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Determinants of civil society influence. The Case of International Development and Humanitarian NGOs in the Czech Republic and Hungary[1]

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Abstract

Accession to the EU has had ambiguous effects on civil society organizations (CSOs) in the East Central European countries. A general observation is that accession has not led to the systematic empowerment of CSOs in terms of growing influence on national policy making. This paper investigates the determinants of successful CSO advocacy by looking at international development and humanitarian NGOs (NGDOs) in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Reforms in the past decade in the Czech Republic have created an international development policy largely in-line with NGDO interests, while Hungary's ministry of foreign affairs seems to have been unresponsive to reform demands from civil society. The paper argues that there is clear evidence of NGDO influence in the Czech Republic on international development policy, which is due to the fact that Czech NGDOs have been able solve problems of collective actions, while the Hungarian NGDO sector remains fragmented. They also have relatively stronger capacities, can rely on greater public support and can thus present more legitimate demands towards their government.

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1. Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the East Central European (ECE) EU member states have been the focus of much scholarly attention in the past two decades. These organizations are historically seen as weaker compared to their Western counterparts due to the legacy of Communism, which led to a lack of interpersonal trust and low levels of civic activism (see; Palubinskas, 2003; Wallace et al., 2012). Membership in the EU was a crucial element in the democratisation of the region (Vachudova, 2005), but the effects of accession on CSOs seem ambiguous. On the one hand, CSOs have benefitted from the rights and responsibilities the national adoption of the EU's *acquis communautaire* gives them in many policy areas and have also gained access to increased international financing (Roth, 2007). On the other hand, accession has, in general, not led to the empowerment of civil society in terms of growing influence on national policy formation (Börzel and Buzogány, 2010) because accession made the state become relatively stronger (Bruszt, 2008). However, this general conclusion is increasingly under challenge from evidence of CSO influence in specific cases, which points to the fact that the net effect of accession on CSO empowerment depends on a number of scope conditions. This literature has yet failed to fully focus on identifying and testing what these conditions are.

International development and humanitarian aid constitutes an intriguing policy area to study this question. Non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) play an important role in these policies of the ECE states: they are heavily relied on by national governments to implement state-financed development projects abroad, and are also the main actors in domestic awareness raising and development education (see OECD, 2007). In absence of wider media interest in international development, they form the most important watchdogs of how the government spends its aid resources. NGDOs have benefitted from accession to the EU as it was mainly EU pressure which led to the creation of national foreign aid policies in the ECE countries (Szent-Iványi and Tétényi, 2008), and membership opened up possibilities for these NGDOs to engage in the work of transnational networks and apply for EU funding. As a result, there is evidence that the NGDO sectors in the ECE states have undergone a process of professionalization (Bučar, 2012, Selmeczi, 2013). While the growing literature on international development policies in the ECE countries does acknowledge the importance of NGDOs, there has to date been very little in-depth analysis on their role and their influence on policy making.

This paper examines the role played by NGDOs in the making of international development policy in a comparative case study of two ECE countries, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Both countries had international development policies during the Communist regimes, and when re-creating these policies around the turn of the Millennium they faced similar conditions and started off with rather similar policies and practices. However, since EU accession, their international development policies have taken very different courses, with the Czech Republic making the clearest steps to become one of the most advanced aid donors in the region (Horký, 2012, p. 23), while the policy area in Hungary seems to have shown signs of stagnation and only modest reform (Paragi, 2010, Hódosi 2012, Szent-Iványi, 2012). NGDOs in both countries had very similar experiences as a result of EU accession, and have become more professional and highly 'Europeanized' in terms of adopting the policy agendas of EU-wide NGDO groups. They have also been engaged in development policy making processes and have put forward clear reform demands towards their respective governments.

Differences between the NGDO's abilities for effective domestic advocacy and influence may be one potential explanatory factor of why international development policies in the two countries have evolved so differently in the past ten years. The paper does not attempt to untangle these different factors and does not claim that NGDO influence (or the lack of it) is the only (or most significant) explanatory factor in the different trajectories the Czech Republic and Hungary have taken. It does however argue that there is evidence of a causal relationship from the characteristics and advocacy capabilities of the NGDO sectors towards the shape international development policies in the two countries have taken. The fact that NGDO influence seems to vary between the two countries suggests that empowerment is not an automatic consequence of EU accession. Identifying the key conditions which allow NGDOs to translate the direct and indirect benefits of EU accession into increased influence on the national policy formation process is therefore a key contribution of the paper.

The paper uses an inductive methodology and compares the characteristics and activities of NGDOs in the two countries in order to determine what characteristics are necessary for influence. Data was collected through 24 qualitative interviews between 2012 and 2013 in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Respondents included representatives from national NGDO associations, individual NGDOs, as well as ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) and aid agency officials. For reasons of confidentiality, respondents will remain anonymous. The interview data was complemented by a number of other sources, including national strategic and legal documents, as well as government, NGDO and international organization reports.

