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POST-CONFERENCE REPORT

Visegrad Countries in International Development Cooperation

Opportunities – Challenges – Actions

The Visegrad countries' collaboration in development cooperation had been initiated even before all the countries worked out their own development aid systems. All of them are still relatively new donors. Limited funds devoted to development cooperation force V4 to seek a new, innovative way of thinking. The Visegrad Group is a forum of latent potential for moving beyond traditional multilateralism. But are V4 countries ready to utilize that? If yes, what should be the ultimate goals and results of this cooperation?

The Representatives of various sectors gathered in Budapest at a conference titled *Visegrad Countries in International Development Cooperation* on January 21st, 2013 tried to address this and other questions of great importance. The aim of the conference was to map the Visegrad countries' capacities and opportunities for joint activities and programs in international development cooperation. This publication presents the main recommendations from four panel discussions conducted during the conference.

FOUR MAIN FINDINGS SHOULD BE HIGHLIGHTED:

1. Raising awareness lies at the heart of V4 countries' joint activities in development cooperation and should remain one of the vital aspects of common work.
2. By means of deeper and well-designed cooperation in international development, V4 countries can improve the standards and quality of their current development policies and instruments without immediate surge of ODA funds. There are several opportunities that could cover that, such as mapping involvement to date in LDCs, better information sharing, building absorption capacity of funds or enhancing grant acquisition from the EU.
3. Apart from all else, level of the prospective V4 collaboration in development cooperation is not as obvious as one might think. First of all, the Visegrad countries should work on evidence and good assessment. They need to estimate thoroughly the benefits and the costs of every scenario. Hypothetically speaking,

after joint pilot programming it may turn out that it is ineffective and inefficient in terms of both fulfilling the development and political goals. Thus, instead of greater cohesion and bigger funds, V4 would generate more bureaucracy and administrative costs than if they acted separately. The same might concern the idea of joint call of proposals and the institution that would manage common funds. Whatever decision would be made as to the depth of V4 activities in development cooperation, the key aspect would remain the same - the Visegrad countries must act in accordance with the political willingness, evidence-based policy and results-based approach. Choosing between common implementation, common programming, joint political actions at multilateral forums and many other ultimate solutions should not be accompanied by an "all or nothing" attitude. Currently, the middle scenario is the most likely, embracing, for instance, common implementation without matching funds,

strengthening the evaluation capacity or working out the common position in multilateral organizations.

4. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are becoming more important subjects in the current V4 discourse. Still, only small share of ODA funds provided by V4 countries has been transferred to LDCs and well-governed nations. However, experiences gained during the intensification of V4 development cooperation within Eastern Partnership can find application in the Global South, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. There are a few prospective joint initiatives that could be undertaken, such as mapping hitherto presence of V4 in Africa, building more comprehensive inter-parliamentary relations between V4 and African states as well as defining the role of the International Visegrad Fund in joint projects in LDCs. Moreover, V4 should think about carrying out first ever V4 pilot project in Africa.

I. MPs ENGAGING IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

When Prime Minister David Cameron fought for the votes of the young generation, he had to declare that he was not going to cut development aid funds. Barack Obama during his presidential campaign also underscored the importance of development cooperation. The Visegrad countries are far from treating development cooperation as one of the fundamental instruments of foreign policy. To change that, non-governmental organizations from V4 countries have organized joint study trips to developing countries. In November 2012, a group of MPs from the Visegrad countries visited Ethiopia to find out how the prospective V4 cooperation could be implemented in the field. Aside from just visiting projects carried out by a particular V4 country, the delegation held talks with Ethiopian governmental bodies and high ranks officials from parliament and various ministries.

Visegrad development cooperation is the process in which all member states have been building their capacity in providing development assistance. During the first panel discussion, the members of parliaments from V4 gave some thoughts on potential V4 cooperation in the international development cooperation agenda.

AWARENESS PIVOT

A lot of actions need to be taken regarding public awareness. Social support for development cooperation is still relatively high in most V4 countries with the exception of Hungary, but it does not convert into higher level of awareness, in particular among decision makers.²

One of the crucial elements to turn the tables on position of development cooperation in V4 priorities is to build awareness and ability to understand the problems of developing countries among MPs. The aforementioned study visits can break a stalemate. After seeing the projects in the field, MPs will be able to start a discussion on the related issues not only within parliaments but also the societies. Greater MP awareness should lead, as a first step, to discussion with decision makers on how to implement some projects, how to set priorities for V4 assistance or how V4 countries should best focus on the problems of Global South as relatively small donors. Parliamentarians are at the first line of politics and they can spread information within society and address problems to voters. Nevertheless, MPs have to become the true partners in that discourse which can only be attained by expanding their knowledge. Ministries of Foreign Affairs or other leading institutions dealing with ODA have been taking advantage of this lack of professionalism on the part of parliaments in development cooperation.

Moreover, inter-parliamentarian cooperation is a vital condition for building awareness. Cooperation between V4 parliamentary bodies such as Committees of Foreign Affairs, Committees of European Affairs and others allow the exchange of experiences beyond national borders. As a result, MPs may have better recognition of issues and take the right steps needed to resolve them.

