

Lithuanian Presidency Priorities for Development Cooperation

Why are the Lithuanian Presidency priorities important?

From 1 July to 31 December 2013 Lithuania will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union (presidency) for the first time. This means that Lithuanian government members and officials will chair the process of the creation of EU rules and legislation during this period. With this role Lithuania will be in the centre of EU policy-making. Although much of the presidency agenda is determined by on-going processes in EU institutions, the presidency country has opportunities to promote their national priority issues.

The period of the presidency is important for the citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the presidency country because of the opportunity to gain an improved European perspective, contribute to the EU discussions with national expertise, and also to engage more in policy debates and influence the decision-makers with their priorities and recommendations. National media and the public usually pay special attention to European politics and international processes during this period. Being aware of the Lithuanian Presidency agenda gives also civil society actors outside Lithuania a better position to engage and influence the on-going policy processes.

This Policy Digest will shortly explain the role of the country when holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union; look at the context of the Lithuanian Presidency and its main priorities and high-level

events concerning development cooperation; explain the actions of the Lithuanian development CSO platform Lithuanian Umbrella (LU) during the presidency; and outline possible action points for CSOs outside Lithuania to engage in the presidency processes and activities.

What is the Presidency of the Council of the European Union?

All 28 EU Member States take up in turn the **presidency of the Council of the EU** in order to chair the process of the creation of EU rules and legislation. The Presidency rotates among member states (MS) every six months. The presiding MS advances the Union's on-going work agenda, but it also has an opportunity to shape and influence EU policy and legislation, as well as to strengthen public support for the EU in the MS. The presidency country represents the Council in its dealings with other EU institutions, such as the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP). The presidency seeks to deliver results, which often means putting forward compromise proposals and negotiating agreements.

The presidency plans and chairs most meetings of the Council of the EU where ministers of different fields meet, e.g. the agriculture, transport or education ministers. Since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in 2009, the presidency does not chair the meetings of the Council of Foreign Affairs, where development ministers meet. This is done by the High Representa-

tive of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a position that is held by British Catherine Ashton. The minister of foreign affairs of the presidency country, however, traditionally co-chairs or sits close to the high representatives during the Council meetings. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the presidency is also not chairing the meetings of the European Council, made up of the EU Heads of State and Government – this is done by the permanent president of the European Council and the position is currently held by Belgian Herman van Rompuy.

Wider Context of the Lithuanian Presidency

Becoming the first Baltic state to hold the presidency of the European Union is a challenging task for Lithuania. The presidency is taking place at a time of critical juncture when EU institutions are seeking to conclude key policy dossiers before the EP elections in May 2014 and the EC concluding its mandate later in 2014.

Each presidency sets out its own priorities for its six month term, providing the contexts within which the agenda for Council meetings is set. The presidency priorities take into account the priorities of the so called **Trio Presidency** under which three successive presidencies work together to develop an 18 month political programme. Lithuania is part of a Trio programme with Ireland and Greece, spanning the period from January 2013 to June 2014¹. This programme sets out as the main task of the Council to strengthen the Union's capacity to respond to the current economic, financial and social challenges. Lithuanian priorities for the presidency – **Credible, Growing & Open Europe** – are highly connected to these issues. In order to restore the EU's economic credibility the Lithuanian Presidency will strive to make progress towards sounder public finances, strengthen the single market, secure growth and new jobs, especially focusing on opportunities for youth employment.

Development Cooperation Priorities during the Lithuanian Presidency

There are numerous important policy processes taking place during the Lithuanian presidency concerning development cooperation. One main focus area is the EU contribution to the advancement of the **development framework after 2015** (the so called 'post-2015 agenda'), to the RIO+20 processes and to reaching the MDGs by 2015. The EU position on post-2015² for the

United Nations General Assembly meeting taking place on 23 September in New York was adopted during the Irish Presidency. The UN General Assembly and the negotiations taking place there will be one of the high-light events of the Lithuanian Presidency.

