the most challenging issues for the developing countries Poles named: deceases including HIV/AIDS (65%), access to potable water (43%) wars and interior conflicts (40%).

FINAL COMMENTS

Within last years all V4 countries have made a profound progress in the area of development and humanitarian aid. Starting from the point of virtually no engagement in the assistance to the foreign societies, step by step, they are getting more and more involved in this kind of initiatives.

In all countries the biggest challenge in creating ODA structures has been formulation of the adequate legal framework. Work on legal adjustments allowing more efficient assistance is especially advanced in Czech Republic and Slovakia. The lack of legal framework and strong governmental institutions responsible for managing ODA still significantly hamper responsible assistance cooperation in Poland and Hungary. The creation and further improvement of those structures is of the key importance.

In terms of financing ODA all V4 countries seem to be caught in the double bind. Struggling to fulfill obligation of the aid increase, they tend to report as ODA such spending as credits with grant elements or debt cancellation. Yet these forms of assistance (together with other kinds of inflated aid), even though acceptable, are not highly recommended and are criticized for a small impact on the communities in need. At the same time the lack of political recognition of the importance of the development issues hinder the possibilities of increasing ODA at the cost of other expenditures. Currently the quota of debts that could be cancelled and consequently included in ODA is shrinking in all V4 countries. It will be interesting to observe what strategies will the V4 countries take up in a future in order to raise, or at least keep at the current level, the ODA financing. Having in mind the difficulties awaiting officials in their work toward further increase of the ODA value and quality, NGDOs are looking forward to work together toward strengthening the effectiveness of development cooperation.

The above mentioned lack of political support is directly linked to the problems with a public support. It seems to be especially challenging to raise the level of knowledge and awareness of the development issues. Public still is not well informed about the development in general and ODA or NGO programmes in particular. Even though the public declares approval for the foreign assistance, the support seems to have a rather passive character – still not many people are actively involved in the development related initiatives. The common presumption that V4 societies are not rich enough to

assist others is in a daily practice of the NGDOs recognized as the strongest obstacle in awareness- and fund-raising campaigns. It also does not allow to mobilize political powers.

In all V4 countries a strong concern remains the quality of the ODA programmes. It is still difficult to be assessed as all described ODA systems lack evaluation procedures that would allow measurement of the aid effectiveness and its impacts on the targeted communities. The more detailed work on the CSP is awaited. In accordance with the Paris Declaration of 2005, stronger and more active involvement of the recipient communities in the designing of such documents, as well as assistance programming is essential and expected in the future.