Thirdly, collaboration of the MPs with other actors like NGOs and Ministries of Foreign Affairs or Development Agencies can create

the room for addressing development cooperation issues in V4 media. A coherent front could overturn a current trend in focusing only on the closest neighborhood. That cannot be done without proper information.

V4 PATH IN AFRICA

It would be inexplicable not to see the future importance of Africa in the world politics and economy. The MPs have appropriate instruments, the so-called bargaining lever, to convince national governments to change their minds. Additionally, V4 had quite interesting experiences with African countries prior to the fall of communism. Currently, all V4 countries are ahead of facing the challenge of how to cooperate with Africa comprehensively. Their own capacities to be efficient and effective are quite limited, though, which is why V4 countries should think through the common approach towards Africa. It is well-justified, particularly taking into account the present coverage of Embassies of V4 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.³

The Visegrad countries' MPs could begin with improved cooperation with the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa, even more so as AWEPA can be considered as a good forum to test whether and to what extent transitional experience is in the line with Africa's needs. That could either validate or disprove the hypothesis according to which such experience can be transferable not only to Eastern Partnership countries but also to the Partners from South.

INVESTMENTS CHANCES

V4 countries have to change the commonly used language to be able to present their citizens with very effective and practical aspects of development cooperation. Poverty should still be treated as to priority. However, the Visegrad countries could also focus on chances and opportunities which derive from development cooperation, such as investments. That is why V4 countries may concentrate on attracting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in development cooperation. The Visegrad Group could also attach high priority to job creation in

Africa and bringing about economic growth. Within the International Visegrad Fund, an innovative instrument of microfinance grant could be established, which would foster sustainable development in Africa. Such financial service could be granted via V4 Embassies in the region.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ● Study trips to developing countries are important factor of building awareness among Members of Parliaments.
- ● MPs and development actors such as NGOs, Universities and governmental bodies from V4 countries should create united front for addressing the development cooperation issues in V4 media.
- ● V4 countries should strengthen inter-parliamentary cooperation, in particular between specialized African groups.
- ● Visegrad members should change the perception of Africa, switching from the "poverty only image" to a continent of future opportunities. MP involvement is indispensable.
- ● MPs from V4 countries should cooperate more closely in AWEPA.
- ● Visegrad Group should give a high priority to job creation in Africa and bringing about economic growth activities.
- ● V4 should work together on greater involvement of SMEs in development cooperation.
- ● MPs from the Visegrad countries should be more involved in fulfillment of the obligation to increase ODA funds for LDCs.

*Text is a summing-up of the 1st panel discussion conducted during the conference entitled Visegrad Countries in International Development Cooperation, with the following panelists: Robin Bohnisch (Member of Parliament, Czech Republic), Virag Kaufer (ex-member of Parliament, Hungary), Killian Munyama (Member of Parliament, Poland), Jozef Viskupič (Member of Parliament, Slovakia)

II. GO BEYOND TRADITIONAL MULTILATERALISM*

Not so long ago V4 countries used to be aid recipients, therefore, they have unique position when it comes to spending external resources efficiently and effectively. All V4 countries share similarities in terms of lagging behind the international obligations concerning the level of the ODA/GNI ratio. The similarity also involves huge imbalance between bilateral and multilateral aid as well as very

low awareness of development cooperation. The Visegrad Group has the chance to go beyond the traditional multilateral aid, though it is unlikely that revolution in that area will happen overnight. V4 countries are moving from very first step, i.e. the exchange of information, to advocacy work and common policy coordination towards EU or OECD.

The panelists of the 2nd discussion sketched some areas where V4 can share their interests in development cooperation.

TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE

Distinction between multilateral and bilateral has a big significance. The V4 countries are well recognized as a bloc within the EU, but to a smaller extent other multilateral forums. Bilaterally, the V4 countries occasionally organize development cooperation meetings at ministerial level. As a result, within recent months, joint efforts have been undertaken to put transition experiences in EU development cooperation and to express that in the EU financial perspective. The challenge for V4 is to transfer provisions supporting their transition experiences into regulations of the EU Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI) in order to link this acknowledgment of transitional experience with money allocation. That is why Visegrad countries attach great importance to joint efforts to adjust conditions of applying for the EU funds. Yet V4 countries have been quite at the bottom of the list of states that obtained EU financial grants related to development activities.

LEVEL OF JOINT ENDEAVORS

Collaboration between NGOs from V4 countries is the most prominent dimension of V4 development cooperation. Even though most initiatives were aimed at building awareness among societies of the Group, the emphasis is changing toward joint implementation of development projects.

At this stage, strengthening information sharing should be considered as a prerequisite step in V4 cooperation to make it more efficient. V4 is not starting from scratch in that regard, albeit the perspective of such comprehensive approach is rather unlikely.

The V4 countries could also consider collaboration with a more experienced donor from outside of the group, such as Sweden or Germany. That could give V4 additional experience and catalyze the potential common implementation of projects. V4 countries have already conducted some joint micro projects, thus before moving on, they may have to step back a little bit and draw conclusions from these attempts at building up capacity for acting together on a bigger scale.