Another priority of the Lithuanian Presidency is enhancing the agenda of the **Eastern Partnership** (EaP) – the initiative aiming to tighten relationship between the EU and six Eastern European and Southern Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) by deepening their political cooperation and economic integration. Developments in the EaP initiative are especially important for many EU-13 countries as much of their official development assistance (ODA) goes to partners in EaP countries.

On 28-29 November the heads of state of the EaP countries will meet the heads of state or government of the EU-28 in Vilnius during the EaP Summit. This 3rd Summit is seen as an important milestone for seeking to attain the objectives and setting guidelines for further deepening of the EaP. Key issues concerning the summit will be discussed at the EaP Foreign Ministerial Meeting in Brussels on 22 July 2013.

A lot of other important policy processes are ongoing in the EU institutions during the Lithuanian Presidency that need the focus, reaction and coordination from the Lithuanian Presidency and where CSOs are also engaged:

- In July the EC will publish its Accountability report with a communication on the **Future of Financing for Development**³. Global ambitions concerning the upcoming new development framework will need to be matched with commitments for financing for development. CSOs are organised in the CONCORD Task Force on Financing for Development to put forward their suggestions for the future financing scheme.
- The **Development Cooperation Instrument** (DCI) and the 11th **European Development Fund** (EDF) will have to be negotiated and adopted.
- Council Conclusions on EC communications on **Local Authorities in development**⁴ and **Maximising the Development Impact of Migration**⁵ will have to be adopted. Also, the European Parliament is preparing a report titled "Local Authorities and civil society:

³ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/financing_for_development

⁴ Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes, 15 May 2013

⁵ Maximising the Development Impact of Migration: The EU contribution for the UN High-level Dialogue and next steps towards broadening the development-migration nexus, 21 May 2013

¹ http://static.eu2013.lt/uploads/documents/Trio_Programme.pdf

² The Overarching Post 2015 Agenda - Council conclusions, 25 June 2012

Europe's engagement in support of sustainable development".

- Various EU institutions and EU delegations are involved in drawing up **CSO roadmaps** for partner countries.
- African, Caribbean, Pacific countries (**ACP**) and **EU Joint Parliamentary** assembly will be held on 23-27 November in East Africa to look, among others, at the future of the joint cooperation.
- **European Development Days** will take place in Brussels on 26-27 November⁶.
- **Biennial EU report on PCD** will be published in the end of 2013 where MS involvement in enhancing PCD is also analysed⁷.
- The annual implementation report of the "EU Plan of **Action on Gender Equality** and Women Empowerment in Development 2010-2015" will be published⁸.
- **Foreign Affairs Council meeting** of development ministers will take place on 12 December 2013.

Lithuanian National Priority – the Transition Experience

Mainstreaming the transition experience in the field of development cooperation is the national priority issue concerning development cooperation during the Lithuanian Presidency. Lithuania and many other Eastern and Central European countries in the EU hold valuable transition experience from the period after the fall of the Soviet block. These countries witnessed transition processes from communist rule towards western-like democracy and from centrally-planned socialist economy to market economy. The transition of these countries included transformations of many different aspects of the countries' political, economic and social life. Now these countries have expertise of how to use foreign assistance to support such a difficult process. That experience and best practices can be of great use for other countries and regions undergoing similar transitions.

The **EU Transition Compendium**⁹ compiles numerous reform examples from different areas, such as agriculture, employment, health, institutional and education reforms. In 2012 the EC issued a communication titled

"EU Support for Sustainable Change in Transition Societies"¹⁰ where different methods and tools for EU support to transition societies are outlined. The issue of the use of the transition experience in development cooperation is likely to be discussed also in one of the high level debates during the European Development Days on 26-27 November 2013.

Development CSO Opportunities during the Presidency

The presidency period is an excellent opportunity for development CSOs to become more involved in development cooperation issues on the European level, both in terms of **policy-making** (being aware of EU policy processes and engaging in advocacy) and **operations** (capacity to receive funding, cooperation with actors from other EU countries). Engaging in the presidency can lead to **increased visibility** of development CSOs in the government and EU institutions, as well as in international networks and in the media.

