
Chapter 19

Development Cooperation in the Czech Foreign Policy

Ondřej Horký

To date there has been no academic yearbook on the Czech development cooperation, and this chapter on the ‘development dimension’ makes up a part of a book on the Czech foreign policy.¹ Both of these facts are symptomatic of the relevance and characteristics of the ‘Foreign Development Cooperation’ of the Czech Republic. Firstly, the policy is considered as of little importance in the political and public spaces despite a substantial budget, compared to the other dimensions of foreign policy covered by this book. Secondly, the territorial and sectoral priorities of bilateral cooperation and the subsequent implementation by the Czech companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) make it a policy that is led rather by the domestic security and economic interests than by serious efforts to reduce poverty in the South.

The period from 2007 to 2009 corresponds roughly to the preparation of and the major part of the institutional ‘transformation’ of the Czech development cooperation. This denomination might suggest a movement from a less effective to a more effective system as the ‘re-emerging donor’ is expected to comply with the global and EU commitments on poverty reduction in the South and to align itself to the best practices of more experienced donors. However, the ongoing centralization of decision-making at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the project implementation at the Czech Development Agency (CzDA) have strengthened the subjection of development cooperation to the short-term foreign policy priorities and they did not substantially weaken its dependence on the economic interests of the Czech exporters.

This instrumentalization of development cooperation should not hide, however, the achievements in terms of legislative and institutional transformation, as well as the successful Czech presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2009. By the end of 2009 at the domestic level, the Chamber of Deputies approved an Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance that facilitates financial transfers abroad, and after years of institutional transformation, a new draft of the strategy was being commented by the members of the Council on Foreign Development Cooperation. This new advisory body to the MFA, founded together with the CzDA in

2008, associates other ministries and the platforms of private companies and NGOs, and it is officially supposed to ensure policy coherence for development.

At first sight, it appears that the Czech Republic will soon have a development cooperation framework similar to those of the experienced donors. But many practices in implementation, such as the *de facto* tied bilateral aid, have remained the same. The use of reshaped institutions and the implementation of new norms hence depend on the commitment to global development shared by the government and top political elites. The forthcoming failure in achieving a 0.17% share of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) on the gross national income (GNI) in 2010, the aid quantity target agreed at EU level, is only a symptom of the government's lack of interest. Problems with aid quality, due especially to its fragmentation, missing evaluations, and policy incoherence, are much less visible but sharper. The low commitment of the government to the development agenda is counter-balanced by the rising advocacy activities of the NGOs, facilitated by EU funding, the growing support of the citizens for development cooperation despite the economic downturn, and the worse performances of other 'new' EU states as well as the bad performances of some 'old' EU member states.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Background

While the development dimension of the EU is frequently labelled as a 'development policy', the term 'development cooperation' is currently relevant for the Czech Republic. The term 'development policy' appeared only once and randomly in an official document, but in reality and in spite of the legal and institutional changes, there is no such thing as a broad, holistic and coherent government policy towards the South. Moreover, the development-related policy that was officially restarted on the basis of a government decision in 1995 bore the name 'Foreign Development Aid' until 2004. Then its name was changed to the current title 'Foreign Development Cooperation', in accordance to the more egalitarian language on development in the donor discourse, and the name remained the same in the government proposal of the Act on Foreign Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Provided Abroad. In this chapter, all three terms are used interchangeably.

From its very beginnings, the Czech development cooperation was institutionally grounded in exceptional and regular government decisions proposed by the MFA. The most important documents were the 1995 and 2004 'Principles'. The first document institutionally defined the broad goals and criteria for allocating Czech development aid. The policy was coordinated by the MFA, but it was independently managed by almost all of the other ministries, and this without any common rules until 2005.² The 2004 update has strengthened the policy as an 'integral part of the Czech foreign policy' and reacted to the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, but it did not challenge the fragmentation of the Czech aid. It reduced the number of programme countries to

ten, including Afghanistan and Iraq, but the sectoral priorities still corresponded to the actual scope of almost all of the other ministries.³ Meanwhile, a 2002 ‘Conceptual document’ envisaged the foundation of a development agency, but the government only took note of the plan without approving it.⁴ Even though the 2004 ‘Principles’ have officially remained valid by the end of 2009, three major documents have emerged during the 2007–2009 period.