A very important area for future V4 cooperation is to help the V4 project implementing organizations - NGOs, companies and others - to successfully bid for EU funds. This is a well-grounded direction, taking into account the fact that recently the V4 countries have started to transfer huge amount of money to the European Development Fund (EDF). So far, though, there has been no single Hungarian NGOs or company project funded by the EDF, for example. Better representation of the V4 block interests could be beneficial to all of the Visegrad countries together and each of them individually.

Common implementation can take various forms in terms of depth of cooperation. The Visegrad countries can work on parallel projects without matching funds, but first they need to gather comprehensive information about their respective initiatives and projects. In the most advanced scenario common implementation means joint call for proposals and work on the same granting schemes. Nevertheless, joint call for proposal would encounter the legal difficulties at the moment, as for instance there is no such legislation covering pooling funds in the Polish Development Cooperation Act. Thus, V4 should take up screening the level of alignment of Visegrad members' legislative systems. In a more basic scenario, the V4 countries could implement projects in the same country and sector without a strict structural framework. So far, the V4 have been doing the latter by taking up the parallel projects in the same field. For instance, recently Slovakia has started to work with the Czech Republic in Myanmar. The reasons why they decided to do so is that Slovakia wanted to take advantage from a more-experienced donor and the Czech Republic is well-established and has an Embassy in the country (whilst Slovakia does not). Without pulling the funds, these two countries have conducted two projects in the same area. The V4 countries can also work on the same target group, as it has been between Slovakia and Hungary which have jointly organized a training program for Ukrainians. First part took place in Budapest and the second one in Bratislava. Beneficiaries got the best practices from transition experiences of both countries. They decided on separate financial mechanisms to avoid the problems of common budgeting.

However, even such level of cooperation arouses some more general controversies. First of all, the V4 countries must honestly answer the question of why they decide to undertake joint implementation, or if it is only about the political image or a chance to combine comparative advantage of V4.

JOINT PROGRAMMING

Joint programming requires resource allocation in advance of several years. Some countries face legal problems when trying to put that into practice. Before the V4 would decide on common programming, the whole Group should peruse cases of more experienced donors that show why the common programming did not work for them or where the bottlenecks can be found.

To date, V4 practice has provided a few examples of common programming that can be mentioned. Recently, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have started joint evaluations. Both countries had also very recent experience in joint programming in Moldova.

MAPPING

To strengthen V4 efforts into poverty eradication in the LDCs, MFAs could map their geographical and sectorial involvement to date.⁴ That would allow the Visegrad Countries to assess, among other issues, the character of V4 presence, the level of resour-

ces involved and the volume of aid provided. It should be done on both the administrative and NGO level. Ultimately, mapping would give the substance for better understanding of where the V4 can really work together in Africa and whether such cooperation could cover all countries, two countries or just a single one. It is worth noting that Hungary has joined the World Bank's Mapping for Results Initiative, thus, every single project financed by Hungary will appear on the website with exact location and a short description.

THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND AS A PROSPECTIVE TOOL

The International Visegrad Fund was created to enhance the internal cohesion of the V4. A few years later, it has successively broadened its scope of responsibilities, focusing on foreign policy dimension. For instance, in 2011 the Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Program (V4EaP) opened up and provided a chance to obtain grants under the call for proposals co-financed with the Netherlands. In December 2012, the Fund started another program targeting Western Balkans. Such instruments can be used to address very sensitive issues within the projects implemented, such as dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. Moreover, the Fund initiated the so-called V4 Think Tank Platform, a network for structured dialogue on issues of strategic regional importance. The network provides recommendations to the governments of V4 countries. Presumably, the next subject for this platform would concern the evaluation of the V4 collaboration in development cooperation. As a consequence, it will lead to improvements in quality of short-term and long-term analysis of V4 development cooperation. Current Fund programs are a good example of how to harmonize aid and make it more transparent. The Visegrad Fund might also have a role to play in carrying out the idea of joint call for proposals in development cooperation. For instance, small and standard grants can be utilized for implementing projects in LDCs. Visegrad countries should also make good use of new instruments provided by the Fund. The first concerns the comparison of V4 know-how regarding Northern African countries, whereas the second focuses on better effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivered by the Visegrad states. Furthermore, the International Visegrad Fund can collect external financing to increase the common budget without exerting pressure on constrained national budgets. Japan and Sweden have declared preliminary willingness to take part in that component.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The next step for the V4 countries is to work on the existing mechanisms. Task forces for Moldova and Tunisia are steady points from which V4 could start and combine their activities in certain communities in a variety of sectors. The V4 countries do not have to agree on a single sector, but rather focus on one country, taking into account comparative advantages of each V4 state. Hypothetically speaking, Slovakia could run an educational project in Nairobi slum, while Hun-

gary can implement a health sector project and Poland provide water management activities.