By identifying the scope conditions which have led to the successful empowerment of NGDOs, the paper contributes to the wider literature on the effects EU accession has had on CSOs in the new

member states. It also addresses an important gap in the literature on international development policies in the ECE countries: given the significance of NGDOs in these policies, it is surprising that there has not been much research on their roles, or from a wider perspective, the influence they have on governments (with Bučar's 2012 case study on Slovenia being a notable exception). The following section presents the international development policies of the Czech Republic and Hungary, which is followed by a discussion of the impacts of EU accession on CSOs in general, and NGDOs in particular. This is followed by the Czech and Hungarian case studies, and the final section inductively draws theoretical conclusions which can guide future research on the topic.

2. International development policies in the Czech Republic and Hungary: Different trajectories

While starting from rather similar situations in the early 2000s, the international development policies of the Czech Republic and Hungary have taken quite divergent paths. Both countries were donors of foreign aid during Communism, and both terminated these policies after 1989. Foreign aid was re-started in the run-up to EU accession during the late 1990s in the Czech Republic and early 2000s in Hungary. Both countries may thus be considered 'new' or 'emerging' donors of foreign aid, but the Czech Republic has done much more to approximate its policies to globally agreed practices in the past decade as compared to Hungary (Horký, 2010, Paragi, 2010, Szent-Iványi, 2012). We briefly review four areas where the divergence between the two countries is evident: aid volumes, aid delivery structures, aid allocation and transparency.

Concerning aid volumes, in 2012, the Czech Republic provided almost 220 million dollars in foreign aid (or 21 dollars for each Czech citizen), while Hungary gave 118 million (12 dollars per capita). The Czech aid effort per capita was therefore 75% higher than that of Hungary. This difference in relative aid levels has been rather constant since 2007, as shown on Figure 1.

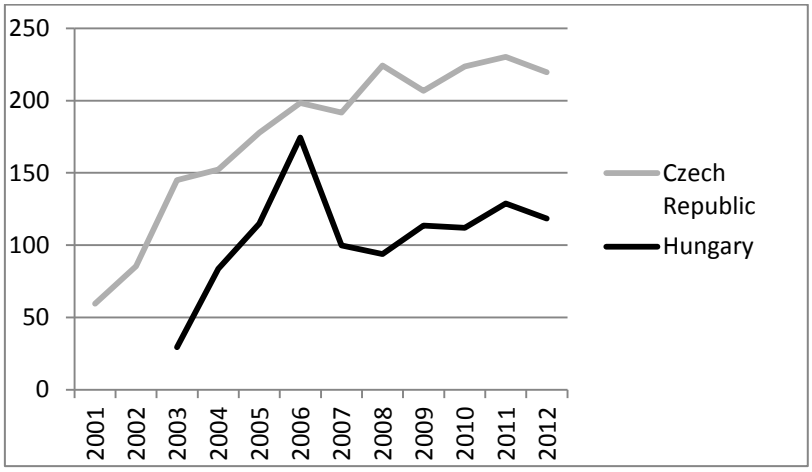

Figure 1. Czech and Hungarian Official Development Assistance, in million dollars and constant 2012 prices and exchange rates

Source: OECD (2014).

Looking at the institutional structures for aid delivery, both countries started with structures seen as highly inefficient: the responsibility for foreign aid was dispersed along several government ministries, each of which had its own aid budget, with the MFA acting as the main coordinator. However, the MFA did not have any strong authority to influence decisions made by other ministries, and thus development policies in both countries were seen as lacking strategic guidance (OECD, 2007, Paragi, 2010). Lancaster (2007: 19) argues that aid fragmentation in government equals weak development purpose in government aid programmes. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), an organization responsible for coordinating the activities of foreign aid donors, has acknowledged this and encourages donors to 'rationalize aid administrations by placing all development-oriented work across government departments under a common strategic umbrella and increasing the coherence of country-level oversight of aid programmes' (Lumsgaarde 2013: 3). Czech development cooperation underwent major restructuring between 2007 and 2011, which strengthened the role of the MFA by centralizing the foreign aid budget under the ministry. All implementing tasks were given to a new MFA agency, the Czech Development Agency (CzDA). The law regulating the policy area (Act 151 of 10 April 2010) made poverty reduction a key priority, and the MFA formulates regular medium-term strategies based on the law. The new Czech system is seen by observers as more effective than the previous fragmented system (Sládková, 2011). Hungarian development policy on the other hand did not undergo any such reform: the fragmented system remains, and as of mid-2014 there is no law regulating the policy area and no implementing agency. Hungary's first foreign aid strategy was only accepted by the government in early 2014.

In terms of aid allocation, the Czech Republic is seen to place greater emphasis on providing aid to the poorest countries and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, as advocated by recommendations from the OECD DAC or the EU. More than a third of Czech bilateral aid is targeted to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), while only a fourth of Hungary's assistance reaches these countries (Table 1). Czech aid to Africa has shown a slow but steady increasing trend in the past decade (see OECD 2014), while Hungary's has not. Hungary seems to favour giving aid to European countries, especially Ukraine and Serbia where supporting Hungarian minorities is seen as an important goal.