Firstly, the government approved the long-awaited ‘Transformation of the System of Foreign Cooperation of the Czech Republic’.⁵ This document proposed a roadmap for the institutional and budgetary concentration of aid implementation from the nine line ministries to the CzDA during the 2008–2010 period. The agency would not be founded on a greenfield as was the case of most of the ‘new’ EU member states, but it would arise from the Development Centre, an advisory body of the MFA issued by a UNDP project. The document assigned policy decisions solely to the MFA, but in order to replace the key role of the other ministries, an advisory Council for Foreign Development Cooperation was designed to replace the former Inter-ministerial Working Group. Its statute was equally approved by the government and its role is to coordinate development cooperation and to ensure that policy coherence for development is promoted.⁶

Secondly, the transformed system of providing bilateral aid was institutionalized in a law proposal for the first time. Even though the very first proposal was submitted for approval at the MFA level as early as in 2006, it became the subject of many comments and arguments by the many actors involved in the policy, resulting in the government submitting the Act on Foreign Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Provided Abroad to the Chamber of Deputies only in July 2009. By the end of the year it was submitted for comments to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, with an outlook of further unproblematic acceptance by the Chamber of Deputies. After the vote in the Senate and the President’s signature, new ‘Principles’ will be presented by the MFA to the government for approval to make up for the many issues that have been excluded from the initial proposal. While for the first time the Members of Parliament and the President will have to deal officially with development cooperation, which may raise their awareness of the issue, the law is rather technical in its nature. It allows the MFA to send grants abroad without *ad hoc* approval by the government as a whole, and it gives the CzDA the right to run calls for grants to the Czech NGOs instead of running tenders for supplies. It opens the way for an untied, deconcentrated, and more flexible bilateral cooperation but without a guarantee that the new tools will be used for the sake of its greater effectiveness.

Finally, three years after the end of the validity of the preceding conceptual document and one year of delays to the transformation plan, the MFA has initiated a draft of a new strategy for the period 2010–2017. The process included the members of the Council for Foreign Development Cooperation, but it was kept closed to the actors outside the Council and its *ad hoc* working group. Nobody, including the NGO platform, organized any public debate on the subject. The draft document is characterized by a double and sometimes contradictory understanding of development cooperation as a tool of foreign policy and as a way of honouring development commitments and

reducing global poverty. The number of programme countries was reduced by half to four: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Moldova and Mongolia. Finally the inclusion of a Least Developed Country in Africa was initially justified only by public and external acceptability. The remaining ‘project’ countries are mostly of interest to the Czech Republic because of security concerns. The number of sectors has been reduced to four as well, but they have been redefined so vaguely and broadly that they may include almost any activity. The proposal is more detailed in the areas of policy coherence for development, gender and new tools related to the private sector. Nevertheless, most of the commitments on the quantity, quality, coordination and complementarity of aid are not translated to the national level.

Political Context

Even though the amount of ODA of the Czech Republic corresponds to roughly two thirds of the total MFA budget, its presence in the political space (as well as in the public space and the media) is relatively marginal. It is considered as a ‘technical’ agenda and since development cooperation is implemented abroad and most of the domestic actors heavily depend on government funding, it is not prone to be widely discussed or criticized. Nevertheless, transformations that entail a substantial shift in power between the ministries have required political consensus at government level, and they have exceptionally reflected the preferences of political parties as well.

The 2006 general elections programme of the winning Civic Democratic Party (ODS) promised a reform of the system, but the foundation of a development agency, as stated in the government programme, was eventually taken over from the election programme of the Greens, one of the coalition partners. After four years of opposition to the centralization, the other ministries finally agreed to gradually give up the management of development aid in their competence, which was sometimes influenced by nepotistic relations, and transfer it to the MFA with the CzDA. The the Greens has also managed to push for a statement on policy coherence for development with trade and agricultural policies in the government programme, but it remained without consequence until the fall of the Topolánek government in early 2009. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg, though nominated by the Greens, did not visibly favour development cooperation either.

With the exception of the now dissolved neo-Nazi Worker Party and neoconservative-libertarian think-tanks, such as the Centre for Economics and Politics (CEP) affiliated to President Klaus, who opposed development cooperation, there seems to be a silent consensus on the current levels and open use of development cooperation for foreign policy priorities, which is common among post-communist countries and some ‘old’ member states, and the differences between political parties in regard to this issue are not discernible. Aside from the support of the Greens, the pro-poor focus and effectiveness of development cooperation is defended mostly by the NGOs and academia, but their weak voices do not reach mainstream political debates, which results in the fact that the non-respect of international and EU commitments is not perceived as a relevant problem in the Czech polity. Overall, the debate on development cooperation takes place at the MFA, the Council for Foreign Development Cooper-

ation, the foreign committees of the Parliament, and the NGOs, but its character remains technical rather than political.