From a political point of view, Visegrad countries tend to persuade the European Union that Moldova should be one of the programming countries for the EU. The rationale is that there is no transition country included in the EU Joint Programming Initiative.⁵

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ● The Visegrad countries should attach great importance to joint efforts to adjust conditions of applying for EU development funds.
- ● On this stage of cooperation, strengthening information sharing should be considered a prerequisite step to improve efficiency.
- ● Common implementation can take various forms in terms of depth of cooperation. In the most advanced scenario it may mean joint call for proposals and working on the same granting schemes. V4 countries can also prepare parallel projects without matching funds.
- ● Important area for future V4 cooperation is to help the V4 project implementing organizations – NGOs, companies and others – to successfully bid for EU funds.
- ● The V4 countries should consider collaboration with a more experienced donor from outside the group, such as Sweden or Germany. That could provide the V4 with additional experience and catalyze the potential for common implementation of projects. Such cooperation should involve the V4 NGOs.
- ● Visegrad countries could start from mapping their geographical and sectorial to-date involvement to strengthen the V4 efforts into poverty eradication in LDCs.
- ● The Visegrad Fund might have a role to play in carrying out the idea of joint call for proposals aimed at LDCs.

*Text is a summing-up of the 2nd panel discussion conducted during the conference named Visegrad Countries in International Development Cooperation, with following panelists: Miroslaw Broito (Head of EU Development Policy Unit, MFA, Poland), Petr Halaxa (ODA Department, MFA the Czech Republic), Peter Hulényi (Head of Department for Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid, MFaEA, Slovakia), Adam Kirchknopf (Deputy Head of International Development and Assistance Department, MFA, Hungary), Karla Wursterová (Executive Director of International Visegrad Fund).

III. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE IN V4 DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION*

The Visegrad countries have still not decided what should the actual depth and level of V4 cooperation in international development be, so that the overall efficiency of actions will increase. However, there is no doubt that the maturity levels are on the rise. Currently, most V4 countries have a better vision of what they want to achieve via development cooperation and they have better instruments in their possession than it was the case even two years ago.⁶ For instance, a year ago the Development Cooperation act entered into force in Poland. As a consequence, Poland adopted the first ever Multiannual Development Cooperation Program for 2012-2015. During the 3rd panel discussion, academia representatives from all V4 countries were trying to find out what the current and potential challenges of the V4 collaboration in development cooperation were. A few areas of particular interest should be addressed.

REAL NEED OR ARTIFICIAL CONCEPT?

Even if we skipped all very basic arguments in favor of a deeper cooperation in international development, such as common history, geographic proximity or successes achieved during more than twenty years of Visegrad cooperation in other sectors, the Visegrad countries would still need cooperation in that area as in terms of quantity and quality, their capacities are very similar to each other. The fact has been well-proved by international perception, with the V4 countries scoring at the bottom of the Commitment to Development Index that ranks 27 richest countries and quantifies a range of policies that could affect developing countries including: (i) quantity and quality of foreign aid; (ii) openness to exports; (iii) policies that encourage investment; (iv) migration policies; (v) security policies; (vi) support for technology creation and dissemination.

Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia have been ranked at or below average in most components, except for the environmental one. More importantly, components like openness to trade or security policies are weighed in the same way for all the EU countries because of the EU common policies. The most striking contrast concerns the aid component. While the average score in quality and quantity of aid equals 5.0, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia do not even exceed a 1.0 threshold. The Czech Republic does, but very modestly, scoring just 1.1.⁷

The V4 countries scored so low mainly because of overloading recipient countries with too many small projects. Secondly, there is a coordination gap between each V4 country individual activities and other donor undertakings in the field. Moreover, only a small share of the ODA funds provided by the V4 countries has been transferred

to LDCs and well-governed nations, plus there are not enough ODA agreements signed with governments of the recipient countries. Finally, the V4 countries are penalized for providing very limited ODA funds in terms of ODA/GNI ratio.

In all fairness, it is not only limited quantity of aid, but also effectiveness and the so-called qualitative approach, that require a new way of thinking about aid from the V4 countries. Quality of the V4 aid would be the first to benefit from strengthening of well-thought cooperation framework. Joint projects or even programs can also increase the cumulative volume of aid and, as a result, its final impact.

CHALLENGES OF V4 COOPERATION

In theory, all that looks very plausible, but in practice the V4 countries have to deal with substantial barriers. First of all, common programming seems to be highly unlikely. Current timeframes of strategic documents on development cooperation vary significantly country by country. In Poland, the period involved is 2012-2015, in the Czech Republic it is 2010-2017 and in case of Slovakia it is 2009-2013. Even more strikingly, in Hungary there no legislation on the ODA has been passed yet, but it should be hammered out during this year. Such lack of cohesion hampers the prospective cooperation between the V4 countries. Thus, they should harmonize the timeframes of strategic planning on a country level first, which would be an important step towards common implementation of the projects.

When it comes to common implementation, though, at the first glance similarities can be observed in sectorial and subject priorities that are stated in programming/strategic documents of all V4 countries. However, new sectorial priorities in Poland were chosen in a less organized manner than it was, for instance, the case in the Czech Republic. Poland did not conduct comprehensive analysis of its real strengths in partner countries and has not prepared Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) dedicated to any recipient-country so far. Both Slovakia and Hungary have worked out the CSPs concerning only a few recipient countries of their ODA. This kind of Country Strategy Papers could also include a paragraph, if justified, that would analyze the potential of V4 cooperation in a particular country. It would constitute impetus for sharing V4 experiences on a more regular basis and doing more joint research work, The latter being a vital part of potential V4 cooperation.