Table 1. Czech and Hungarian aid allocation by region, 2008-2012, in percentages of total bilateral aid

	Czech Republic	Hungary
Europe	25.4	37.6
North Africa and Middle East	6.3	0.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.5	2.1
America	3.9	0.8
East Asia and Oceania	11.8	7.4
South & Central Asia	33.2	24.0
Unspecified	10.0	27.5
Memo: LDCs	35.8	24.7

Source: Calculations of the authors based on OECD (2014).

Finally, in terms of transparency, the 2013 Aid Transparency Index ranks the Czech Republic 35th out of 67 donor countries and organizations, while Hungary seems to be one of the least transparent donors in the world, ranking at position 64 (Publish What You Fund 2013: 16-17). Czech Aid is actually more transparent than aid provided by Finland, Luxemburg, or the US State Department. The Czech Republic publishes rather detailed information on the CzDA's website, and the results of evaluation reports are also made public, some in English. It is almost impossible to find project level data in the case of Hungary, and no evaluation reports (if ever commissioned) are public.

Explanations for the diverging paths of the two countries in this policy field vary. Seeking international prestige may have a higher priority for the Czech government than the Hungarian government. Budget austerity after 2006 in Hungary, plus the fact that the 2008 crisis hit Hungary extremely strongly could also have been factors. However, we contend that differences between civil society in terms of influence on policy making can be a further potential explanation. As discussed, we dot attempt to untangle the partial effect of civil society pressure from the other potential explanatory factors. To understand the role NGDOs have played in forming international development policies in the two countries, the following section looks at the context in which CSOs and NGDOs especially have emerged from.

3. Civil society, EU accession, and the emergence of development and humanitarian NGOs

EU accession has had direct and indirect impacts on CSOs in ECE. Direct effects mainly relate to the new possibilities that have opened up for CSOs at the European level. Accession had made ECE CSOs

eligible to apply for project grants from the EU institutions directly. It also opened possibilities for them to interact and become more involved in the work of EU-wide advocacy groups and epistemic communities, exposing them to a wide range of learning dynamics and allowing them not only to master new skills and techniques, but also socializing them and raising their domestic profile (Börzel, 2010, p. 3; Kutter and Trappmann, 2010). Indirect impacts on CSOs on the other hand come from the fact that due to EU membership and the adoption of the *acquis*, national legislation and policy making processes have changed, and thus so has the context in which CSOs work. In most policy areas, the EU has pushed the ECE states to involve civil society in policy making, which means making these processes more transparent and open, and also instituting regular consultations with key CSOs. In addition, CSOs have become more professional in dealing with the state (Petrova and Tarrow, 2007). Despite the new opportunities offered by EU accession, there seems to be an emerging consensus in the literature that its legacy has not been fully positive (Fagan, 2005; Börzel and Buzogány, 2010, Batory and Cartwright, 2011). Adopting the EU *acquis* by the state was often done under high time pressures, not leaving enough room for meaningful CSO involvement in the process, which sent mixed signals to civil society. CSOs have often also been too weak and lacking capacities to truly engage with the state in policy making, mobilize protest or invoke their rights domestically and abroad (Börzel and Buzogány, 2010). EU accession has also partially offset the pressure ECE CSOs would otherwise face to seek out different sources of funding, including grassroots fundraising (Fagan 2005).

Turning to the specific case of NGDOs, these CSOs developed in the Czech Republic and Hungary more or less in parallel with the emergence of international development policies in the late 1990s (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015). The roots of NGDOs are mainly in large faith-based domestic social care and relief CSOs, which emerged in the early 1990s with the renewed autonomy of churches. In the early days, the focus of their activities tended towards the alleviation of domestic poverty aggravated by the transition crisis. During the mid-1990s, these faith-based CSOs and others increasingly started to venture abroad, by providing *ad hoc* humanitarian assistance to people hit by humanitarian catastrophes. Helping the victims of the wars in Yugoslavia and Chechnya were strong catalysts for the emergence of secular NGDOs as well (Drazkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2013, p. 68), such as People in Need (PiN) in the Czech Republic. Gradually, in the late 1990s, many of these NGDOs became engaged in longer term development projects by moving from humanitarian relief activities to rehabilitation.[1] A smaller group of today's NGDOs however have a very different background: these were founded in the 1990s to promote and monitor the development of democracy in their own countries and often received large amounts of US funding. These NGDOs, such as DemNet

Foundation in Hungary, were forced to seek new mandates after EU accession, and supporting democracy-enhancing projects abroad was a viable survival option.