The generally weak presence of the development agenda on the political arena and the low willingness of the Ministry of Finance to honour commitments on aid quantity have been from time to time breached by the easy *ad hoc* government decisions to provide extraordinary and non-systematic development aid as a reaction to political events. In 2007 and 2008, the government decided to provide special development (and not merely humanitarian) aid to Afghanistan, Georgia and Palestine, but these decisions were conditioned more by perceived security threats and commitments to military allies than development concerns. Aid to the Palestine Authority was also intended to strengthen the Czech position during the EU presidency. Not only these decisions contributed to further fragmentation of Czech aid, but they confirm that the main drivers of the Czech development cooperation do not find their sources in global poverty, but in the political events at international and EU level.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: AGENDA AND EVENTS

The general understanding of what is considered as an event makes the *a priori* long-term oriented development agenda seemingly eventless, as it is differentiated from a foreign policy marked by diplomatic scoops. However, the high number of projects of bilateral cooperation that were implemented could hardly be condensed in this chapter. The Official Development Assistance also accounts for policies which are not in the sole competence of the MFA such as scholarships for students from the developing countries. On top of it, the development agenda is strongly Europeanized and internationalized. On the other hand, the striking absence of project evaluations since 2007, a handful of published project evaluations from the preceding period, three unpublished mid-term programme evaluations for Angola, Moldova and Vietnam and unpublished monitoring reports do not allow us to assess the implementation of Czech aid. The subchapter hence draws on official statistics in terms of financial inputs and explores the development agenda by the main issues of aid quantity and forms, its quality and territorial and sectoral distribution. It also overviews the EU and multilateral dimension of the Czech development cooperation, with emphasis on the presidency of the Council of the EU. Examples of typical projects in 2007 may be found in an official publication of the MFA.⁷

Quantity and Forms of Aid

The development cooperation budget is approved by the government on a yearly basis with a non-binding mid-term outlook, but the projects are multiannual in contrast to 'new' EU member states. With the high part of the contributions to the EU budget for the total ODA, the oscillating exchange rate between the Euro and the Czech Crown, and the varying growth of GNI, Czech multilateral aid disbursements are badly predictable. Three-year indicative bilateral budget plans are approved annually by the

government, but they are not always respected. The already approved budgets for 2009 and the planned budgets for 2010 were cut by around 5% and 15% respectively with the alleged justification being the financial and economic crisis. It is very clear now that the Czech Republic will not reach the ODA/GNI ratio of 0.17%, as approved by the Council of the EU in 2005.⁸ This failure is less random than structural since this 2010 target has been interpreted by the Ministry of Finance as a mere ‘recommendation’. The MFA has always accepted the objections of the Ministry of Finance against raising the development budget, so the financial commitments were discussed only within the inter-ministerial mechanism of reviewing proposals, and the MFA has never openly challenged the position of the Ministry of Finance in the cabinet.

In the period 2007–2009 the ODI/GNI ratio was raised by one point to 0.12%, but in absolute numbers it saw its peak in 2008 with 4.6 billion CZK, and it stopped at 4.2 billion CZK a year later, mostly due to the reductions in the budget for bilateral projects. These numbers seem to be quite substantial, but in 2009, bilateral ODA accounted for only 41%, the compulsory contribution to the EU budget accounted for 53%, and other multilateral and regional organizations accounted for 5% of the total ODA. Moreover, bilateral cooperation includes large parts of the so-called inflated aid. In 2008, it included an unpublished part of the military and civil missions in Afghanistan (420 million CZK), arbitrarily selected and improbably high administrative costs amounting to 7% of bilateral aid (150 million CZK) and the assistance to refugees at home (300 million CZK). In addition to that, the scholarships for students from developing countries, which in most cases support brain drain, cost about 150 million CZK a year. Not counting humanitarian aid and transition policy, the final budget for bilateral projects corresponded to only about 610 million CZK (25 million EUR).

The prospects for the following years are not good either, not only because of the crisis-related budgetary cuts. The opportunities for bilateral debt relief are near their end, and they can only be replaced by the already negotiated payment to the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), which will start in 2011. The chances of doubling the ODI to reach the pledged ODA/GDI ratio of 0.33% in 2015 are bleak, as this would mean multiplying the ‘real’ bilateral budget several times. Until now, development cooperation had the same cuts applied to it as other expenses, and it does not seem that it would benefit from any special treatment by the government in the positive or negative sense.

