

Interview for the Romanian Center of European Policies / Euractiv.ro

- 1. Among other key recommendation you have pointed out: The Visegrad countries should firstly narrow the scope of enhanced coordination to the two most advanced partner countries: Ukraine and Moldova. Have you seen recent developments in this regard?**

In the past two-three years, no formal institutional changes have been introduced, which would have rendered the coordination of international development cooperation easier among the four Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland) during their planning, programming or implementation phases. Moreover, the past two years have not been particularly easy in Ukraine and Moldova either, and their domestic circumstances were far from ideal to facilitate coordination in the area of development cooperation.

Nevertheless, both the Slovak and the Czech V4 Presidencies kept international development cooperation on their agendas indicating an intention to increase coordination and to establish synergies in the partner countries, especially in the area of the Eastern Partnership. While the Slovak Presidency in 2014/15 specifically called for finding common grounds in Moldova, it initiated more visible progress in coordination with Ukraine in the end. Following the October 2014 parliamentary elections, which were expected to bring some clarity and calm in Kyiv, the four Visegrad countries –after coordinating with Ukraine– agreed that they would “divide the labor” among themselves and support reforms in Ukraine in selected areas. The Czech Republic took responsibility for civil society, education and media, Hungary for the SME sector and the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), Poland signed up for decentralization (local administration reform) and public finance reform, and Slovakia for energy security and security sector reform. Additionally, the Slovak Presidency also launched the so-called V4 Road Show in Ukraine, an event series focused on sharing the V4’s transition experience in a variety of sectors, which is now continued by the Czech Presidency (2015/16). The viability of the task division and the effectiveness of the Road Show are yet to be evaluated, nevertheless these have been the most notable developments with regards to enhanced coordination on the V4 level in the Eastern Partnership area.

- 2. Refugee crises and/or Russian aggression. Will we face a re-orientation of the geographical priorities of the new donors? Are they necessary? Could they be effective?**

Some of the key factors that will influence how Central and Eastern European (CEE) new donors think about their development policies are indeed the refugee crisis and the developments in Eastern Europe. Additionally, the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will require rethinking our approach to international development cooperation, will have the biggest impact in the coming years.

On the one hand, Russia’s aggression in Ukraine underlined the importance of the region, while the recent signature of the Association Agreements and DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine strengthened the relevance of this vector of the CEE countries’ development policies. With these agreements entering into force, there is an increased demand for the Visegrad countries’ so-called transition experience and know-how with regards to the adoption and implementation of the EU *acquis*, the respective parts of which

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are now required to take. For this reason, I expect that this region will remain among the main priorities for years to come.

On the other hand, dominating domestic and foreign policy agendas in the past several months, the refugee crisis will most likely have a strong impact on the policy. Firstly, it undoubtedly calls for increased assistance to address the humanitarian crisis that has evolved in the Middle East over the past several years as the consequence of the Syrian crisis and the aggression of Daesh. Secondly, with the unprecedented inflow of people both from the Middle East and Africa emerged a discourse that calls for addressing the problems at their root and tackling the causes of migration where they arise to help people stay in their countries. While this thinking does not help those who are already in Europe, it can direct attention to development challenges in the least developed countries – in addition to the need of addressing the security challenges more effectively, of course. Championed by Hungary in the Visegrad Group, this discourse has been mainly calling for the reallocation of EU funds to these areas so far. Nevertheless, should its proponents decide to “put their money where their mouth is,” least developed countries could gain more prominence in these donors’ development agenda. However, we are yet to hear of substantive bilateral pledges.

Finally, the post-2015 agenda, which seeks to move beyond the so far prominent North–South divide to establish a more global and sustainable approach to development, prompts all actors, new donors included, to rethink their place in the international system of development cooperation. While the Millennium Development Goals targeted the developing countries, the SDGs require significant adjustments from the developed world as well. The SDGs lift a vast amount of sectoral areas into focus, give prominence to climate and ecology, necessitate the cooperation of a broader set of actors, and the incorporation of new forms of financing. On top of ongoing political and security challenges which can incite a geographic reorientation, the integration of the Agenda for Sustainable Development into national IDC policies will call for reflecting on the thematic/sectoral foci and the general policy framework as a whole in the coming years.

It is hard to judge at this point whether development activities could be effective after a potential reorientation both in geographic and thematic terms. It strongly depends on how the policy is implemented, and whether the principles of aid effectiveness are thoroughly incorporated into the process. The importance of local ownership cannot be overstated here. The principle of policy coherence for development, which rightly receives increasing attention nowadays, should also be taken into account in order to ensure that development and non-development policies mutually support each other and hence the developing country. While admitting that much progress has been made in all four Visegrad countries since the launch of their international development policies more than 10 years ago, there is still much room for improvement concerning aid effectiveness.

3. Do you see as necessary a more active assistance coordination of the Visegrad countries with other new donors in Central and Eastern Europe? On which direction?

After the adoption of the SDGs, which will guide the development field in the next 15 years, all actors will need to reflect on how they can best adjust to the post-2015 agenda and address (some of) the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets in their development policy. This exercise gives a good opportunity for governmental actors to discuss and coordinate with each other how their international development policies will evolve in the future and also to engage other actors (non-governmental and private) in the process. When it comes to target countries of

assistance, coordination with local stakeholders from early on and throughout the whole implementation is of utmost importance in order to ensure local ownership.

In the case of the Visegrad countries, it is worth examining the prospects for cooperation with other Central and Eastern European countries, especially in the direct neighborhoods which I believe will remain on the agenda for quite a while. It would be logical to seek such opportunities, for example, with Romania in the case of Moldova. Given that these new donors are in fact also small donors with limited financial capabilities and still very far from meeting their ODA/GNI targets, pooling resources in key target areas where capacities complement each other or even dividing labor –like the V4 did in the case of Ukraine– in order to reduce overlaps and redundancies could potentially increase impact in the partner country and could contribute to aid effectiveness.

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