The creation of official foreign aid and accession to the EU opened up new possibilities for Czech and Hungarian NGDOs. NGDO representatives interviewed all emphasized the positive effects of EU accession on their work, some even crediting the EU for their very existence. Both indirect and direct effects of accession were highly pronounced. The main indirect effect was through the creation of government development policies, as governments mainly turned to the national NGDO communities to implement state-financed projects abroad. Due to the need to communicate with governments, NGDOs created formal associational organizations called national 'NGDO platforms' to promote advocacy: the Czech Forum for Development Cooperation (FoRS) and the Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and Humanitarian Aid (HAND). Direct effects were also numerous and substantial. National NGDOs gained access to development project grants administered by the European Commission (EC). NGDO platforms swiftly became members of the CONCORD, the pan-European 'platform of platforms', exposing them to EU level advocacy and ties with NGDOs from other countries. CONCORD included the new members in its AidWatch initiative, an EU-wide program to monitor official aid policies. Both platforms produce national versions of these AidWatch Reports, which are perhaps their most visible monitoring and advocacy documents.

The direct and indirect effects of EU accession have undoubtedly given a huge push to the development of the NGDO sector in the Czech Republic and Hungary. However, the sectors still displays much of the weaknesses that CSOs in general face in the region, mainly along the 'lack of funds, people and capacities' argument.[2] The links NGDOs have with their grassroots are also weak, which is exacerbated by low public awareness on development issues (Selmeczi, 2013). A cross-national examination of the total level of engagement in voluntary associations, especially those connected with aid issues, was 'very low' in ECE (Wallace *et al.,* 2012, p. 10). However, there are also clear differences between the NGDO communities, which can serve as possible explanations as to why the Czech Republic's international development policy can be seen as more developed than Hungary's.

The remainder of this paper explores these differences in order to show (1) that there is evidence of NGDO influence on development policies in the Czech case, and lack of it in the Hungarian one; and (2) to identify the key conditions which have led to this situation. There has been little systematic research in the wider literature on what the conditions for CSO influence are in the ECE countries post-accession. While some research has been carried out in areas like environmental issues (see Carmin and Fagan, 2010), these results may not be transferable to international development, which

is part of foreign policy. Rather than adapting a theoretical framework developed for other fields which may not be appropriate, the paper opts for an inductive approach and examines three broad areas in the two countries: characteristics of the NGDO platforms, the wider NGDO community and public support for aid, and government attitudes towards NGDOs.

4. Different levels of influence

4.1. NGDO platforms

As it is the NGDO platforms which play a key role in engaging the government in both countries, we first compare the advocacy activities and capacities of FoRS and HAND.

FoRS, founded in 2002, had 37 full member organisations and 10 observer organisations in 2010, including both big and small organizations,[3] most importantly PiN, the Adventist Agency for Relief and Development (ADRA) and Caritas, the three biggest NGDOs in the Czech Republic. This structure increases the legitimacy of the platform, because FoRS is used as the single advocacy body for the sector, and large NGDOs have made it clear that they will not bypass it.[4] A relatively large number of fee paying members, including the largest NGDOs means that FoRS is rather healthy from a financial perspective and can maintain a permanent staff of 5 people, including a full time policy officer whose main duty is to engage the MFA on policy issues, and support such efforts of the chairman and the board members. FoRS also actively pursues grant funding, mainly from international sources. There has been a steady increase in FoRS's income from membership fees in the past years, meaning that it can rely less on grant funding,[5] and that its growing capacities are not results of MFA support.

FoRS was one of the key drivers of the Czech development policy reform process between 2007 and 2011. An early CONCORD AidWatch Report (CONCORD 2007) shows that FoRS was pushing for the centralizing of resources, the creation of an agency, making poverty reduction a goal of Czech aid, increasing the share of Sub-Saharan African and LDCs in aid allocation, and increasing transparency. After the transformation, the reports published by FoRS have changed their tone, giving the impression that the platform is generally satisfied with the new system, and focusing on more minor technical issues as opposed to policy level criticism. The 2012 FoRS AidWatch Report (FoRS 2012) praises the increasing transparency and effectiveness of the system, welcomes many initiatives of the MFA like launching a systematic evaluation program, and mainly calls for 'fine-tuning'. Many other requests of FoRS have also been met by the MFA. For example, it recommends that the CzDA publish indicative lists of future grant calls, an issue the agency has since promised to do.[6] FoRS also pushes for expanding Czech field presence in partner countries – something the CzDA is lobbying for

as well. In 2012, the MFA set-up a co-financing scheme for NGDOs applying for EU development resources, which was another long-standing demand of FoRS.

There is therefore clear correlation between the advocacy demands of FoRS, its growing capacities, and the reforms the MFA subsequently implemented. Interviews suggest that the fact that FoRS has effectively lobbied the MFA with demonstrable results has increased its acceptance amongst the NGDO community.[7] As stated by a FoRS official:

> The members value the support we give them and see it as a cheap way of getting their voices heard […] Of course Czech NGDOs are diverse, coordination has its limits and it's not possible to have unified opinions on everything, but I think we manage well.[8]

The Hungarian NGDO platform, HAND, created in 2003, had 17 member organisations in 2012, up from the 12 original founders (Selmeczi, 2013). A striking difference when compared to FoRS however is that neither of the two most significant Hungarian NGDOs, Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA) and Hungarian Baptist Aid (HBA) are members of HAND. HBA never joined HAND, and while HIA was a main driver behind HAND for several years, it left the organization in 2010.[9] The main reason why HIA left HAND was that it felt it's not getting enough for its membership fees and could be more effective engaging the MFA itself.[10] The only big NGDO which still remains as a member of HAND is the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, which is the largest domestic relief and social care NGO, but has little international development activities. Besides HAND, there is a second, more specialist NGDO platform created in 2008, the Hungarian Africa Platform, with slightly overlapping membership. A recent mapping exercise carried out on the Hungarian NGDO sector (Selmeczi, 2013) revealed that there are around 60 organizations in total doing some form of international development-related work, thus it is difficult to argue that HAND is representative of the sector.