According to the geographical and thematic priorities of each V4 country, the rationale for common implementation appears more significant. All of the V4 states recognize Afghanistan and Moldova

as priority countries. Three out of four⁸ provide their aid to Georgia, Ukraine and Palestinian Authority. When it comes to Sub-Saharan Africa, all V4 countries implement projects in Kenya and Ethiopia, albeit on differing scales. Furthermore, sectorial specialization also provides room for cooperation. The V4 member states are active in supporting democratic institutions and good governance as well as in agriculture, education, water management and health sectors. However, if we narrow V4 development cooperation down to poverty eradication, the advantages that were just mentioned could turn into political obstacles. This is because development assistance is still targeted mostly at the neighboring countries. For instance, according to Polish development policy documents more than 60 per cent of bilateral aid should be provided to Eastern Partnership countries (while roughly 4 per cent goes to Africa). Such approach has its political and strategic rationale, economic and political ties are obvious, but simultaneously it has caused a problem for those who have been lobbying about deepening V4 cooperation in ODA bearing in mind SSA and other regions with elevated poverty levels. Decision-makers from the Visegrad countries need to understand that there should not be any kind of conflict between alleviation of the poverty and realization of vital or even strategic interests in the nearest neighborhood. There is also no doubt that V4 international obligations and prospective opportunities derived from present rapid economic growth in many parts of Africa should lead V4 to re-orientation of this part of the world in the policy of the Group.

NATIONAL VISIBILITY VS. V4 VISIBILITY

Deeper development cooperation taken up by the Visegrad countries would require political decision and cohesion among the member states. In particular, bearing in mind that one of the greatest barriers for moving forward is the so-called 'visibility driven policy', meaning that donor countries want to be visible during providing aid as their first and foremost goal. It is mainly achieved by using badges, logos and other emblems. Visibility means hiring staff with donor's nationality and competition for influence and funds as well. One can also claim that it is about showing taxpayers where their money goes. From the political point of view, in all V4 countries it is still easier to gain greater political momentum for undertakings funded by a particular country than for ones financed by the whole Group. Regardless of validity of these arguments, policy of national visibility narrows the room for potential cooperation. The V4 countries would have to consider carefully, whether they value their own visibility the most or if they are mature enough to transfer some extent of visibility to the level of the Group.

AID TRANSPARENCY

Aid transparency could be the first step toward real V4 cooperation in the international development sector, as even for a researcher it is hard to find data that could be comparable and credible enough to analyze. The issue is not so much about the sheer volumes of aid, but more detailed geographical data, project descriptions, achieved goals and local problems. Still none of V4 countries has signed IATI (the

International Aid Transparency Initiative).⁹ They have pledged to implement the Busan common standard but without effects so far. According to the Aid Transparency Index, the Czech Republic is placed 22 out of 72 countries, with Poland, Slovakia and Hungary ranking as 52, 61, 70, respectively.¹⁰

Thus, taking into consideration the fact of scarce financial resources and relatively low number of projects and programs, V4 countries could focus together on aid transparency process within the EU. Finally, V4 countries could pick one country from the Global South, such as Ethiopia or Kenya, and engage in the EU Division of Labour Process. That could result in lowering V4 fragmentation of aid and transaction costs.

INCREASING THE BILATERAL FUNDS

The V4 countries need a serious political discussion about the 0.33 ODA/GNI commitment, as not only quality but also quantity of V4 aid matters. Multilateral aid is obligatory contribution to the EU or the UN and there is nothing to do about that. What the V4 can do is to increase bilateral aid. It must be a joint decision of the governments of V4 countries and national parliaments. Bilateral funds amount to around 25-30 per cent for Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and roughly 35 per cent for the Czech Republic. Without change in that regard, the ultimate efficiency of V4 development cooperation will depend on positions of the member countries in political forums and multilateral institutions. In that respect, the V4 countries could also think about strengthening the involvement of their small and medium size enterprises in development cooperation. SMEs, which take part in development tenders organized by many International Organizations, often need some direct or indirect assistance from their countries of origin. Additionally, the V4 countries could have a joint stand at development and humanitarian aid fairs as DIHAD (Dubai International Humanitarian Aid & Development Conference) or AidEx to promote the common approach in development cooperation more widely.

