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COUNTRY CASE STUDY: POLAND

POLISH OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND PEACEBUILDING

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ACRONYMS

CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
CSPs	Country Strategy Papers
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EDF	European Development Fund
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
GAERC	General Affairs and External Relations Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAP	Polish Press Agency
PHO	Polish Humanitarian Organisation
SENSE	Strategic Economic Needs and Security Exercise
SLD	Alliance of the Democratic Left

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite a tradition of providing assistance to developing countries that reaches back to the 1970s, Poland is a new actor in the field of European Official Development Assistance (ODA). The activities oriented towards developing and introducing a strategy for Polish development assistance analysed in this report originate directly from the obligation accepted by the Polish government in 2004, when they joined the EU. On a basis of sources reviewed for this paper, it is difficult to judge to what degree the weaknesses of Polish ODA result from ill-informed or lack of political decisions, and to what degree the reason is an absence of reliable administrative mechanisms for planning and implementation. Nevertheless, it is worth taking into account that Poland's experience in the area is still minimal. The transformation from a receiving country into a donor country requires much deeper changes than just improving the administrative system and increasing the percentage of the budget directed for this purpose.

Poland's committed development assistance in 2008 is lower than what was promised under the obligations accepted in 2004. In 2007 Poland's ODA amounted to €304,554,500, which constituted approximately 0.09 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), almost the same amount as in 2006. This means that it would be practically impossible to reach the figures declared in 2004: 0.17 percent of its Gross National Income (GNI) by 2010 and 0.33 percent by 2015.

As this report demonstrates, Poland's ability to meet its ODA obligations is hindered by a lack of legislation. No legal act that would comprehensively regulate all the issues and procedures connected with foreign assistance has been created in the last five years. As a result, there is a lack of stability and continuity in the development of Polish ODA priorities; instead, ODA is planned and implemented based on annual competitions for funding among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local government institutions and annually formulated priorities developed within the framework of yearly budgets.

In addition, Poland's assistance is dispersed among activities undertaken by numerous departments. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has a coordinating role in the process of planning expenses connected with bilateral assistance; however, it has only 20 percent of the development assistance funds at its disposal. Therefore, it is difficult to speak about a single "development assistance strategy". It is rather a sequence of activities undertaken by particular institutions. A coordination of those activities by a separate entity – a new government agency – would increase the possibility of establishing a consistent national strategy and utilising the available funds for a more effective implementation.

Other issues addressed in this analysis stem from the problem areas described above. The lack of a clear, multi-annual Polish development assistance strategy – and, what follows, a low visibility of horizontal policies – is a result not only of a lack of political vision, but also a direct consequence of the absence of legislative solutions. Annual, ad hoc competitions for funding imply that it is more important for government institutions to meet the deadlines connected with initiating and concluding particular procedures, than a real debate on the direction, quality and value of the assistance in itself. In this *modus operandi*, it is impossible to implement a system of consultation with receiving countries so as to harmonise assistance with their development strategies, as well as with government programmes of poverty reduction or NGOs.

The term "peacebuilding" is not used in the Polish strategy. The key term is "democracy". 'Democracy establishes a space for liberty, that is an immanent constituent of development, and only in conditions when human rights,

rules of good practice in government and in other democratic mechanisms are observed, assistance can be provided in such a way, that the resulting development would be sustainable', as the authors of the project write.¹ At the same time, Polish foreign assistance is concentrated on eight priority countries, and at least four of those have ongoing or recent open conflicts: Afghanistan, Angola, Georgia and the Palestinian territories. Initiatives directly or indirectly oriented towards peacebuilding are financed in the framework of assistance. Examples of such initiatives are: repatriation of refugees; care for child victims of conflict; organising legal-government institutions; supporting preparation and implementation of reforms; optimising the work of police and of administrative and legislative apparatus; and rebuilding the economy of the country in conflict. The lack of a shared overall ODA strategy among key Polish institutional actors, however, prevents peacebuilding from becoming a recognised component contributing to peace and stability in Polish priority countries.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the analysis conducted is that the organisation of Polish development assistance is a process that has been already initiated, but not yet clearly developed, which hinders effective implementation. Its success will depend on the determination of the MFA to regulate three basic issues: ensuring that financing reaches the levels set in 2004; implementing effective legislative solutions; and facilitating the coordination of implementation of a holistic strategy of Polish assistance. The development of a comprehensive strategy is critical to developing Polish capacities as regards peacebuilding; it will then be possible to advocate for the development of a specific peacebuilding focus within ODA which is currently absent. These steps will address the most severe deficiencies of Polish development assistance: its limited reach; instability of implementation and low visibility of assistance strategy; and limited public knowledge about Polish development and peacebuilding priorities.

This paper aims to provide an overview and analysis of Poland's existing policies and practices, as well as future plans regarding ODA priorities and peacebuilding activities. A leading goal in the research and writing process has been to provide a basis and direction for improvement in the way ODA and peacebuilding funds are being planned and spent to generate the maximum possible impact in beneficiary countries, but also in Poland and its society.

The key findings of this report also serve as recommendations to guide future development of Poland's ODA and peacebuilding activities.

1. Polish development assistance and peacebuilding requires vision and strategy: it is a necessary requirement for increasing its effectiveness. Polish development assistance requires a long-term strategy that would delineate not only the geographic areas to be provided with assistance, but also priorities, goals and expected results of activities undertaken. This pertains to the whole field of peacebuilding. A well designed strategy, based on a strategic choice of areas and goals, is necessary to reach any long-term results to enhance stability and build partner relations with receiving countries that would be able to utilise Polish assistance as a predictable tool supporting their independent development.

2. The strategy of Polish assistance should be developed in dialogue with receiving and implementing agents. The occasional discussion held between representatives of the MFA and NGOs, such as members of the NGO platform Group Zagranica, are not at all an adequate method for developing a comprehensive ODA strategy that includes peacebuilding elements. Preparing goals that would positively support the changes in developing countries requires designing a stable system of consultation with NGOs active in the developing countries, institutions of the receiving countries, researchers and Polish diplomats.

3. Dispersion of funds earmarked for ODA by different ministries decreases the effectiveness of ODA; better coordination of activities at the government level is therefore necessary. Taking into account the growing scope of Polish assistance, as well as the complex nature of issues addressed in its framework, it is necessary to establish a dedicated government agency to deal solely with ODA. Such an agency, among other activities, would coordinate, competently monitor and evaluate the implementation of Polish assistance activities affected by NGOs and local government units.

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007a). *Solidarity, Development and Freedom - Strategy for Polish foreign assistance for the years 2007-2013* [draft] (unpublished).

4. It is critical to solve the legislative problems directly influencing the quality and style of implementation of Polish assistance. In this context, accepting the proposed Foreign Assistance Act is urgent, as it would enable implementers of Polish assistance to utilise a financial mechanism excluded from the annual state budget. It is impossible to implement effective and sustainable development and peacebuilding activities of half-a-year duration, which is currently how ODA commitments are planned due to annual budgetary cycles.