Quality of Aid and its Territorial Distribution

Preceding the transformation of the development cooperation that was initiated in late 2007, there was a common understanding between the MFA, the Development Centre and the NGOs that bilateral aid is fragmented and hence ineffective. This view was supported by the ‘special review’ of the OECD Development Assistance Committee and the recommendations of the World Bank that have underlined the commercial motivations of the Czech aid, its territorial and sectoral fragmentation, and its poor focus on results.⁹ These arguments were widely used by the mentioned domestic actors as an argument for centralization of decision-making at the MFA and the founda-

tion of a single implementing agency, but since the plans got approved, the concerns for effectiveness have been weakening. The internal coherence of the Czech development cooperation is but a part of the aid effectiveness agenda, and the institutional transformation did not translate into a substantial change in the habits of the actors.

The Czech development cooperation remains donor-driven and *de facto* tied to the provision of Czech goods and services. Even though the Czech development agency has required the provision of common deliveries such as furniture by the local producers in the South, the tenders are still run in the Czech Republic. The Czech development agency does not have branches in the priority countries and therefore it is extremely difficult to gather relevant information without the intermediary of the interested companies and NGOs. Even though the number of priority countries and sectors is being slightly reduced, Czech aid remains overly fragmented. The efforts involved in taking cross-cutting issues such as gender and environment into account, and in promoting aid coordination, complementarity and policy coherence for development were mostly initiated by the NGOs or the European Commission, and their effect remains negligible. There is a very weak identification with communitarian aid and a resistance to delegating aid implementation to another donor, or even to using instruments such as general budget support. On the other hand, the Czech Republic has been quite active in promoting trilateral cooperation, formerly with bilateral donors such as Luxembourg, Canada and Austria, but more recently with the European Commission. But given that the reference framework for assessing Czech aid is the extent of promoting national interests, these concerns are not considered as relevant by the majority of actors.

The territorial distribution of the Czech bilateral cooperation is quite stable. The shallow defragmentation of aid leads rather to the retirement from the Least Developed Countries and Africa. In 2008 the eight priority countries (Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Mongolia, Serbia, Vietnam, Yemen and Zambia) shared two thirds of the budget earmarked for bilateral projects, and no projects were initiated outside the priority countries – with the exception of the so-called ‘small local projects’ affiliated to embassies. Europe accounted for 39%, Asia for 34% and Africa for 15% of the bilateral ODA. The Czech development cooperation is focused mostly on middle income countries in the Czech Republic’s Eastern Neighbourhood and the Balkans. The 2007 mid-term programme evaluations revealed that it was in Moldova and Vietnam that the Czech involvement was the least effective and coordinated. For example, the Czech Republic was active in six sectors in Moldova: these were largely defined to please the line ministries, and thus they accommodated almost any project. In 2010 the transition period will see the Czech Development Agency active in ten countries, with Mongolia, Georgia and Angola corresponding to two thirds of its budget and environment as the most prominent sector.

The Czech EU Presidency and Development Aid

The Czech presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2009 not only affected the communitarian level during the strictly delimited period of six months, but

it played an important role at the domestic level already in 2008. It particularly exhausted the capacities of the Czech development actors appointed for domestic tasks, but for a while, it gave the development agenda a higher level of importance at the EU level. The impact was the most visible within the MFA and the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the European Union in Brussels, which has been directly involved in presiding over CODEV, the working group on development of the Council. However, the biggest contribution to the rising relevance of development in the Czech Republic may consist in the other ministries' understanding of the priority the EU gave to the agenda. Even though it is too early to assess the costs and benefits of the intense EU experience, it has the potential to draw a larger amount of government attention to development issues in the long term. The presidency's contribution to the NGOs is more evident: it has facilitated their funding from diverse EU sources, boosted advocacy activities, and improved the visibility of development cooperation in the public space.

The national priorities of the presidency represent only a small part of its day-to-day activities, but they are symptomatic of its overall approach to development policy. The original Czech proposal included good governance, aid effectiveness, the Eastern dimension, and policy coherence for development in the area of environment as priorities. These were later modified and reduced to three priorities: access to sustainable sources of energy at the local level, support of democratic governance, and the Eastern dimension as a cross-cutting issue. The success of the third priority was mitigated as the working group and the Directorate General on Development are traditionally oriented toward Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific countries, but it helped to raise awareness of the territorial priorities of the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries. The first two priorities, as well as the unforeseen priority imposed by the circumstances to mitigate the impacts of the global financial and economic crisis, were successfully coined by the Council Conclusions. The informal meeting of development ministers took place in Prague on 29 and 30 January 2009. The main role of the presidency – to moderate the debate and search for consensus – has been assessed as successful by the peer member states and the Council.