This structure has an impact on HAND's finances: for much of its existence, the platform has been working with at most two permanent staff members. This has been exacerbated by the post-2008 crisis, with many members not being able to pay their membership fees at all. [11] As the MFA does not finance HAND at all, it relies mainly on international project grants to stay alive, but it is difficult to cover regular operating expenses from these. HAND therefore has little capacities to support the advocacy work of its board members.

The AidWatch Reports published by HAND show an unresponsive MFA. The reports are much more critical than what can be observed in the Czech case (both in the pre and post transformation eras) and formulate a large number of demands towards the MFA, both policy related and technical ones. The first AidWatch Report in 2007 (Kiss, 2007) grouped these into 12 points, including issues like

increasing aid; creating an aid strategy and formal legislation to guide how the money is spent; increasing the transparency of data and reporting; reducing the number of recipient countries; and strengthening the coordinating role of the MFA. The 2012 report (Hódosi, 2012) reiterated these issues noting that there has hardly been progress on any of them.

A key difference between the capacities for advocacy of FoRS and HAND seems to lie in their composition: FoRS represents the Czech NGDO sector well and is relatively strong financially. HAND's weakness reflects the divided nature of the Hungarian NGDO sector, and to some extent the impact of the economic crisis.

4.2. NGDO communities, access to financing, and public opinion

Concerning capacities of individual NGDOs, the ones from the Czech Republic seem stronger. PIN, the largest Czech NGDO was more than twice as large as the biggest Hungarian, HIA, in terms of its balance sheet in 2010. In Hungary, beyond the three large faith based NGDOs, only 4-5 smaller ones have meaningful activities abroad, the others are mainly involved in development education (Selmeczi, 2013: 13), while in the Czech Republic there are almost two dozen NGDOs which are regularly active abroad.[12] We investigate two reasons for these differences: the abilities of NGDOs to access external financing, and public support for international development.

As mentioned, EU accession has opened the possibility for ECE NGDOs to apply for grant financing, and after 2007 the EC has even 'ring fenced' a certain portion of its funds in the EU budget for national awareness raising and development education projects of these NGDOs. NGDO participation in EC grants however is low for both countries, but the Czech NGDO community seems to do better. Although there is no data on the number of Czech and Hungarian grant applications, or on how many NGDOs apply as partners in consortia, the EC's Grant Beneficiaries Database[13] does reveal the identity of the lead partner in successful grant applications. While this proxy definitely underestimates ECE NGDO participation, the result is telling: between 2007 and 2011 50 grants were approved for NGDOs from the Czech Republic and Hungary (see Figure 2, which also includes data for Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia for comparison), as opposed to the total number of 11,135 grants awarded for applicants from all countries during the five year period. Out of the 50 grants, 34 were won by Czech NGDOs, and 16 by Hungarians. With similar levels of population, and assuming that the number of grants awarded per country correlates with the number of proposals submitted, this clearly marks Czech NGDOs as more successful in accessing EU funds.[14]

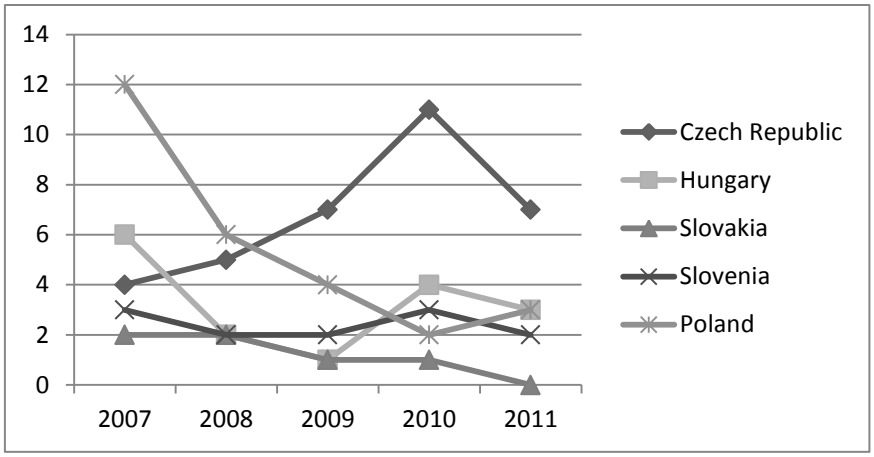

Figure 2. Number of EU-financed external assistance grants won by NGDO lead partners from selected ECE countries