5. In order to ensure a high quality of peacebuilding activities, it is necessary to raise the competence of agents implementing assistance in the context of cultural, social and religious differences of receiving countries. For example, in the context of a steep increase of expenses for implementing Polish assistance in Afghanistan, an intensive education in the specifics of the region is necessary. There is a significant possibility that either the activities planned for 2009 will not be implemented because of the inadequate number of experienced institutions, or that errors will be made – as a result of a lack of experience in the region – that will be difficult to correct.

6. Polish assistance strategy and vision must be consistently communicated to the public. The low level of support for the vision of Poland as a donor country is the result of inconsistent communication about Polish ODA and peacebuilding to the Polish public. On the basis of analyses conducted, it can be seen that the problem is rooted not only in the weakness of information, promotion and education campaigns, but also in the lack of clarity of messages produced by the MFA.

7. There is a clear difference between the understanding of and motivations for assistance activities in Poland and older EU Member States. Taking into account the common aim – peacebuilding and fighting poverty in developing countries – it seems necessary to intensify the activities oriented towards experience exchange and debate between the new and old EU countries. Such a debate should not necessarily lead to unified policies, but at least to a mutual understanding about what ODA and peacebuilding means and what they should accomplish in recipient countries.

INTRODUCTION

This analysis was conducted in Poland in 2008 within the broad framework of the Capacity-Building Cluster of the Initiative for Peacebuilding. The research was set to explore the policy and practices in the Central, Eastern and Southern European Member States for more effective peacebuilding within and through national foreign assistance programmes.

This paper aims to provide an analysis and recommendations for the improvement of existing policies and practices as well as future plans in Poland towards ODA in the peacebuilding context. The process of desk research, interviews and discussions with policy-makers involved in Polish ODA planning and implementation had the general goal of providing adequate recommendations for guidance on improving Poland's commitment to ODA processes and specifically prioritisation of peacebuilding to Polish decision-makers, including government representatives and interested Polish NGOs.

While the recommendations and main findings of the research are aimed primarily at government policy-makers, they will also be disseminated to relevant stakeholders and the broader public, in order to achieve the objectives defined above. These research findings are also addressed to Polish government officials, local civil society actors and are specifically addressed to Polish representatives within the EU structures, such as members of the European Parliament (MEPs). As the research shows, for the Polish government to effectively plan and implement ODA and peacebuilding plans requires both a clear strategy, legislative changes and involvement of broader representation of the society. For this reason, recommendations need to be delivered to various target groups to foster coordination between them.

METHODOLOGY

Regarding the sources of information, generally, in 2007–2008 there were several occasions to discuss ODA issues with representatives of the MFA, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finance. There were official meetings with directors of departments in which the Zagranica Group board members and its executive secretary participated. In July 2008, two officially authorised interviews were conducted by the ODA monitoring working group (of the Zagranica Group) in the preparation of a recent report entitled *Polish Development Assistance 2007*. The new director of the MFA Development Cooperation Department took part in the General Assembly of the Zagranica Group in September 2008. We also had the opportunity to talk about ODA during seminars organised by the MFA in April 2007 and September 2008, the Zagranica Group in November 2007, and a public debate organised by the Zagranica Group with the participation of the MFA Development Cooperation Department and Ministry of Finance Foreign Department directors in September 2008. Moreover, there were several unofficial contacts during conferences, working meetings and calls for proposals (evaluation of proposals with the participation of the author as an observer). Selected questions were handled in phone conversations with the MFA Development Cooperation Department in 2007 and 2008.

CURRENT GAPS IN POLISH ODA

FUNDS FOR POLISH ODA: PESSIMISTIC PROGNOSIS FOR 2015

The Polish tradition of providing assistance to developing countries reaches back to the 1970s. Poland, however, is a new actor in the field of European ODA: as a condition of its accession to the EU in 2004, Poland committed to supporting developing countries through ODA. In May 2005, Poland promised during a meeting of the Council of the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), along with other new Member States, to increase its assistance to developing countries to 0.17 percent of its GNI by 2010 and 0.33 percent by 2015.² The declaration was confirmed by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland at a meeting in May 2005. Also in May 2005, the Ministry of Finance presented a plan to increase the funds for development assistance in the years 2006–2010. According to this plan, Polish ODA would amount to 0.1 percent of the country's GDP (that is around one billion Polish Zlotych (PLN) or €300 million) in 2006, 0.11 percent of GDP (PLN 1.2 billion) in 2007, 0.12 percent of GDP (PLN 1.4 billion) in 2008, 0.14 percent of GDP (close to PLN 1.8 billion) in 2009, and 0.17 percent of GDP (PLN 2.3 billion) in 2010.³ However, even the earlier commitments have not yet been fulfilled.

Despite the nominal increase by a couple of hundred thousand Zlotych in 2006 and 2007, the percentage of ODA in relation to GDP has not changed at all. In 2007, Polish ODA amounted to PLN 1,005,029,852, constituting approximately 0.09 percent of GDP – the same amount as in 2006. In general, the value of Polish ODA has increased rather insignificantly and thus reaching the levels set for the next years, especially for 2010, seems improbable.⁴ The same conclusion was made in June 2008 during a seminar organised by the MFA, by one of the department employees responsible for policy coherence issues. During an unofficial meeting with the representatives of the Zagranica Group board,⁵ the new director of the MFA Development Cooperation Department also admitted that the volume of Polish bilateral ODA will not increase at all in 2009.

Since 1996, Poland has been a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is an observer in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). This means that it can participate in meetings of the Committee and its auxiliary organs and has the right to participate in discussion, but without the right of making decisions. However, in the *Strategy for Polish Cooperation for Development* from 2003,⁶ there is mention about a plan to join DAC as a full member. At the moment, it is estimated that Poland will attain full membership in DAC before 2010. OECD member states that want to join the Committee must first approve all the qualitative and quantitative guidelines of DAC, and meet all of its recommendations, including providing statistics about the value of foreign development assistance granted every year, together with a report on development assistance policies. The lowest possible value of ODA is not set formally, but so far all the states joining DAC have granted ODA at the level of at least 0.2 percent of GDP.

2 It should be noted that while international obligations, including the above-mentioned GAERC declaration, utilise the Gross National Income (GNI) index, the Polish government utilises Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

3 A. Czaplicka (2006). *Pomoc Rozwojowa Nowych Państw Członkowskich Ue Przykład Polski* (Development Assistance in New EU Member States: Poland). Warsaw, Poland: Institute of Regional and Global Studies, Warsaw University. p.17. Available at http://www.wgcsr.uw.edu.pl/pub/uploads/aaa83/83_Czaplicka.pdf; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006). *Informacja publiczna na temat kierunków i priorytetów polskiej pomocy zagranicznej i współpracy rozwojowej w 2006 r.* Warsaw, Poland: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. p.5. Available at <http://www.msz.gov.pl/files/docs/konkursy/dwr/IPKPPPOLPZWR2006.pdf>. Note: this MFA plan was not eventually realised.