The way in which the Czech positions toward the EU and global development policy are adjusted outside the presidency is also quite revealing of the low relevance of the agenda at the domestic level. The MFA did not interfere in the mandate to be issued by its Ministerial Coordination Group, as it is entirely drafted by the Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid and there are no external actors involved. As far as the current positions are concerned, the Czech Republic is overtly sceptical towards the endorsed commitments of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action. The new strategy paper openly discards uses of budget support and delegated cooperation on the grounds of the desired involvement of the the Czech companies and NGOs in the projects of the Czech development cooperation.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: IDENTIFICATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KEY ACTORS

No other dimension of the Czech foreign policy is characterized by such a high number of state and non-state actors. Even the centralization of the system has confirmed the important role of other state actors in the inter-ministerial council and at the same time, the transformation of the system did not cause aid to be less tied to the products and services provided by the Czech NGOs and companies. According to 2005 estimates, 40 employees were active in the public sector, 110 in the non-profit sector and 250–300 in the private sector.¹⁰ Hence, the bilateral development cooperation is quite an important employer. The relations between the actors are hierarchical. The government approves the policy and the budget outlined by the MFA. In turn, the MFA coordinated the other ministries, which are phasing out of implementation, and, the CzDA, which runs new tenders and grant competitions. The NGOs and companies implementing projects try to influence the policy through their respective platforms and keep their acquired positions in implementing aid. Other specific relations are analysed in the following subsections.

The Government

The already low priority of the development agenda within the foreign policy is reduced even further by the weak position of the MFA *vis-a-vis* other ministries. Since 1993 the MFA has been occupied mostly by the coalition partners of the winning right or left wing parties, and the foreign affairs constituency could not compete with the strong constituencies in the policy areas of finance, industry and agriculture. The references to development cooperation that were made by the Prime Ministers Mirek Topolánek and Jan Fischer always originated in other areas. In 2007, the former challenged the aid allocation to those countries that had not supported the Czech candidacy to the UN Security Council on the grounds that it was incompatible with the Czech ‘economic diplomacy’. He was criticized by the opposition for this.¹¹ In 2009, on the eve of the Copenhagen Summit, the latter claimed that the newness of the Czech part of the so-called Fast Start Financing for climate change adaptation and mitigation funding was a ‘secondary problem’.¹² These were the only appearances of development cooperation in their public statements.

Political Parties

An analysis of election programmes for the cancelled elections to the Chamber of Deputies in October 2009 shows that only the Greens (SZ) dedicated more than one page of its programme to development cooperation and policy coherence for development. This dedication is due to the strong affiliation of the party with the civil society. The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and the Civil Democratic Party (ODS) both touch upon the two issues in only one sentence. The programmes of other parliamentary parties completely ignored these issues.

The Parliament

Lead by an opposition deputy, the Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies has been the most active body of the Parliament. It has regularly complained of the low interest of the MFA to consult its policies, including development cooperation, with the Parliament. The Committee has repeatedly and symbolically attempted at raising the budget for development cooperation until 2008, and in March 2009 it has replaced one of the three subcommittees by a subcommittee on development cooperation. Though, the step foreseen by the chair since 2007 was motivated by a deposal of a turncoat deputy from the original committee. In July 2008, the Senate has voted, on the proposal of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, a decision that has asked the government to reconsider its stance towards aid volume and to inform Senate on its decision. However, this initiative did not have any impact on the government. Only a couple of members of the Parliament, disregarding their political appurtenance, are aware of the development agenda, which hampers any long-term influence on the government.