DEVELOPMENT BEYOND AID

At this particular moment, the V4 should focus on the shift agreed in Busan that switches from aid effectiveness to development cooperation effectiveness. It means that V4 countries should do more about Policy Coherence for Development and consider it as an essential part of their political activities within development cooperation. The Visegrad Group also suffers from unequal trade relations, while the more equal trade regime could not only benefit the poorest in the global South, but provide gains to citizens of all V4 countries. If the V4 governments truly want to be effective, other ministries need to eliminate negative impacts of non-development policies and make those policies coherent with development cooperation objectives. Not only the departments of development assistance from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, but also the Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, Industry, Environment and Economy need to be involved. And more importantly, they must be invo-

lved in a well-organized manner, or otherwise their small projects will serve nothing else obstruct our eyes from seeing more structural problems. The NGOs from V4 countries should perform as advocacy actors and engage in explaining that many problems of the global South do not originate in the South, but in the North. They cannot stop lobbying all the ministers and their subordinates to think about Aid for Trade approach and going beyond traditional development assistance. Even though the PCD is one of the major dimensions of the EU Development Cooperation Policy, Visegrad countries must raise their awareness about its complexity at every level, from high rank officials and MPs to NGOs workers and average citizens.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The V4 countries need a deeper cooperation in development issues to enhance the quality of V4 aid without immediate surge of the budgets.
- Aid transparency could be the first step towards real V4 cooperation in the international development.
- The V4 countries need a serious political discussion about the 0.33% ODA/GDP commitment, as not only quantity but also quality of V4 aid matters.

- The Visegrad countries tend to consider the Policy Coherence for Development as an essential part of their political activities within development cooperation and implement development beyond aid approach. Still, clear political commitment and policy coordination mechanisms are needed to put PCD into practice. The V4 should overcome the so-called 'visibility driven policy' pursued by each member country and increase mutual visibility of the projects.

- All V4 countries should have a well prepared strategy on international development cooperation. Hungary is still lagging behind that. That would be a very helpful step towards common implementation of the projects.

- The V4 countries should concentrate on absorption capacity and strengthening the mutual capacity in evaluation process.

*Text is a summing-up of the 3rd panel discussion conducted during the conference named Visegrad Countries in International Development Cooperation, with following panelists: Pavel Burian, PhD (Czech University of Life Science, Prague), Kacper Kosowicz (PhD student at Warsaw School Economics, Poland), Tomáš Profant (PhD student at University of Vienna, Slovakia), Andras Tetenyi (assistant professor at Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary).

IV. FUTURE OF V4 DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION*

NGO collaboration has been the core and catalyst of V4 joint activities in the development cooperation. Experiences to date indicate that non-governmental organizations from four Visegrad states can fruitfully work together on, among others, the development of policy dialogue with governments, the awareness building projects, the global education programs and sharing their experiences in capacity building.

The panelists of the 4th discussion found a few areas on which Visegrad countries could focus in near future.

GO BEYOND ODA – CREATE A SYNERGY

The official channels for V4 cooperation are important, however priority still should be given to the grassroots level. That is the part of the MDG 8 and Istanbul principles for CSO Development Effectiveness which proclaim the need for improvement in efficiency and the synergy creation between actors in order to avoid the overlaps.

This kind of synergy is a key element of building true cooperation. For instance, even NGOs from one country know very little about one another due to lack of information sharing. The commonness of this phenomenon harms the overall effect of aid significantly. Such a situation has begun to change lately and Visegrad NGOs started to perceive their counterparts not only as competitors, but also as potential partners. Prospects for the future involve such communication, information sharing and knowledge of what others are doing would arising on the level of the Visegrad countries. Many V4 NGOs have expertise in a variety sectors that could be used to complement each other. NGOs from one V4 country can help its counterparts to reach a new country, a goal which otherwise would not be possible to attain. Secondly, the Visegrad countries must strive for this synergy to decrease the marginalization on the EU level. New member states, mostly with small NGOs, have a really hard time tapping the EU funds. The V4 countries can break the ice together through creating consortia - one proposal submitted by four countries would significantly increase the chances of getting a grant. Additionally, ministries of the V4 Group could be

very helpful by lobbying on the EU level for greater involvement of V4 NGOs in obtaining the EU funds.

NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Nowadays, a vivid discussion is taking place in the international society regarding the actual role of private sector in development cooperation. This is also a very new topic for V4 countries and it brings about so many controversies because the Visegrad countries have not yet worked out the clear boundaries between genuine development activities and pure business. The Czech National NGOs Platform (FoRS) has been carrying out an analytical project which is going to show the main barriers, obstacles and prospective chances for collaboration between NGOs, private sector and academia in development cooperation. Mutual teaching and learning are the key elements. NGOs can benefit from opening up themselves to knowledge and expertise from business. They could learn the pragmatic approach as private sector demands quick reactions and immediate analysis pointing out what needs to be done in order to come up with technical solutions in the areas of their expertise. Apart from that, V4 countries could also focus on building their own strategies towards greater involvement of the private sector. It is worth saying that at the beginning of this year the Czech Republic started the ministerial B2B pilot Program of Development-Economic Partnership that is going to examine the possibilities of business cooperation in that regard. Its aim is to support cooperation of Czech companies with partners in developing countries, using the transfer of know-how and technologies. So far, there has been a call for proposals for Serbia and Ethiopia and three projects were selected (with a budget slightly over 10 thousand EUR total).¹¹ In Poland, this relatively new dimension of international cooperation seems to be discussed in more detail in 2013, but without a comprehensive plan it is hard to predict positive results. In particular, in most Visegrad countries there are legal obstacles making the process quite unlikely. For instance, the legal framework in Poland does not enable private entities to participate in calls for proposals organized by MFA. Moreover, Public-Private Partnerships is reserved only for domestic undertakings.