4 This question - about the possibility of reaching a level of 0.17 percent of GNI by 2010 - was explicitly asked during an interview with the MFA representative in July 2008. However, we have not been allowed to quote the name of the source.

5 The Zagranica Group (meaning 'Polish NGOs Abroad') comprises a Polish Platform of Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) which work at the international level, mostly in developing countries. Zagranica Group is a member organisation of is a member of the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD). The Platform members include think tanks, HR organisations, development cooperation institutions etc.

6 The document developed by MFA in which the approach to the development policy is formulated.

TOO MANY PLAYERS IN THE FIELD: DIFFUSED FUNDING

The effectiveness and perception of Polish ODA is strongly influenced by its structure and style of management. The whole spectrum of development assistance provided by the Polish government consists of multilateral assistance (granted through international institutions) and bilateral assistance (granted directly through Polish public administration institutions).

A large majority of the multilateral assistance is provided through Polish participation in the EU budget in general, and the rest consists of payments to other organisations and international funds, such as UN departments, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and European Investment Bank (EIB). Starting in 2008, Poland also contributes to the European Development Fund (EDF).

The MFA coordinates the process of planning the funding commitments connected with bilateral assistance. Within the framework of bilateral assistance, funds support the initiatives and projects of such institutions as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Interior and Administration, Office of the Committee for European Integration, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Infrastructure, Chancellery of Sejm, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Ministry of National Defence, Ministry of Economy, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The MFA organises separate competitions for funding for NGOs, universities and local government units. The Ministry also supports the so-called Small Grants Fund, administered by the Polish diplomatic posts, from which organisations from partner countries can implement their projects.

However, the role of the MFA as a coordinator of bilateral fund spending is extremely limited by the fact that only about 20 percent of the bilateral assistance funds remain at its direct disposal. These are the funds directed to financing (through competitions) assistance projects in developing countries, implemented by NGOs, universities, local government units and embassies: financing the operation of the Polish foreign assistance programme; funding the programme of volunteer work abroad (initiated in 2008), financing initiatives pertaining to development education and funding the provision of humanitarian aid.

The cost of cooperation with the Russian Federation is classified as a separate pool of expenses – according to the DAC list, Russia is not an ODA recipient, so the costs of those projects are not qualified as ODA.

The remaining funds, constituting about 80 percent of all Polish bilateral assistance, are at the disposal of other departments listed above. The departments state that their initiatives, qualified as ODA, meet the requirements of the strategies of Polish assistance prepared by the MFA. However, as the funding resources tend to benefit countries that do not have official priority according to Polish assistance strategies, it is rather difficult to speak about actually meeting the strategies' requirements. The majority of assistance is provided through "tied aid", that is, preferential credits and annulment of debts (last year, tied aid took up as much as 74.5 percent of the value of bilateral assistance), even though the directives of OECD and DAC suggest a gradual departure from tied help, considering it ineffective.⁷ The commitments of such departments as the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Science and Higher Education (grants for students from developing countries), Ministry of Interior and Administration (costs of refugees' stay in Poland), and others, are planned according to a different time-frame and without the participation of the MFA.⁸

7 DAC (2007). *DAC Statistical Reporting Directives*. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/28/62/38429349.pdf>; DAC (2002). *Directives for Reporting to the Creditor Reporting System Aid Activity Database*. Appendix 2.2, 'DAC Guiding Principles for Associated Financing and Tied and Partially Untied Official Development Assistance (1987)'. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/10/31743730.htm>.

8 This information is based on an interview conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Finance in July 2008 (the Foreign Department director and his deputy); it is also one of the findings of *Polish Development Assistance. Independent research conducted by non-governmental organisations*, a report published by the Zagranica Group in 2007. This has also been confirmed by a representative of the Ministry of Economy (Chief of the International Bilateral Cooperation Department) during an unofficial conversation in June 2008.

LEGISLATIVE PROBLEMS: NO STABLE REGULATIONS

There are also legislative problems to consider, relating to qualitative and quantitative matters concerning Polish ODA. Various components of ODA are placed within different parts of the state budget, and funds for Polish bilateral assistance come from a restricted reserve of the state budget, so the commitments cannot be planned in any format other than yearly. There exists no single legal act that would regulate all the issues and procedures connected with foreign assistance. In 2006, the Department of Development Assistance of the MFA developed a draft (modified a number of times already) of a Foreign Assistance Act. Despite lengthy consultations, however, the document has not been approved by other ministries. It is known unofficially that the strongest opponent is the Ministry of Finance, which considered some of the regulations of the new Act to be conflicting with the Public Finance Act, which allows for annual budget planning only.⁹

The proposition to establish a restricted reserve to finance Polish foreign assistance (including ODA), which would allow independence of foreign assistance from the yearly budget planning and thus implementation of projects spanning more than one year, raised particular objections from the Ministry of Finance.¹⁰ Further changes in the draft will therefore be necessary, as in August 2008 the Ministry of Finance presented an amendment to the Public Finance Act, postulating a departure from the mechanism of a restricted reserve. The draft of the Foreign Assistance Act will have to once again pass the whole process of estimating the effects of regulation, as well as social- and inter-department consultations. It will therefore not reach the Parliament before the end of 2008 and will have no possibility of being introduced into the 2009 budget. If no substantial political action is taken, the present, faulty system of financing Polish foreign assistance will be likely to survive in an unchanged form until at least 2010.

WHERE IS THE STRATEGY?

Together with the legislative problems, there is inconsistency in the documents regulating Polish foreign assistance. On the one hand, there are a number of international declarations and obligations that create the general conditions regulating the field of Polish foreign assistance; on the other, there is still no reliable strategic planning and evaluation system. The most important document shaping the Polish foreign assistance sector is the *Strategy for Polish Development Assistance*, drafted in 2003. Since 2006, the MFA's Department of Development Assistance has tried to introduce a new strategy, but because the draft has not been accepted, it has not been possible to implement it formally as the new strategy. The strategy (entitled *Solidarity, Development and Liberty: Strategy for Polish Foreign Assistance for 2007–2015*) was based mostly on the legislative regulations of the draft of the Act, especially with regard to financing multi-annual projects.¹¹ Thus, Polish assistance is based solely on yearly projects, published in the first months of every calendar year, after approval of the budget and before the official 'Foreign Assistance' competition is organised in order to choose which projects are to be financed from the ODA budget. The yearly projects, with the changing priorities and areas to be supported, not only make it impossible for coordinators of the projects to plan strategically, but also limit the possibilities of matching Polish activities with international activities in given countries or to include Polish assistance in the development strategies of receiving countries.