Source: EC Grant Beneficiaries Database and Zázvorková (2011)

NGDOs in both countries usually blame low levels of public awareness for their inabilities to raise funds from donations, although Czech NGDOs have noted that the private donations they receive, while still not substantial, are increasing.[15] The only sources of comparable public opinion surveys on development aid are the Special Eurobarometer Surveys published by the European Commission. Between 2005 and 2013, seven such surveys were published. The key question of interest asked in these surveys related to how important respondents think it is to help people in poor countries to develop. Six out of the seven reports show that the proportion of respondents in the Czech Republic who think helping the poor is very important or fairly important is considerably higher than in Hungary. In 2005 for example, 86% of Czech respondents said that development aid is important or fairly important as opposed to 73% from Hungary (Eurobarometer, 2005, p. 26).This implies that Czech NGDOs may have had a larger societal base to rely upon both in terms of raising funds and also showing their legitimacy towards the government. This notion is reinforced by interviews. According to a senior manager from a large Czech NGDO:

> There is generally a positive perception of NGOs in Czech Society […], and a feeling that it is good to help other. Increase in public support is visible, and donations have grown dramatically for many organizations, although they are still small.[16]

As for the reasons of this growing support, another NGDO representative argued that:

> [Czech people] are better off and wealthier. They like to travel and are excited about seeing exotic places […]. This also means that they come into contact with developing countries and experience poverty […]. They want to do something meaningful.[17]

Hungarian NGDO experts interviewed however seemed much gloomier on the prospects of raising grassroots funding in cases other than high profile humanitarian catastrophes. This statement from an NGDO interviewee sums it up well: 'We have tried, but it cost more than what we could raise'. [18]

Differences in access to EU financing and public opinion can explain why the Czech NGDO sector, and thus also the NGDO platform has stronger capacities and is better placed for advocacy than its Hungarian counterpart. There are some indications that this correlation also means a casual relationship of NGDO influence on the government: the capacities of FoRS seem to have developed independently of government support, and FoRS has lobbied for the exact same reforms which the government subsequently implemented. FoRS can rely on a strong NGDO sector and supportive public opinion. HAND's low capacities are also due to factors which the government did not directly influence (divided NGDO sector, relatively low public support for development, and a lower ability of NGDOs to attract EU funding). In the following section we discuss government attitudes towards NGDOs in the two countries and include some clear examples which reinforce this casual interpretation.

4.3. Government attitudes towards NGDOs

The differences in capacities between the two platforms, as well as the NGDO sectors they represent hint at the fact that FoRS is *likely* to be more influential than HAND. Indeed, the Czech development cooperation system seems to be much more aligned with the demands of the FoRS and the MFA and CzDA have done many small favours and gestures towards NGDOs than in the Hungarian case. But the issue of causality remains: are Czech NGDOs influential because they have better capacities, or are they stronger because the government supports them and meets their needs? Most likely both casual channels are at work, and they are difficult to untangle. None the less, one can find evidence of NGDO influence on the government when looking at government attitudes towards NGDOs and examining interactions between them.

Both MFA's have officially acknowledged the respective NGDO platforms as partners, and have given them positions in formal consultative bodies and regularly consult with them outside of these on policy matters (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015). The relations between FoRS and the MFA were described as cooperative by both sides. NGDOs evaluated it as 'good and stable', with the MFA being

'supportive of NGDO ideas',[19] and open to discuss all issues.[20] Interviewees from the Czech MFA were, as could be expected, highly diplomatic when commenting on their relationship with the platform. Officials maintained that they take the 'views of the sector seriously' and 'value it'.[21] According them, FoRS is very vocal, but generally supportive of the MFA.[22] An interviewee from the CzDA argued that they have instituted many changes due to advocacy from Czech NGDOs.[23] The MFA seems to have developed a close partnership with FoRS, something acknowledged by an OECD DAC Special Review of Czech foreign aid policy in 2007 (OECD, 2007), and instead of viewing consultation with the platform as burdensome, it uses FoRS to enhance its own legitimacy.[24] There seems to be recognition that FoRS is a natural ally of the MFA as opposed to other branches of government, an issue which was clearly shown during the 2007-2011 reform of Czech international development policy. Looking at the reform process in detail also shows the influence of Czech NGDOs on development policy making.