Naturally, business has its own endemic objectives, but still the benchmark and the signpost for this new discourse should evolve into ultimate development goals for beneficiaries. Simultaneously, it is worth remembering that the private sector can secure long-term financial sustainability which NGOs projects mostly cannot do because of constraints in terms of time and funds.

NEW INSTRUMENTS

Visegrad NGOs should reach out across the borders and establish partnerships with CSOs without waiting for decisions and agreements of the V4 governments. One of successful examples is the Central European Development and Relief Organization Network (CEDRON) supported by the International Visegrad Fund.

Initial goal of the network is to be prepared for delivering humanitarian aid and disaster reduction mechanism. Full functionality of the platform would be attained only when the network gathers essential information from partners, including what each member is already doing in the field, what kind of logistic presence it has and how to employ that during the crisis. All of this would facilitate the other partners' access to a particular area when a disaster strikes. During 2013, the platform will be testing the operational preparedness for humanitarian response. It will take a form of planning the disaster risk reduction strategies for six countries around the world. Currently, the platform has six country teams where members of the network can meet to discuss the long-term strategies for each given country. CEDRON goes beyond the Visegrad countries, containing additionally one NGO from Austria and one from Slovenia. In spite that, it can be well applied to strengthen V4 NGOs cooperation by being a good forum for reaching agreement and sharing information. There have already been practical results of this cooperation. For instance, People in Peril (Slovakia) have implemented a project in Afghanistan together with Caritas Czech Republic. Moreover, People in Peril work with Hungarian Baptist Aid in Georgia. These are the examples of bilateral cooperation, but CEDRON is seeking to carry out multi-lateral projects in the future.

PILOT PROJECT IN AFRICA

In the joint projects, NGOs from the V4 countries have been concentrated on building awareness and advocacy work so far. Nevertheless, they should put emphasis on common implementation aspect as well as joint assessment works in the field and the so-called comprehensive projects, with all interested parties from V4 managing given sectors or communities.

Study visit to Ethiopia in November 2012 organized by four Visegrad NGOs allows to claim that joint project implementation in Africa is not as vague perspective as it may seem. First of all, before the trip V4 NGOs had made an assessment of the probability of prospective cooperation in that country. Thus, decision-makers and representatives of various actors could employ evidence-based approach. Generally speaking, the hydro-geological water, sanitation & hygiene sector (WASH) is the most feasible for commencement of the V4 cooperation in Ethiopia. More importantly, the idea has generated interest among the officials from V4 countries. The Embassy of Poland in Ethiopia has an idea worth-considering for the Visegrad cooperation, which is a joint project concerning sustainable development, resource management and environmental protection in a relatively small region named Bishangari. They have already discussed this proposal with their counterparts from other V4 countries, as well as the Ethiopian governmental bodies. The V4 could seize this opportunity as political activity and, to some degree, the political will is unique. Ultimately, it could be turned into first V4 pilot project in Africa.

WHAT'S NEXT?

One of the solutions for the future is to work out the shared Visegrad affiliation with projects that might be incorporated. It would strengthen the V4 visibility and public communication. Another interesting initiative would be common Visegrad fundraising events. The aid provided from such undertaking could be implemented under shared identity and the flag of V4.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ● Creating synergy between V4 actors should be a priority for building true cooperation. It should encompass overcoming the lack of information sharing and rivalry moods.
- ● The V4 countries ought to work together against the marginalization on tapping the EU development funds by creating consortia.
- ● NGOs from V4 countries should open up to involvement of private sector in development cooperation. There is a need for in-depth analysis of the prospective chances and threats.
- ● Visegrad NGOs should reach out across borders and establish partnerships with CSOs without waiting for decisions and agreements of V4 governments. CEDRON could play an important role.

- ● V4 NGOs should put an emphasis on common implementation aspect as well as joint assessment works in the field and so-called comprehensive projects when all interested parties from V4 could manage given sectors or communities.
- ● Ethiopia should be considered as good candidate for conducting the first joint pilot project in Africa.
- ● Working out the shared Visegrad affiliation to the joint development projects could be considered as prospective solution for the future cooperation.

*Text is a summing-up of the 4th panel discussion conducted during the conference named Visegrad Countries in International Development Cooperation, with following panelists: Tomáš Bokor (People in Peril, Board Member of Slovak NGDO Platform, Slovakia), Robert Hodosi (DamNet Foundation, Policy Officer), Zuzana Dudova (FoRS, the Czech Republic), Izabela Wilczyńska (Polish Humanitarian Action, Senior Policy Officer, Poland).

¹ Political scientist and independent expert on development cooperation; e-mail: Kosowicz.kacper@gmail.com.

² According to Eurobarometer on Development Cooperation published in October 2012, 86 per cent of the Czech are in favor of providing aid, in Hungary the figure is 73 per cent, in Poland around 90 per cent and 82 per cent of respondents support providing aid to developing countries in Slovakia. However, opinion polls conducted for particular Visegrad MFAs can differ from Eurobarometer's results, for instance, the latest opinion polls for Polish MFA indicate that social support for aid has decreased to 74 per cent. (<http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/PublicOpinion/Polls/197.html>); European Commission, *Solidarity that Spans the Globe: Europeans and Development Aid*, Special Eurobarometer 392, October 2012; pp. 8.