All these issues have a negative influence on the quality of implemented assistance programmes and limits the professionalisation of the non-government sector as a main agent in implementing foreign projects. According to announcements of the MFA, including the public declarations of the Minister himself, the new strategy should be accepted and published in 2008. By the regulations of this document, the Department of Development Assistance should be able to prepare the strategy of cooperation with at least some of the priority countries targeted by Polish foreign assistance, that is: Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – the countries that receive the highest amount of Polish ODA funds.¹²

9 This conclusion is based on unofficial conversations with a few representatives of the MFA in July 2008. It was partly and indirectly confirmed by the representatives of the Ministry of Finance in July 2008, during an interview conducted by Zagranica Group representatives.

10 This information is based on an interview conducted with an anonymous representative of the MFA.

11 There are two different documents: 1) *Strategy for Poland's Development Cooperation*, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 21st October 2003 (available in Polish at http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/files/dokumenty_publicacje/Strategia_2003.doc) and 2) a draft of the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs strategy entitled *Solidarity, Development and Freedom - Strategy for Polish foreign assistance for the years 2007-2013* (see footnote 1).

12 For more information, see: <http://www.polishaid.gov.pl/Partner,countries,162.html>.

The question of strategic planning of Polish assistance concerning particular priority countries is even more important, as until now, no system of evaluation of Polish assistance has been established. Simply put, apart from direct ad hoc monitoring of the implementation of particular projects, no attempt to evaluate the quality of assistance, effectiveness of spending funds, effectiveness of strategies adopted and general reasonableness of the basic assumptions, has been undertaken. A system of evaluation to be introduced in the new strategy of foreign assistance still remains in the planning phase. Yearly planning, annual changes in priority areas, pressure to rush projects that have to fit in the budget year, absence of any evaluation system and lack of possibility to coordinate long-term strategies with development plans of the receiving countries – all these factors constitute major impediments to the quality of Polish assistance.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLIC OPINION

PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONSULTATION PROCESSES: GOOD WILL WITHOUT A STRUCTURE

Normally, Polish NGOs can come in from a technical standpoint to influence the process of planning foreign assistance through so-called 'social consultations'. However, this does not mean they have a real influence on strategies and funding commitments. The first problem, described above, concerns the very limited focus of Polish assistance on priorities stated in programme documents that the MFA presents for consultations.

Secondly, the very structure of Polish assistance – the absence of a separate executive agency, legal barriers and lack of access to many potentially effective instruments – limits opportunities to make the assistance work better. The process of consultation itself is not perfect. Quite often organisations do not have enough time to go through the lengthy documents and evaluate them. There are also no funds available for independent, professional legal expertise. Since 2007, there has been no permanent consultation mechanism between the NGO sector and the MFA in place that would enable NGOs to raise objections and engage in discussion with decision-makers. Previously, the Council for Cooperation with NGOs attached to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, established in 2003, theoretically had this aim. The Council effectively ceased functioning in 2005 – there were no meetings and no initiatives taken thereafter – although it was only officially disbanded in 2007. The Forum of Cooperation of the Minister with NGOs was officially inaugurated in March 2008 to replace the Council. While it has announced that regular consultation meetings with the NGOs will be held, until now no such meeting has been organised.

The fact that a project very important in this context, the Eastern Partnership, which was announced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs as a programme for the Polish Presidency of the EU in 2011, but has not accommodated wider consultation with NGOs, is clear proof of the lack of transparency in the planning of Polish international cooperation. A number of institutions were asked to present their opinions about the project (including the Center for International Relations, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, and the Centre for Eastern Studies), but this was done without allowing any public discussion or evaluation of the project itself or the consultation process; the process was not open and the resulting recommendations were never published.¹³ This indicates not only a lack of transparency of processes and institutional functioning, but also that participatory democracy processes are not yet institutionalised as an important component of Polish governance.

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES: THE QUEST FOR IMPACT

The system of Polish foreign assistance does not include any mechanism allowing consultation on Polish ODA strategies between the government and the receiving countries, whether at the level of matching receiving countries' respective development strategies or enhancing government programmes to reduce poverty in cooperation with NGOs. The state of affairs is contrary to the assumptions of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which deemed ownership of assistance procedures to be one of the main qualitative criteria of effective assistance.¹⁴

¹³ Conclusion based on an unofficial conversation with a representative of the think tank involved in that consultation. However, in September 2008, another representative of the same NGO said they were satisfied that the MFA had taken into account their recommendations, which were included both in the initial and final versions of the Eastern Partnership concept paper submitted to the Council of Europe. Moreover, in late September 2008, the Zagranica Group was invited to contribute to the preparation of further documents, and hence a proposal of the Eastern Partnership content.

¹⁴ OECD (2005). *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, High Level Forum, Paris 28th February - 2nd March 2008. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>.

The degree of influence of NGOs over particular decisions made in the field of Polish ODA is hard to estimate. However, it seems that to a limited degree it may concern only the part of ODA that is under direct control of the MFA. Yet, given the lack of legal regulations concerning consultation procedures, this influence is limited to highly unprofessional and uncoordinated lobbying.

The subject of foreign assistance does not appear in the campaigns of political parties (the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) is an exception), so participation in elections and electing particular candidates cannot yet be a method to support a particular programme in foreign assistance policy.

The Zagranica Group is trying to address the above-mentioned problems. It is a coalition of Polish NGOs working for and in cooperation with foreign partners. The Group aims to: mediate contacts of particular organisations with the MFA and other institutions influencing Polish assistance strategies; to represent the people and organisations working in international cooperation; to organise the process of civil control of the foreign assistance policy of Poland; and to shape adequate legal conditions for international cooperation.

In addition to building contacts with the Department of Development Assistance and other departments of the MFA, participating in consulting new documents, preparing opinions and controlling competition procedures in the field of foreign assistance, since 2006 the Zagranica Group has been monitoring the entirety of Polish foreign assistance and publishing the results in annual reports that evaluate the quality and quantity (including value) of assistance initiatives. Through active membership in the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD), a network working in development assistance, the Zagranica Group also takes part in annual monitoring activities on the assistance given at the EU level, including by particular EU countries.

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST FOR DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND PEACEBUILDING

According to the draft of the new strategy, the aim of Polish foreign assistance is to enable a world that is safer, more sustainable and developing faster, especially those regions where Polish assistance may have a particularly positive impact. In a document entitled *Polish Aid Programme 2008 administered by the MFA of the Republic of Poland, Warsaw 2008* it is stated that: 'One has to acknowledge the fact that it is in Poland's best interest to contribute to the reduction of global poverty and to endorse the principles of democracy and growth of civil society, the two factors being essential in the social and economic development of partner countries'.¹⁵

The concept of foreign assistance is broader than that of ODA and encompasses other assistance activities that, while not always fulfilling the ODA criteria, are nevertheless significant for peace, safety and stability in the world. Activities such as the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, support of independent media and broadly understood civil society, are important examples.