Ministries

Despite the transformation of the system, some ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, have preserved their specific agendas accountable for ODA, such as scholarships for students from developing countries, projects on prevention of illegal migration and Aid for Trade. Even though the ministries are continually running out of projects that were initiated before the foundation of the CzDA, they still continue to play a role institutionally through their vote in the Advisory Council for Foreign Development Cooperation, or personally through the incoming staff to the agency socialized by them. This is particularly true for the Ministry of Environment. The position of a ministry on development issues varies naturally according to its constituency, and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, for example, still considers development cooperation as a form of export subsidy for the Czech companies. The Ministry of Finance plays a particular role by opposing respect for the financial commitments with the argument that public budgets are tight.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Even though the MFA has occupied a central position in the Czech development cooperation from the beginning, its dominance as a coordinating body was continuously strengthening. The policy-making unit is now located in the relatively autonomous Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, which was founded in 2003, shortly before the accession to the EU. Approximately thirteen diplomats were working there after the EU presidency in late 2009, one diplomat represented the Czech Republic in the corresponding working groups CODEV and COHAFA at the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the European Union in Brussels, and a diplomat was *de facto* outsourced to the Regional Centre of the UN Programme on Development (UNDP) in Slovakia. Some diplomats were also appointed to the development cooperation agenda at the embassies in priority countries, but the career code of the foreign ministry does not fit the long-term side of the development agenda, and

the department and the embassies in the South suffer from a high turnover of personnel. The Ministry has traditionally defended development aid as a tool of the foreign policy, and in late 2009 the Minister Jan Kohout justified the government law proposal in the Chamber of Deputies by stating that it was ‘not primarily charity, but first of all investment, investment in our security, in the prosperity of our citizens’.

The Czech Development Agency

The development agency grew out of the Development Centre, which was officially affiliated to the Institute of International Relations while in reality being subordinated to the Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the MFA. Especially in its beginnings as a follow-up of a UNDP project, it had not only played an advisory role to the MFA, but many policy-making tasks were directly outsourced by the ministry to its advisory body. Due to its multilateral origin, the Development Centre used to defend a more pro-poor stance than the MFA, but with its transformation from a policy advisory body to an implementing body, and the personnel changes in its direction, it came to approach the more pragmatic stance of the MFA. As of the end of 2009, about sixteen experts were working at the CzDA, divided between the territorially-oriented identification department and the sectorally-based formulation and monitoring department. As the only agency of its kind from the ‘new’ EU member states, it is a member of the Practitioners’ Network for European Development Cooperation, but real cases of coordination with other donors are rare as the Czech aid is tied and the agency lacks offices in developing countries. Despite the foundation of the agency and its responsibility for designing a substantial part of the project cycle and running transparent tenders, the Czech development projects are still mainly donor-driven, and also, they at least partially respond to the commercial interests of Czech companies.

The Council for Foreign Development Cooperation

Before the transformation from the Inter-ministerial Working Group in January 2008, the Council for Foreign Development Cooperation served as a coordinating body for the managing of the ministries and it discussed predominantly technical matters on an irregular basis and at the level of heads of department. The inclusion of the NGO and private sector platforms with an advisory vote, but with an influential voice, and the centralization of policy-making and budgeting at the MFA have led to a pace of four to five meetings a year and frequent representation by deputy ministers. Nevertheless, there is a concern that after the completion of the transformation process the ministries will gradually lose their interest in the development agenda. This would be detrimental to the creation of a genuine development policy for the Czech Republic as policy coherence for development is the second objective of the Council after coordination. It is defined in its statute, but not implemented at all yet. In addition to the mentioned actors, the associations of towns and regions make up a part of the Council, but their role in the Czech development cooperation has been negligible so far as well. Generally speaking, the influence within the council is distributed according to the weight of the ministries in the government.

Non-Governmental Organizations

The NGOs are important actors in the Czech development cooperation even though their part of the aid implementation does not surpass one third of the projects and amounts to even less in financial terms. They are much more visible than private companies in the Czech Republic: there are special budget lines for them to raise public awareness, and they frequently use the state-funded projects for improving their own visibility and private fundraising. Overall, their relation with the MFA can be labelled as one of interdependence. At the same time the NGOs' poverty-focused projects may serve as a tool for sustaining the public support of the policy. On the other hand, with the extremely low private donations for development (but not humanitarian) projects, most of the NGOs existentially depend on government support. This dependence on the state determines the nature of advocacy activities run by the NGO platform FoRS – the Czech Forum on Development Cooperation. It gathers together about thirty organizations, a great majority of the active NGOs, and lobbying for easy NGO funding is its foremost task. In spite of that, and especially with the external funding from the EU, the NGOs have started their own policy activities that open and put pressure on the MFA to honour its commitments, not only in terms of aid quantity, but also in terms of aid effectiveness and policy coherence, as it appears in the last *Aid Watch* report.¹³ Individual members of FoRS are affiliated to the national version of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, but it has been largely unsuccessful in substantially raising public awareness. People in Need, Caritas and Adra are the most important development NGOs in the country.