As the reform involved a centralization of the Czech aid budget to the MFA, it was understandably opposed many line ministries, including the Ministry of Finance. It is remarkable that the reform went through in face of such strong political opposition, and FoRS played a key role. FoRS had been lobbying for a more centralized system well before the reform on the grounds that it would greatly increase the effectiveness of Czech aid. Several interviewees agree that Šimon Pánek, the well-connected director of PiN and chairman of FoRS at the time was instrumental in convincing the MFA and top politicians to go forward with the transformation.[25] Being a student activist during the Velvet Revolution, and thus having personal ties to many politicians (Vaughan 2006), Pánek had achieved widespread recognition through his work with PiN. As the chairman of FoRS he was able to rely on the advocacy capacities of the platform, which was actively involved during the preparation of the reform. Key arguments used for convincing top level politicians on the necessity of reform were high Czech public support for development, and the successes abroad of the Czech NGDO sector, which, coupled with a more effective state policy, would boost the international reputation and prestige of the country. This later argument seems to have resonated well with the government, as evidenced by a speech of Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek arguing for the reform of Czech foreign aid (Topolánek 2006). Ultimately, this strategy proved successful, and several NGDO sources argue that the reform would not have happened without their advocacy. This close relationship between FoRS and the MFA/CzDA seems to work well in a sense that the NGDO community gets what it wants, but the support of FoRS also strengthens the position of the MFA within government.[26] This symbiotic relationship means that FoRS may be exercising some form of self-censorship in order to maintain its influential status. This issue was mostly denied in interviews, although some experts did

acknowledge the fact that Czech NGDOs have become 'politically savvy' and know when to criticize and when to step back.[27]

In terms of rhetoric from the government and the NGDO sector, we can observe rather similar statements from Hungary as in the Czech Republic. HAND perceives its relationship with the MFA as 'normal', and values the MFA's open door policy,[28] and MFA diplomats have also talked about a good relationship.[29] However, the two large non-HAND member NGDOs also seem to have a special relationship with the MFA, as the ministry regularly asks for their opinions.[30] While the issues that HAND lobbies for are rather transparent due to publications like the AidWatch Reports, no one really knows what HIA and HBA does, although the MFA maintains that they do not engage in policy related advocacy.[31] HIA and HBA are often directly asked by the MFA to implement (mainly humanitarian) projects without any open tenders. The MFA argues that the two organizations are the only ones capable of such tasks, which is most likely true. As one MFA official noted:

> Sure, we talk and consult with HAND. But the Ecumenicals and the Baptists [ie HIA and HBB] are the ones who can actually get things done.[32]

It seems that the independence of the two large NGDOs has rendered HAND irrelevant for the MFA to some degree, and they feel they can bypass the platform. The MFA, while stating that it involves HAND in consultations on policy, does not always do this in a meaningful way: for example, HAND is routinely given very short deadlines (often less than a week) to comment on drafts.

There have also been several instances of tension between the MFA and HAND in the past years, which reinforce notions of a more problematic relationship. One recurring theme is related to accessing data. Hungarian foreign aid is one of the least transparent in the world (Publish What You Fund 2013), and according to HAND, getting data from the MFA for AidWatch reports is always difficult. In 2007, HAND turned to the Ombudsman for Data Protection to force the MFA to provide necessary data for the report.[33] There were severe delays in publishing the 2011 report, with HAND blaming the MFA for not providing the data on time, and the MFA maintaining that they did provide all data and HAND was unable to analyse it in time. The 2011 report even notes it in its text that the MFA did not provide data (Kiss, 2011, p. 6). All these issues point to a less than fully cooperative relationship, although, to be fair, HAND officials have noted that the MFA itself is facing difficulties in getting data from the other line ministries. This however is contradicted by the fact that in the MFA's annual reports on international development, aid spent by the MFA itself is actually reported in a much less transparent way than the spending of the other ministries (see for example Hungarian MFA 2012).

In 2010 the MFA's international development budget was halved (Kiss, 2011, p. 32), which meant that it was unable to publish calls for proposals for the NGDOs, nor support co-financing for EU grants. Even though the MFA aid budget is only a small part of Hungary's total foreign aid spending, this can be seen as a disproportionately large cut even amidst government austerity due to the crisis, once again showing the low priority assigned to international development by the government. The Czech government made a clear promise not to cut the bilateral aid budget, and more or less stuck to this until 2013.

The difficult relationship between HAND and the MFA was also shown by the case of Hungary's international development cooperation strategy paper. As mentioned, HAND has been lobbying the MFA to create such a strategy since 2007, but this has led to no results.[34] HAND tried a different strategy by approaching Members of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and took interested MPs on awareness raising trips to Africa. By socializing MPs this way, HAND was able to increase their interest in the topic. In early 2013, these MPs pushed a resolution through Parliament which mandated the MFA to create an international development strategy. HAND therefore successfully circumvented the unwilling government and went straight to the legislature to get what it wanted.

Much of the tensions between the MFA and HAND clearly predate Hungary's current right-wing government led by Viktor Orban, which has shown a strong distrust towards civil society, especially CSOs critical of the government. It is somewhat paradoxical, that many NGDO interviewees have actually noted that relationships with the MFA have improved much since Orban came to power in 2010. This however may have more to do with personnel changes at the MFA, with a younger generation more open to involving civil society in decision making taking the place of older career diplomats. The general government attitudes towards civil society however have gotten more hostile after 2010, which does not bode well for increasing the influence of HAND in the future.