'There can be no development without democracy'.¹⁶ The Polish strategy is based on this assumption that reducing poverty and addressing disproportionate global development have better chances for success when coupled with democracy, lawfulness, development of civil society and respect for human rights. The authors of the draft of the new strategy write: 'Democracy creates the space for freedom, that is a necessary requirement of development, and thus only in conditions of respecting human rights, rules of good government practice and other democratic mechanisms, the assistance may be provided so that the development would be sustainable'.¹⁷ While not named specifically, therefore, Polish assistance strategy does recognise the importance of transitional justice through the emphasis on rule of law and good governance, as well as human security, by using a human rights-based approach to development.

Beside ODA, Polish foreign assistance consists of a number of initiatives and projects supporting democratisation – that is, the political and social transformation and the change in forms of government in the receiving countries, known as Democracy Assistance. In a brochure entitled *Polish assistance 2007*, the MFA presents two aims of Polish foreign assistance: 'reduction of poverty and fulfilment of the other Millennium Development Goals in the countries receiving Polish assistance; [and] ensuring democracy, the rule of law, civil society development and respect for human rights – predominantly in Eastern Europe'.¹⁸

At present, Polish foreign assistance is concentrated in eight priority countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, the Palestinian territories, Tanzania and Ukraine. These priorities are published in annual plans and it seems that until now these are set anew every year, which does not help to improve the consistency and

15 Polish Aid Program 2008, administered by the MFA of the Republic of Poland, WARSAW 2008, p.3. The document has not been published and the only available version was circulated under the consultation process in 2007.

16 Draft of the new strategy: Solidarity, Development and Freedom – Strategy for Polish foreign assistance for the years 2007-2013, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007a). Op. cit.

17 Quotes and references come from the unpublished version of the brochure circulated within the consultation process.

18 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007b). *Polish Aid 2007: Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland*. Warsaw, Poland: Development Cooperation Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs (unnumbered). Available at http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/files/inne%20dokumenty%20PDF/polish_aid2007.pdf.

long-term viability of Polish assistance. The new strategy introduces a category of countries that, despite not being a main priority, are important for Polish political interests and assistance policy. These countries, among others, are countries where Poland has stabilising and military missions. The list of priority countries is changed every year, and from the first list announced in 2004, only four countries remain the same. There are also changes on the list in 2009 – in connection with the liquidation of the Polish Embassy in Tanzania, which came as a surprise even for the MFA's Department of Development Assistance, Tanzania will not be a priority country next year. Another African country will most probably take its place. Both Ethiopia and Kenya are known to be possible candidates, according to two unofficial conversations with an MFA representative in July 2008. However, the director of the Department of Development Assistance has admitted on a few occasions that some major changes are possible starting in late August. There is a new option being considered that, rather than having specific priority countries in Africa per se, the whole continent will be covered by the new 2009 ODA programme with sectoral priorities (such as water supply, HIV and AIDS prevention etc.). This new concept was announced by the Development Cooperation Department director during the General Assembly of the Zagranica Group in late September 2008.

Apart from the priority countries, the regions of the Western Balkans and Central Asia receive Polish bilateral assistance. In 2007, NGOs received altogether more than PLN 0.5 million for implementing projects in Central Asia and about PLN 0.7 million for projects in Balkan countries. In Asia, the priority areas are development of civil society, support of independent media and fighting corruption, amongst other issues. The activities consist of transferring experience and know-how. The situation is similar in the Balkans region, although since 2006, the activities have concentrated on the EU integration aspect. In connection with the conflict in South Ossetia, it may be expected that assistance plans for 2009 will prioritise projects aimed at citizens in Georgia and the Southern Caucasus in general. It is possible that cooperation initiatives with Russia may gain a different status, provided that they remain outside the scope of ODA.

The choice of particular priorities depends on various criteria, such as Polish foreign policy towards a given region, tradition of historical, diplomatic and social contacts, presence of a Polish embassy or consulate, local conditions enabling Polish assistance to be visible, presence of Polish minorities etc. Real needs of the receiving country are only one of the many factors and, as mentioned above, the process of taking those needs into account and harmonising them with activities undertaken by other donors is underdeveloped and unsystematic.

More than half of the funds under the control of the MFA are spent on projects for four of eight (nine in 2007) priority countries: Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Among the areas of assistance mentioned in the documents connected with the MFA's competitions for funding, the issues of democratisation are prominent, which is proof of the high importance attached to it.

Polish NGOs are invited to consult more important strategic documents and strategies proposed therein. However, the end result is often an increase in the number of areas of assistance, which prevents concentration and development of a few key development and peacebuilding activities. The fact that only the minor part of the budget of Polish ODA is subject to consultations with the MFA has to be taken into account. Thus, the analysis of 2007's commitments yields an astonishing result – despite the indication of nine priority countries in Polish assistance for 2007 – the largest assistance qualified as ODA was received by China (about PLN 186 million) and Nicaragua (about PLN 84 million), which have never been Polish ODA priority countries.

PEACEBUILDING IN POLISH ODA

As mentioned above, the concept of foreign and development assistance in Poland also includes other aid activities that are significant for international peace, safety and stability. One of the central notions in the ODA discourse, reflected in all the drafts of strategic documents is sustainable development, which could also be interpreted in a context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Activities such as the promotion of democracy, human rights, good government practice, support of independent media and civil society, are important examples.

The MFA representatives are familiar with peacebuilding as a category of activities and they seem to clearly understand what is meant by this word. While peacebuilding and conflict prevention is not an overall priority of Polish ODA, Polish development resources are intended for priority countries where opportunities for

peacebuilding are of the utmost importance. These countries are Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories, and this, and this also seems to be a topical issue in the Balkans, Georgia and Moldova (because of Transnistria).

However, where peacebuilding activities are concerned, there is confusion regarding the actors and activities that can be included as ODA. For example, activities in Afghanistan already raised debates in 2007, when it appeared as though part of the Polish ODA budget would be passed to the Ministry of Defence to support development initiatives of the Polish army accompanying military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the draft of the new strategy sent for consultation in early 2007, there is a section that states that, in addition to priority countries, there are also countries of importance for Polish policy, where Poland has military missions that should be supported by development assistance activities.

While not specifically termed as such, the emphasis upon rule of law, good governance, human rights and democracy indicate that the Polish government considers transitional justice and human security as important cross-cutting issues within the framework of ODA and peacebuilding specifically. It is obvious, however, that there is much that can be done in terms of raising awareness amongst both decision-makers and the public about what these two concepts entail, and how they contribute to building peace.

PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND PEACEBUILDING: THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Development assistance is not a subject regularly covered by the Polish media, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that very few Polish citizens are aware whether, how and to whom, Polish assistance is given. Apart from coverage of catastrophes, disasters or related humanitarian action, there are no analyses that concentrate on the quality of development assistance, needs of the beneficiaries and/or mechanisms supporting sustainable growth and democracy.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that in the first half of 2008, four in-depth articles about development assistance were published in nationwide magazines. There were also a number of news stories written about development assistance – mainly in the Internet news portals (onet.pl, wiadomości24.pl, tvn24.pl, among others) – following the publication of the OECD annual report for 2007. The subject is not particularly attractive to the media, so journalists sometimes try to liven it up by searching for minor scandals: concentrating upon embezzlement of assistance funds, ineffectiveness of procedures, overvaluing costs of coordination of the programmes, for example.