Private Companies

The private companies are the main beneficiaries of the Czech development cooperation in financial terms. The costs of an energy infrastructure project managed by the Ministry of Industry and Trade in Palestine have surpassed 6 million EUR, for example. Formally unorganized before 2008, some of the companies united in the Platform of Entrepreneurs for Foreign Development Cooperation (PPZRS), which was initiated mostly by major Chambers of commerce. While the NGOs lobby for aid to Least Developed Countries, the private sectors naturally prefer the neighbouring middle-income countries with already established strong economic relations. In some cases, the individual companies were still influencing the policy by interfering in the project identification process, which is still partly in the hands of the commercial representatives of the Czech embassies abroad. The platform has also initiated activities that help Czech companies in participating in EDF tenders.

Academia

While the Czech academic research on development is limited and fragmented, development studies as a discipline taught at universities are more widespread. Palacký University in Olomouc has started a full Bachelor's and Master's study programme in this subject, two universities have partial study programmes in it, and some other universities teach territorial studies, which are related to the South. A more general problem consists in the uncritical acceptance of the global or national political discourse on development.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

The interest of the media in development issues has slightly risen during the 2007–2009 period, but it is still insufficient. According to a Eurobarometer survey, 43% of the Czech respondents judge that the media refer ‘too little’ about the development of poor countries.¹⁴ Moreover, a part of the Czech media outputs result from awareness raising projects run by NGOs, and many articles written by professional journalists are heavily influenced by stereotypes. The media inform about the Czech development cooperation only exceptionally, or if they do inform about it, it usually has to do with cases of failures and alleged corruption. Apart from the tabloidization of the Czech media, the lack of interest is also due to the improved, but still insufficient transparency of the Czech development cooperation, which is due to its management by diplomats who usually do not take care of raising the public awareness of the foreign policy. So far, only half of the population is aware of aid provided by the government, and this result is mitigated by the frequent confusion between humanitarian and development aid.¹⁵

There is indeed a gap between the humanitarian and the development donorship. While the Czechs are strongly willing to contribute to the relief after natural disasters, the NGOs are dependent on government aid, and they can hardly be considered as a part of the civil society in its original meaning. Nevertheless, there are several grassroots organizations providing development aid that exist outside the official structures. Greater public awareness would probably translate into higher pressure on politicians to provide development aid as the Czech Republic is one of the few EU countries where the opinion that developing countries should be helped has strengthened between 2004 and 2009. It reached 87% in 2009, according to Eurobarometer. The most important reasons for the Czechs to support development cooperation are the assistance to people in need, the fight against poverty, and help for children, while security and economic interests as primary motivations rate very low (3.4% and 2% respectively). The combination of both EU and domestic surveys shows that while people are quite sceptical about the actual use of aid, they are idealistic and do not require it to be a pragmatic tool for serving the Czech interests. People are hence close to the position of NGOs, but there is a gap between them and the government position. Development policy puts hence a question mark on the democratic legitimacy of the preference formation in the Czech foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

Despite some notable variations between donors, development cooperation in the European Union is often understood less as a political than as a technical part of foreign policy – unless it lies outside the influence of the foreign ministry as a government policy in its own right. The way forward to be followed by the bad performers in terms of aid volume and effectiveness is also seen as linear, as it entails heading toward greater commitments on poverty reduction, which most often means abandoning

the short-term national interests. The path undertaken by the Czech Republic, a medium-sized ‘new’ EU member state, shows that in the period from 2007 to 2009, it took a different direction and fostered the role of development cooperation as a tool of the foreign policy. Meanwhile, the development effectiveness of the Czech aid may have improved as a side effect of the policy, but the absence of project evaluations does not allow for assessing its impact on the partner countries. On the other hand, the legal, institutional and strategic settings have been improving over time, so it may be argued that the aid efficiency has risen in respect to the foreign policy priorities.

If, however, one accepts this particularity of the development cooperation of the Czech Republic – which is also present, among others, in many other post-communist states and is contrary to their international commitments – the efforts undertaken to centralize the bilateral cooperation system have been incomparable. Indeed, for a long period of time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs faced the resistance of the line ministries to efforts to limit their particular interests. In contrast to the ‘new’ member states that have started to provide greenfield development aid only with their approaching accession to the EU, the Czech Republic had lost much time and energy on rebuilding the system on a brownfield. Still, it has remained the leader among the post-communist states: by the end of 2010, the Czech Republic has a law and a detailed strategy paper in preparation; the tasks are clearly divided between the MFA as a policy-maker and the Czech Development Agency as an aid implementer; other assets include multi-annual financing, country programmes, skilled and experienced staff, a functioning inter-ministerial council, etc. If the offices of the agency were dispatched to partner countries and the aid was consequently untied, the development cooperation framework of the Czech Republic would be almost ready to honour the current international commitments on development effectiveness.