5. Conclusions

The paper examined the role played by international development and humanitarian NGOs in the making of international development policy in a comparative case study of the Czech Republic and Hungary. Czech international development policy had undergone a spectacular reform process which reflects the demands of the NGDO sector and the country is now seen as the leader among the 'new EU donors'. Hungarian foreign aid policy however has been stagnating until recently, with very little visible changes happening, despite clear demands for reform advocated by the NGDO community. Advocacy by NGDOs may be one factor which can explain reform. While the effect NGDOs have had

on development policy is difficult to entangle from other factors of influence, there is clear casual evidence of their influence in the case of the Czech Republic, and the lack of it in Hungary.

The main issue the paper aimed at investigating is what factors made Czech NGDOs more influential than their Hungarian counterparts. As there has been very little research to date on NGDOs in the ECE states, the analysis in the paper opted for an inductive approach, and instead of adopting a potentially misleading theoretical framework developed for another sector, it was guided by empirical facts. Based on this approach, four theoretical conclusions emerge which can explain the relative success of Czech NGDOs as opposed to Hungarian ones:

1. *Issues of collective action matter*. Czech NGDOs have managed to overcome the problem of collective action and have been generally able to present a unified front towards the MFA through their advocacy platform FoRS. The Hungarian NGDO community however remains fragmented, with the main platform, HAND, being unrepresentative of the sector and large organisations unwilling to pay the costs of joint advocacy.
2. *Better capacities*. Czech NGDOs, and the NGDO platform, have developed relatively stronger capacities than their Hungarian counterparts, which can be explained by the fact that the sector is unified and able to finance the platform, and the better performance of Czech NGDOs in obtaining EU grants. One may argue that these capacities developed relatively independently from government support to the sector.
3. *Stronger public support and legitimacy*. The Czech public seems more open to supporting poverty reduction in developing countries, and is also more affluent to provide donations to NGDOs. This not only strengthens the NGDO sector financially, but also gives their demands stronger legitimacy and sensitizes the government.
4. *Government receptiveness*. The Czech MFA clearly realized that NGDOs are its natural allies when it comes to getting its interests through in government politics, and have developed a close partnership. The relationship between the Hungarian MFA and HAND however has been much more confrontational.

These factors actually resonate rather well with the conclusions of the wider literature on the determinants of CSO influence. The quantity of aid is directly related to the ability of the domestic development community to mobilize resources (see Lister and Carbone, 2006). The existence of a strong and relatively unified development constituency, like that in the UK, is also important in keeping development issues on the political agenda and this constituency can also be an important political ally for those elements of government with an interest in development. Indeed the literature acknowledges that the interests of the NGOs and those of the government can converge (Johansson,

et al. 2010). The findings also underline the importance of the domestic context when evaluating the effects of EU membership in different countries. While NGDOs in both countries have benefitted from similar effects of EU accession, the paper has argued that different domestic circumstances have led to the observed differential empowerment.

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[1] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 01/02/2013.

[2] Interviews with an experts from a Czech NGDO and CONCORD, 04/02/2013 and 23/01/2013.

[3] Interview with a FoRS board member, 07/03/2013.

[4] Interview with a FoRS board member, 07/03/2013, and a Czech NGDO expert, 04/02/2013.

[5] Interview with a Czech NGDO expert, 08/03/2013.

[6] Interview with a CzDA official, 15/02/2013.

[7] Interview with a Czech NGDO expert, 07/03/2013.

[8] Interview with a FoRS representative, 08/03/2013.

[9] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 05/11/2012.

[10] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 05/11/2012.

[11] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 06/02/2013.

[12] Interview with a FoRS representative, 08/03/2013.

[13] The database is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/funding/beneficiaries/index.cfm?lang=en.

[14] While the EC is the most important international source of financing for NGDOs in ECE, other sources, such as the UN system, may also play a role. However, it has not been possible to obtain comparable data on Czech and Hungarian participation from these sources

[15] Interview with a FoRS board member, 07/03/2013.

[16] Interview with a Czech NGDO expert, 04/02/2013.

[17] Interview with a Czech NGDO expert, 08/03/2013.

[18] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 01/02/2013.

[19] Interview with a Czech NGDO expert, 04/02/2013.

[20] Interview with a FoRS board member, 07/03/2013.

[21] Interview with a Czech MFA official, 07/03/2013.

[22] Interview with a Czech MFA official, 07/03/2013.

[23] Interview with a CzDA official, 21/04/2012.

[24] Interview with a FoRS representative, 08/03/2013.

[25] Interview with Czech NGDO experts, 07/03/2013 and 17/10/2013.

[26] In her analysis of Slovenian NGDOs, Bučar (2012: 85) characterizes this relationship as 'allies' in the 'promotion of the topic for their mutual benefit'.

[27] Interview with a FoRS board member, 07/03/2013.

[28] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 06/02/2013.

[29] Interview with a Hungarian MFA official, 24/04/2013.

[30] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 01/02/2013.

[31] Interview with a Hungarian MFA official, 24/04/2013.

[32] Interview with a Hungarian MFA official, 25/11/2012.

[33] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 06/02/2013.

[34] Interview with a Hungarian NGDO expert, 05/08/2013.

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