In addition, it seems that the level of knowledge about development assistance amongst both the media and public is very low. In an attempt to relate the OECD's data about development assistance provided by the EU in 2007, the material prepared by the Polish Press Agency (PAP) and other agencies mistakenly reported that the assistance in question was directed to members of the EU, instead of to developing countries.¹⁹ In fact, this is not surprising. It is almost impossible to obtain information about development assistance from the TV, the press or in school – 78 percent of the public have never heard about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and more than four-fifths are unable to even imprecisely state which of 200 countries are less developed and in a worse economic situation than Poland.²⁰ The lack of development education in Polish schools, a low level of knowledge about the modern world and a weak sense of “global solidarity” make many members of Polish society doubt whether Poland should help other countries. The percentage of vocal opponents of foreign assistance is decreasing (according to research and marketing information company TNS OBOP data from 2005, 2006 and 2007), but a conviction that Poland is too poor a country to help others and that it should first solve its own problems, is still prevalent. In short, the major part of society is convinced that the money directed for development assistance should instead be given to the Polish poor.

19 For more information, see: <http://www.globalnepoludnie.pl/Niekompetencja-mediow-w-kwestiach>, http://www.money.pl/archiwum/wiadomosci_agencyjne/pap/artykul/raport;oeed;zmalala;ogolna;pomoc;na;rozwoj;w;polsce;wzrost;o;3;2;proc;85,0,333397.html

20 According to the survey by TNS OBOP for the MFA, available at <http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/Badania,opinii,publicznej,128.html>. Since 2004, the MFA has conducted yearly public opinion polls (usually in early winter); the number of respondents is 1004–1005 adult persons (varies with different years). The 2005 survey was initiated by the UN Development Programme, but it is also available at the Polish Aid website, at <http://www.polishaid.gov.pl/>.

In one of the first surveys on development assistance conducted by the MFA in 2005, a large part of those receptive towards Polish assistance programmes indicated that countries with a Polish minority should be prioritised.²¹ A specifically understood patriotism prevails over the sense of global solidarity and responsibility for the condition of the world more generally.

It can be assumed that only a minor part of the society is aware that “aid” is not limited to distributing food, money or other items of everyday use. As a result of the development of the global network of mass media, the actions of humanitarian aid generates much more public interest, making their way into the news on the wave of interest in crisis situations: natural disasters, wars etc. Surveys and statistics of fundraising for humanitarian aid show that a large majority of Poles support such activities and donate their money and other material to help during relief efforts organised by the state and NGOs. However, only 27 percent think that ‘Poland decisively should assist in the development of the less developed countries’, according to a survey from November 2007.²²

Journalists themselves often confuse humanitarian aid with development assistance, which is clear in Dariusz Rosiak’s article in the daily *Rzeczpospolita* entitled ‘Killing with Aid’.²³ The article is about the ineffectiveness of methods utilised by international organisations, as well as the embezzlement and fraud that accompany these activities. The conclusion is that ‘International aid not only does not help, but is in itself a greatest obstacle on the way to change the state of the poor of the world, and the sole sensible choice is to stop it altogether’. The author supports the thesis both with statistics and with examples from developing countries.

Janina Ochojska, the founder and chairperson of the Polish Humanitarian Organisation (PHO) argues in her article entitled ‘Intelligent Helping’ that development assistance is a tool that aims to make the receivers independent of humanitarian aid.²⁴ Another author critical of Rosiak’s text is Maciej Kuźmicz in his article ‘Complaining Will Not Help Anybody’.²⁵ The journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza* presents data that shows a relatively high effectiveness of international assistance activities in the developing countries. He also presents examples of particular people that managed to overcome poverty and now earn a decent living for their families because of assistance programmes.

An important voice in the discussion about Polish foreign assistance is an article by Adam Leszczyński published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in April 2008. The author not only describes the mechanisms of ODA in detail, including the division of financing between various funds, but also addresses issues directly connected with the quality of the projects, effectiveness of assistance activities and transparency of reporting their costs.²⁶ An important problem, according to Leszczyński, is the lack of a Foreign Assistance Act that would enable the government, for example, to implement multi-annual projects, which would in turn enable greater consistency of Polish activities on behalf of developing countries.²⁷

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

As mentioned above, Polish ODA consists of a number of components. The majority of Polish assistance is constituted of dues to the budgets of international institutions, and the largest sum of these is transferred directly to the development budget of the EU. In 2007, this equalled more than PLN 0.5 billion. Poland has thus no significant influence over the scope and method of realisation of projects financed by international institutions, as they are not connected to the Polish priorities and strategy of assistance.

In the case of Polish bilateral assistance, some of the decisions are made in departments other than the MFA. It is very difficult, therefore, to track the decision-making processes. On the one hand, there are decisions of the

21 See: http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/files/Edukacja%20rozwojowa/Raport_badanie_opinii_publicznej_polska_pomoc2006.pdf.

22 See: http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/files/Edukacja%20rozwojowa/Badanie%20opinii%20publicznej/Polacy_o_pomocy_rozwojowej_2007_26.02.08.pdf.

23 D. Rosiak, ‘Zabijanie dobrocia’, *Rzeczpospolita*, No. 119 [8020], 23rd May 2008, at: <http://www.rp.pl/artukul/138304.html>. Rosiak writes about ODA but only gives examples of humanitarian aid.

24 J. Ochojska, ‘Madrze pomagac’, *Rzeczpospolita*, No. 126 [8027], 31st May 2008, at: <http://www.rp.pl/artukul/141610.html>.

25 M. Kuzmicz, ‘Narzekanie nie pomoze nikomu’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, No. 121, 26th May 2008, at: http://wyborcza.pl/1,86116,5243723,Narzekanie_pomoze_nikomu.html.

26 A. Leszczyński, ‘Polak pomagac nie umie’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14th April 2008, at: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5114872.html>.

27 Ibid.

Ministers, connected with the current policies and budgets of their respective units, on the other, many funding commitments are subjected to multi-annual international agreements – for example, the annulments of debts are planned in the framework of the international Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, which has a multi-year perspective. Therefore, many commitments and projects cannot be incorporated into an annual planning system.