The central challenge to the Czech development cooperation is located in the political space. The inclusion of development on the domestic political agenda is necessary to close the gap between the government and private companies that see development aid as a tool of foreign policy, and the citizens and civil society that prefer a poverty-focused cooperation. The crucial problems of the ‘new’ EU member states in terms of development policy are often seen as the lack of capacities and the lack of political will. The Czech case is quite different. Given the low aid disbursements, the capacities are relatively sufficient at this stage, but the main problem consists in the presence of a certain type of political will that often goes against the development commitments and the opinion of the civil society and the population. Rather than a lack of expertise, the main problem of the Czech development cooperation has to do with the internal political processes, a problem that it shares with the Czech foreign policy as a whole.

Endnotes

¹ I am grateful to the following people for interviews, written communications, and/or comments on the earlier versions of the paper, carried out in 2007–2010: Václav Exner, Petr Halaxa, Jan Hamáček,

Zuzana Hlavičková, Petr Jelínek, Michal Kaplan, Jakub Karfík, Milan Konrád, Jana Korbelová, Michal Krb, Petr Krupa, Dagmar Kuchtová, Martin Náprstek, Šimon Pánek, Michal Procházka, Hana Ševčíková, Jaromír Štětina, Michal Pastvinský, Gabriela Pilná, Zuzana Sládková, Martina Tuleškovová, Věra Venclíková, Jana Vlachová, Ivana Vlková, representatives of the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, and the permanent representations of six member states to the European Union in Brussels. Special thanks go to Michal Procházka for his continuous valuable comments on my research. However, the responsibility for the final version is mine. The chapter does not reflect the official position of the Czech government.

- ² *Usnesení vlády č. 153 ze dne 15. března 1995 'Zásady pro poskytování zahraniční pomoci'; Usnesení vlády ze dne 12. října 2005 č. 1311 o Pravidlech pro výběr a financování bilaterálních projektů v rámci zahraniční rozvojové spolupráce České republiky.*
- ³ *Usnesení vlády č. 302 ze dne 31. března. 2004 'Zásady zahraniční rozvojové spolupráce po vstupu České republiky do Evropské unie'.*
- ⁴ *Usnesení vlády č. 91 ze dne 23. ledna 2002 'Koncepce zahraniční rozvojové pomoci České republiky na období let 2002–2007'.*
- ⁵ *Usnesení vlády ze dne 19. září 2007 č. 1070 k transformaci systému zahraniční spolupráce ČR.*
- ⁶ *Usnesení vlády ze dne 19. prosince 2007 č. 1439 o zřízení Rady pro zahraniční rozvojovou spolupráci.*
- ⁷ Hlavičková, Zuzana et al.: *Czech Development Cooperation: Report on the Development Assistance of the Czech Republic in 2007*. Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008.
- ⁸ EU External Relations Council: *Council conclusions: Accelerating progress towards achieving the millennium development goals*, Brussels, 24. 5. 2005.
- ⁹ OECD DAC: *Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic: DAC Special Review, 2007*; World Bank: 'The Czech ODA program in the current aid paradigm: challenges and opportunities for a more efficient aid', presented at *The monitoring and evaluation of the Czech's [sic] ODA system*. Prague, 22. 2. 2007.
- ¹⁰ Hurdová, Martina–Nádvořník, Ondřej: *Pracovní trh v sektoru rozvojové spolupráce v České republice. Případová studie*. Praha: Člověk v tísni, 2005.
- ¹¹ *Topolánek chce trestat země, kterým pomáháme*. iDNES.cz, 23. 10. 2007.
- ¹² *EU dá chudým zemím na boj s klimatem téměř 190 miliard korun*. České noviny, 11. 12. 2009.
- ¹³ Plavcová, Dana–Lebeda, Petr: (2009): *Česká pomoc na rozcestí. Zpráva nevládních neziskových organizací o zahraniční rozvojové spolupráci 2008–2009*. Praha: FoRS – České fórum pro rozvojovou spolupráci.
- ¹⁴ Special Eurobarometer no. 318. *Development Aid in times of economic turmoil*, October 2009.
- ¹⁵ SC&C: *Zahraněční rozvojová spolupráce. Závěrečná zpráva*, 7. 11. 2008.