The EC allocates an extra financial support for the national development CSO platform for the presidency period, to enable the platform to undertake actions to establish and strengthen relationships with decision makers, partners and other development actors. The so called 'presidency projects' also aim to increase awareness about development challenges among the general public through open debate and wider media coverage. Read about CSO experiences concerning previous presidencies from TRIALOG Advocacy Guide¹¹ and the report "How to engage in the EU Presidency: Recommendations for Hungarian and Polish development NGOs"¹² by Czech Forum for Development Cooperation – FoRS.

Lithuanian Development CSO plans for the Presidency

The Lithuanian Umbrella (LU) which is made up of two development CSOs – LITDEA and National Platform of Development NGOs which together unite 30 national CSOs – will coordinate and implement a presidency project during 12 months, starting in June 2013. The overall objective of the project is to empower Lithuanian NGOs to proactively contribute to

⁶ www.eudevdays.eu

⁷ Read more about the PCD agenda in the EU and how CSOs can engage from the TRIALOG Policy Digest on PCD, June 2013 http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/pcd_policy_digest_final_june_2013.pdf

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/intervention-areas/humandev/genderequ_en.htm

⁹ <http://www.eutransition.eu>

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/documents/communication_transition_en.pdf

¹¹ TRIALOG Advocacy Guide, Chapter 4, available at: http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/trialog_advocacy_guide.pdf

¹² <http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/HowtoengageintheEUPresidencyKaca.PDF>

national ODA policies in relation to the EU agenda during the Lithuanian Presidency. The three main pillars of the LU Presidency project are:

- Building awareness about development cooperation in Lithuania.
- Facilitating structured dialogue between civil society and decision makers on national and EU level.
- Building CSO capacities.

In relation to the engagement with national and EU decision makers, a structured dialogue between civil society, Lithuanian decision makers and the EU institutions will be facilitated. In this context, LU will organise three **expert meetings** between CSOs and decision makers on EU level to facilitate dialogue with permanent representatives of Lithuania in Brussels, members of the EP and representatives of the EC.

An **event on Post-2015 development agenda** will be organized by LU together with the Beyond 2015 European Task Force in September in Vilnius, Lithuania. The event will aim at highlighting the civil society position on Post-2015 agenda before the upcoming UN summit in September in New York. The event will include a working meeting and a public session that will also be broadcasted online. Decision makers as well as civil society representatives are expected to join the meeting.

A special **event on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)** will be organised by LU in close cooperation with the CONCORD Secretariat and PCD working group in autumn 2013. The first half of the one day event will be a PCD advocacy training for 25 NDGO practitioners from the Baltic states and Poland where good practices will be shared. In the second half of the day the CONCORD Spotlight report on PCD will be launched. Representatives of decision makers, academia, media, the EC and diplomatic staff in Vilnius are expected to join the launch and discussions around PCD on EU and national level will be facilitated.

A **CSO conference in parallel with the Eastern Partnership Summit** will take place in Vilnius on 27-29 November, organised by LU and its member Eastern Europe Studies Centre. Find out more about the registration at www.eesc.lt/en.

Lithuanian Umbrella will also prepare two policy papers, one on "Civil society voice in post-2015 agenda after the UN GA meeting" and the other one concentrating on the development education and awareness raising in the educational system in Lithuania. Both papers are planned to be released in the 1st half of 2014. LU will also prepare two Lithuanian AidWatch reports, one in November 2013 and the other one in April 2014.

Read updates about the LU presidency project from www.pagalba.org and www.litdea.eu.



What can I do?

- Take part in the various CSO events taking place in Vilnius, such as the Post-2015 agenda discussion in September, the PCD Spotlight report Launch and the CSO conference in parallel with the EaP Summit in the end of November.
- Get engaged in the CONCORD Enlargement, Pre-accession and Enlargement (EPAN) working group for advocacy around the EaP Summit. More info at: <http://www.concordeurope.org/about-us?id=94#epan>
- Participate in the European Development Days in Brussels on 26-27 November.

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This project is funded by the European Union.

With funding from

Austrian
Development Cooperation

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