In the area of bilateral assistance in the form of projects – that is, the part under the control of the MFA and theoretically compliant with the strategy and programmes of Polish assistance – the agents implementing particular projects are NGOs, universities, local government units (since 2006) and state administrative organs. The projects are financed through a grant competition – completion offers that are announced at the beginning of each year by the MFA. Each group of agents undergoes a separate procedure of choosing the projects to receive grants: for NGOs, along with universities and local government units, it is a competition; for the state administration organs, it means gathering applications (accepted applications are granted financing as far as the pool of funds allows). The competition is organised on similar principles for both groups (NGOs and local government units): from the moment of announcement and publication of the regulations that state the technical conditions of receiving the grant and priority areas to support, the applicants have 30–60 days (most often 60) to present the required documents on paper and in electronic format. Then the juries, consisting of representatives of the Department of Development Assistance and regional departments of the MFA, evaluate all the applications, discuss them during meetings and prepare a list of projects recommended for financing, which is subsequently approved by the Minister.

The system is time-consuming, and competition procedures can start only after the Budget Act is approved and the appropriate funds are transferred from the Ministry of Finance. This means that, after collecting and thoroughly evaluating the applications, the results of the competition are ready in April/May. The conclusion of all the technical operations connected with transferring the money (modifying the project's budget in case of required changes, opening a bank account, signing the contract) comes shortly before the summer holidays. This drastically limits the duration of the period of implementation of the projects, which – according to the Public Finance Act – must be concluded before the end of December, with the financial report due before the end of January the following year.

Together with the priority regions, the competition process has a major influence on the projects implemented – a large majority of those are so-called 'soft projects', which do not address investment in infrastructure, but rather consist of various forms of sharing experience and know-how, such as conferences, workshops, publications, study visits, practices etc. This constitutes a substantial difference in Polish assistance in relation to the activities of Western donors. ODA of older Member States, for example, mostly supports infrastructure projects, such as renovations and building schools, hospitals, roads and water supplies. The highest number of total projects is implemented each year by NGOs – in 2007 it was more than 100 projects; in the case of local government and administration organs, it was 24 and 28, respectively.

There is no centralised system for evaluating projects, and evaluative actions of the MFA are limited to monitoring implementation. This means, in effect, that the MFA ends up monitoring itself (the evaluation consists of a visit by an MFA official or, more often, of a local diplomatic official, who conducts a standardised survey for the participants of the project). The MFA has announced in subsequent strategy documents that it will develop a system of monitoring, but due to financial and systemic limitations, this will probably happen no sooner than 2010. NGOs rarely run an evaluation – there are no funds in the budgets reserved for that and implementation of the projects is planned with a one-year perspective, thus limiting the continuity of activities.

Gender is specifically evaluated when project proposals are received. Projects are evaluated according to the degree to which gender is mainstreamed into both the process of developing and implementing the project.

The one-year system is a significant problem for Polish assistance. No independent data exists that could help to evaluate the actual effectiveness of funding commitments, the influence of Polish activities on receiving countries, and what should possibly be changed in future assistance strategies.

OTHER ISSUES

IMPACT OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES: NEED FOR PROFESSIONALISATION

Currently, support for developing NGOs is not an aim of Polish foreign assistance, despite the fact that quantitatively, NGOs are the main agents implementing bilateral assistance projects. The funds for implementation of projects within foreign assistance competitions are limited to financing particular assistance activities, not for building capacity of the implementing agent. Any procurement proposition for materials or equipment (such as additional computer hardware), or administrative costs allowing for better organisation of work, customarily raise objections, or at least make the decision-makers suspicious. In the Polish assistance budget, there are no funds for evaluation of the projects, preliminary research, staff training or study visits and pilot projects in the receiving country.

On the one hand, limiting the financing to those parts of the budget that are directly connected with the beneficiaries of the project seems obvious and morally justifiable. On the other hand, the result is a degree of inertia in developing the techniques of assistance – that is, the professionalisation of the sector. The necessity to keep the administrative costs low and preserve the annual system of project implementation, results in a large staff turnover – young people, often students, sometimes even volunteer workers, without necessary skills, with low qualifications and almost no experience in the field, can become coordinators of the projects.

In a broader context, this can lead to a decrease in the quality of assistance activities and limit strategic planning. The organisations themselves rarely invest time and money in training the staff and investing in their professional development – as there is no spare time or money, and the new, young worker is most likely to change jobs after the conclusion of the project at the end of the year.

The draft of the Foreign Assistance Act was to introduce a change in this strategy (or lack of strategy) in relation to the implementing agents. The draft was not approved, however, as described above, nor will it be in the near future. The proposition in the text from 2007 defined a category of 'partner organisations' in relation with the MFA, consisting of those that have proved to be reliable, efficient and experienced partners in the past. Paragraph 31 of the proposed text states that necessary conditions to apply for a status of partner organisation include:

- Implementation by a given agent of one or a number of projects in foreign assistance, in which the sum of grants provided by the Foreign Affairs Minister was not lower than PLN 1,000,000; presentation of a valid financial report of the projects mentioned above; and
- Positive evaluation of the project implemented in the framework of foreign assistance.

Partner organisations in particular situations would have a right to implement activities and projects submitted outside of competitions. It may be assumed that the category would result in the establishment of a privileged form of cooperation with the MFA, allowing partners to participate in consultations or utilise the envisaged 'matching funds' resource – a pool of funds earmarked to satisfy the so-called 'own contribution' or co-financing requirement, in the case of receiving a grant from the assistance budget of the EU or other institutions that require such a contribution.

It should be noted that the stance of the MFA not tending to support the capacity of Polish NGOs as project implementors is rather a result of the lack of formal-legal mechanisms than a resistance to the NGOs.²⁸ For a couple of years, NGOs were invited to a number of trainings and seminars, as well as being eligible for funds for initiatives in the field of development assistance that allow a degree of capacity-building and education programmes for NGOs themselves that lack experience in development assistance.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN PLANNING FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES

Poland actively participates in the activities of many international organisations and institutions working in development. In order to participate in development assistance calls coordinated at the EU level, Polish programmes must meet the requirements of documents and regulations prepared by the European Committee, including Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) and Annual Actions Plans in the framework of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

The MFA stresses the role of Paris Declaration resolutions in increasing the effectiveness of assistance. In the context of international cooperation, the harmonisation of activities is important, both at sectoral and regional levels. In the decision-making process concerning priorities of Polish assistance, the comparative advantages of Poland are taken into account. The MFA is open to trilateral activities as well, with the participation of partners from other developed countries.²⁹

Despite the presence of MFA representatives at many international meetings, it appears that cooperation with other donors is real only on paper. As was mentioned above, there are no long-term strategies of Polish assistance for the priority countries, and thus the yearly programmes are not connected with any documents of other EU members.

Despite the lack of experience and legal framework in the field, the MFA makes efforts to at least discuss development assistance and to remain in contact with foreign ministries and agencies. Some initiatives have included international seminars concerning development assistance, organised with participation of guests from the Visegrad Group and other EU countries in April 2007 (focusing on ODA systems) and in June 2008 (focusing on Policy Coherence for Development). MFA officials have also participated in international seminars organised by NGOs, such as seminars focusing on the legal framework of ODA in Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, which took place in Bratislava in December 2006, and the debate about development assistance in Warsaw in November 2007.