³ Hungary has only two embassies, Poland, the biggest country of the group, has five. Slovakia and the Czech Republic have four and five embassies, respectively.

⁴ In 2010 NGOs from Visegrad countries published the report titled *Least Developed Countries in Official Development Assistance of Visegrad Four Countries*. It covers the period from 2004 to 2008. http://demnet.hu/images/stories/B_kiadvanyok/2.1_aidwatch/least_but_not_last.pdf

⁵ Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFaEA) has informed that during the meeting in Dublin on February 11th-12th, 2013, state secretaries of the V4 countries met and agreed on the coordination of procedures in providing development aid to Moldova.

⁶ Hungary has still lagged behind other V4 countries in terms of the legal and strategic framework for the Official Development Assistance.

⁷ *Commitment to Development Index 2012*, Center for Global Development, Washington, DC 2012. http://www.cgdev.org/files/1426572_file_CGD_CDI_web.pdf

⁸ The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. However, Slovakia provides aid to Georgia and Ukraine.

⁹ The Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia have made a commitment to publish data in IATI format by 2015.

¹⁰ The *Aid Transparency Index 2012*, Publish What You Fund, http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/files/2012-Aid-Transparency-Index_web-singles.pdf

¹¹ First results of the program may be expected at the end of this year

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PANEL I

MPS ENGAGING IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

- Study trips to developing countries are important factor of building awareness among Members of Parliaments.
- MPs and development actors such as NGOs, Universities and governmental bodies from V4 countries should create united front for addressing the development cooperation issues in V4 media.
- V4 countries should strengthen inter-parliamentary cooperation, in particular between specialized African groups.
- Visegrad members should change the perception of Africa, switching from the “poverty only image” to a continent of future opportunities. MP involvement is indispensable.
- MPs from V4 countries should cooperate more closely in AWEPA.
- Visegrad Group should give a high priority to job creation in Africa and bringing about economic growth activities.
- V4 should work together on greater involvement of SMEs in development cooperation.
- MPs from the Visegrad countries should be more involved in fulfillment of the obligation to increase ODA funds for LDCs.

PANEL III

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE IN V4 DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

- The V4 countries need a deeper cooperation in development issues to enhance the quality of V4 aid without immediate surge of the budgets.
- Aid transparency could be the first step towards real V4 cooperation in the international development.
- The V4 countries need a serious political discussion about the 0.33% ODA/GDP commitment, as not only quantity but also quality of V4 aid matters.
- The Visegrad countries tend to consider the Policy Coherence for Development as an essential part of their political activities within development cooperation and implement development beyond aid approach. Still, clear political commitment and policy coordination mechanisms are needed to put PCD into practice. The V4 should overcome the so-called ‘visibility driven policy’ pursued by each member country and increase mutual visibility of the projects.
- All V4 countries should have a well prepared strategy on international development cooperation. Hungary is still lagging behind that. That would be a very helpful step towards common implementation of the projects.
- The V4 countries should concentrate on absorption capacity and strengthening the mutual capacity in evaluation process.

PANEL II

GO BEYOND TRADITIONAL MULTILATERALISM

- The Visegrad countries should attach great importance to joint efforts to adjust conditions of applying for EU development funds.
- On this stage of cooperation, strengthening information sharing should be considered a prerequisite step to improve efficiency.
- Common implementation can take various forms in terms of depth of cooperation. In the most advanced scenario it may mean joint call for proposals and working on the same granting schemes. V4 countries can also prepare parallel projects without matching funds.
- Important area for future V4 cooperation is to help the V4 project implementing organizations – NGOs, companies and others – to successfully bid for EU funds.
- The V4 countries should consider collaboration with a more experienced donor from outside the group, such as Sweden or Germany. That could provide the V4 with additional experience and catalyze the potential for common implementation of projects. Such cooperation should involve the V4 NGOs.
- Visegrad countries could start from mapping their geographical and sectorial to-date involvement to strengthen the V4 efforts into poverty eradication in LDCs.
- The Visegrad Fund might have a role to play in carrying out the idea of joint call for proposals aimed at LDCs.

PANEL IV

FUTURE OF V4 DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

- Creating synergy between V4 actors should be a priority for building true cooperation. It should encompass overcoming the lack of information sharing and rivalry moods.
- The V4 countries ought to work together against the marginalization on tapping the EU development funds by creating consortia.
- NGOs from V4 countries should open up to involvement of private sector in development cooperation. There is a need for in-depth analysis of the prospective chances and threats.
- Visegrad NGOs should reach out across borders and establish partnerships with CSOs without waiting for decisions and agreements of V4 governments. CEDRON could play an important role.
- V4 NGOs should put an emphasis on common implementation aspect as well as joint assessment works in the field and so-called comprehensive projects when all interested parties from V4 could manage given sectors or communities.
- Ethiopia should be considered as good candidate for conducting the first joint pilot project in Africa.
- Working out the shared Visegrad affiliation to the joint development projects could be considered as prospective solution for the future cooperation.

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