To a degree, Polish strategies for foreign assistance stem from coordinating activities in the field of foreign policy. In 2006 and 2007, for instance, MFA representatives participated in international meetings coordinating policies and support programmes in relation to Belarus. As a result of international agreements, initiatives such as the establishment of the independent satellite TV channel Bielsat and reactivation of Belarusian radio *Racja* were completed. Another result of international cooperation – this time with the US – is the implementation of the Strategic Economic Needs and Security Exercise (SENSE) project, for a few years now: training in a form of strategic game, simulating the functioning of modern state together with its administrative apparatus, institutions of civil society etc.

As was mentioned above, and contrary to the assumptions of the Paris Declaration (especially to the principle of ownership of concepts and programmes of development assistance), there exists no praxis or legal and formal instruments that would ensure consultation and harmonisation of Polish assistance activities with receiving countries. The areas of support for particular priority countries are set by officials of the MFA and are not related neither to strategy of poverty reduction for developing countries, nor related to strategies of poverty reduction for developing countries or other local development strategies. Besides, because of the annual expense planning system, Polish assistance is also largely unpredictable for the receivers, thus precluding the possibility to include it in long-term plans of the receiving countries' governments, as they are unable to know what would be the value and area of assistance.

²⁸ This opinion is based on discussions with various contacts – both official and unofficial – at the MFA.

²⁹ Opinion based on conversations with different representatives of the Development Cooperation Department in 2007–2008 and correspondence from the Eastern Policy Department in 2008 to the Zagranica Group.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES>

As in the case of the general public, the subject of assistance hardly features in the platforms of the political parties. As debates with politicians show, representatives of Polish political parties have a very weak idea about the importance of the issue, and what is more, a very low level of knowledge about ODA, sustainable development and peacebuilding specifically. The debate organised by the Centre of International Affairs on the occasion of the International Day for Eradication of Poverty in October 2007 serves as an example. Representatives of five political groups on the eve of the Parliamentary election were to discuss development assistance and its place in general policy of the country, yet it became evident that almost none of the guests were able to distinguish between development assistance and charity, and assistance to other countries was seen to be dependent on solving Polish internal problems first ('Polish hungry children have to be fed first').

A recent resolution of the Congress of the SLD (Resolution No. 4 IV of the SLD Congress, 1st June 2008) has a chapter devoted to the foreign policy of Poland, which mentions global challenges, and the third chapter postulates on continuing the main courses of cooperation with Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

In 2007, PHO tried to conduct a survey among the most popular political parties concerning issues connected with global development and foreign assistance. Only two of the parties responded – the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and the Greens 2004 (Zieloni 2004), with the reservation that the letters do not reflect the official stance of their respective parties.

CONCLUSION

There are several qualitative and quantitative issues related to the foreign assistance and development cooperation in Poland. The Polish ODA system started not so long ago, with the EU accession in 2004. From the beginning, Polish NGOs have been taking an active part in shaping the ODA legal and formal framework. The Zagranica Group in particular, has played an important role in the process of establishing the ODA system.

Since 2005, the volume of Polish ODA has significantly increased. However, it is still quite far from the fulfillment of commitments to reach 0.17 percent GNI by 2010. Along with budgetary problems, Poland continuously faces serious quality gaps caused mainly by an inappropriate legal framework, but also due to the lack of a multi-annual strategy on ODA. This is especially visible in a context of changing priorities of Polish ODA, and a lack of connection between public declarations and real spending.

Another important question is the very poor public awareness of development and peacebuilding issues in Poland. In addition to the general public, journalists and politicians do not really understand development problems and therefore the importance of ODA, as such. The development education topics in school curricula were included only very recently, so we will have to wait for direct results in the future. NGOs have to undertake more intensive advocacy work in order to influence mass media and political parties in parliament – this has not yet been done sufficiently.

Polish development assistance requires vision and strategy: it is a necessary requirement for increasing effectiveness. There needs to be a long-term strategy for Polish development assistance that would delineate not only the geographic area of provided assistance, but also priorities, goals and expected results of activities undertaken. Setting priorities will direct and enable development of organisations implementing assistance projects, and allow them to include new sectors – primarily research – into their activities. It will also enable actors to select, address and systematically order the issues already present in projects of the strategy in the course of planned activities. This pertains to the whole field of peacebuilding. A well-designed strategy, based on a strategic choice of areas and goals, is a condition necessary to reach any long-term results and to build partner relations with receiving countries that would be able to utilise Polish assistance as a predictable tool supporting their independent development.

The strategy of Polish assistance should be developed in dialogue with both beneficiaries and implementing agents. The occasional contact by representatives of the MFA with NGOs gathered in the Zagranica Group is not an adequate method in working to develop the strategy. Preparing goals that would positively support the changes in developing countries requires designing a stable system of consultation with NGOs active in the developing countries, institutions of the receiving countries, researchers, and officials of Polish diplomacy.

Dispersion of funds earmarked for ODA decreases the probability of implementation of the strategy in development. A better coordination of activities at government level is therefore necessary. Taking into account the growing scope of Polish assistance, as well as the complex nature of issues addressed in its framework, it is necessary to establish a dedicated government agency. Such an agency, among other activities, would coordinate, competently monitor and evaluate the implementation of Polish assistance activities, implemented by NGOs and local government units.

It is critical to solve the legislative issues directly influencing the quality and style of implementation of Polish assistance. In this context, accepting the Foreign Assistance Act is the most urgent, as it would enable Polish assistance to utilise a financial mechanism excluded from the annual state budget. It is impossible to implement a responsible assistance activity in a half-year system – which is a consequence of the present legal situation.

In order to ensure a high quality of peacebuilding activities, it is necessary to raise the competence of agents implementing assistance in the field of cultural, social and religious differences of receiving countries. In the context of a radical increase of expenses for implementing Polish assistance in Afghanistan, an intensive education in the specifics of the region is necessary. There is a significant possibility that either the activities planned for 2009 will not be implemented because of an inadequate number of experienced institutions, or that errors will be made as a result of a lack of experience in the region.

Polish assistance requires consistent communication about its strategy and vision. The low level of support for the vision of Poland as a donor country is an understandable effect of inconsistent strategy and sporadic attempts to communicate it to the society. On the basis of analyses conducted, it can be noted that the problem is rooted not only in the weakness of information, promotion and education campaigns, but also because the message from the MFA is confusing.

There is a clear difference between the interpretation of meaning and motivations of assistance activities in Poland and older Member States. Taking into account the common aim – peacebuilding and fighting poverty in developing countries – it seems necessary to intensify the activities oriented towards exchange of experience and debate between the new and old EU countries. Above all, such a debate should lead to a mutual understanding, not to unify the perspectives or mechanically standardise development policies.

Responding to these challenges in the coming years will lead to an increased role for Polish Aid and a more responsive and efficient European development assistance programme.

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