



ALDE-seminar on the Challenge of Development Policy for NMS

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Dear Mrs Budreikaite and Mr Savi, Dear Members of the ALDE Group,

First, let me thank you for the invitation that you addressed to our confederation.

As Board member of CONCORD and representative of the Hungarian Platform **HAND**, it is my pleasure to take this opportunity to share some ideas with your political group on the challenges that NGOs from New Member States face.

CONCORD is a confederation of European NGOs for relief and development at European level. Its 22 national associations and 18 international networks represent over 1600 NGOs that are supported by millions of European Citizens. CONCORD leads reflection and political actions and regularly engages in dialogue with the European institutions and other civil society organisations. CONCORD is part of the Global Call to Action against Poverty.

CONCORD currently brings together NGO platforms from 22 EU member states and hopefully soon from all 27 countries. We engage in joint advocacy and lobby work, like for the AidWatch report - as quoted in the Budreikaite report. As well as creating networking opportunities, we think it is vitally important to share knowledge within our sector.

With regards to New Member States, CONCORD works closely with **TRIALOG**, which is a project that was created in 2000 to build capacities and strengthen national platforms in the NMS and Accession Countries and to support their active participation in CONCORD and other European networks.

DEEEP is a project of CONCORD that aims at capacity building, coordination and increasing political support for awareness raising and development education in Europe.

Last but not least, CONCORD, TRIALOG and DEEEP have a large constituency and get the support of millions of EU citizens.

As this graph of the latest Eurobarometer on climate change shows, 68% of European citizens thought 'poverty, lack of food and drinking water' was the greatest problem facing the world.

Even more encouraging for a development worker I see that in the 2007 responses 10% of European citizens spontaneously stated that aid should be given *because it helps people in need*, affirming their solidarity with the developing world.

Before giving you some information that comes directly from our members, I would like to mention the CONCORD "election manifesto", which is available from the CONCORD secretariat and will be officially launched at the end of November.

CONCORD believes that, as a group of civil society organisations, it is our responsibility to mobilise our constituencies, the media and the candidates to discuss, debate and raise awareness about the future of the EU, the EU's responsibility in the world and to show how internal policies are also having an impact on the rest of the world.

We do hope there will be a specific dialogue with the ALDE Group on the EU elections and the main challenges for external and development policies. CONCORD looks forward to creating opportunities to meet and discuss about that in the coming months.

CONCORD supports the main conclusions of the Budreikaite report on new member states.

Today I will address 4 main challenges facing NMS. One of the biggest challenges is posed by the limited capacity of CSOs and governmental structures to fully engage with development issues.

a) Capacity building

Capacity building is required at many levels, and in different kinds of institutions and organisations. We need a better basis for policy work, engaging at national and European levels in current development issues. In the NMS we need help to develop successful advocacy actions, that move the development agenda forward in the right direction.

Limited capacity is not restricted to those already working directly with development issues however. Increasing numbers of young, well-educated people in NMS are interested in volunteering opportunities in developing countries but because the inability of development agencies to support such activities, they are forced to go to foreign agencies.

b) Awareness raising and development education

As Mrs. Budreikaite's reports shows very clearly, citizen awareness on development issues and public support for international cooperation are main challenges for development policies - not only, but particularly in the new member states. According to a 2007 Eurobarometer poll, 80% of the Europeans have never heard of the Millenium Development Goals. Among the 12 EU countries with the lowest rates of awareness on the MDGs, nine are new member states. Civil society organisations however are the right actors to mobilise and educate citizens for international solidarity, through campaigning, formal and non-formal education and advocacy. In several new member states like Poland, Latvia and Slovenia, the creation of a national development education strategy, together with state ministries as ministry of foreign affairs and ministry of education, has been initiated through CSO initiatives. Such national strategies are key factors to mainstream awareness on global issues in a society, for example through the integration of a global dimension in school curricula.

However, there is still a long way to go to mobilise citizens in NMS for development issues, and we also need you to make national politicians aware of this.

c) Limited national development budgets in the New Member States

NMS all have reduced ODA targets, but despite this they are unlikely to meet them in time. As well as the amount of money allocated to development cooperation, aspects of aid *quality* are cause for concern. In addition to the limited institutional capacity, which I already mentioned, NMS development policies do not all focus on poverty reduction as a main aim, instead taking politically motivated, commercial and security interests into account. The lack of transparency is another problem, as is the tendency to include such non-aid items as debt relief, student scholarships and refugee costs in ODA amounts. Development cooperation is generally given a relatively low priority, and last but not least, gender issues are not taken into consideration.

d) Funding for CSOs and National Platforms

For many development CSOs in NMS, the diversification of funding sources is absolutely crucial to support their work and ensure their survival. Financial contributions from several NMS government are at such a low level, both in terms of project funding and providing co-funding, that it hinders the ability of CSOs to develop. EU funding remains out of the reach of such organisations because of the bureaucratic process and large sums of money involved. The inability of the non-governmental sector to secure a sustainable financial base creates difficulties not only in their daily work, but also for their long term strategies.

This does not just affect individual organisations. Being involved in the Hungarian platform, and as I have regular discussions with those from the platforms of other NMS, I would like to cover the situation of the national platforms. They experience great difficulty finding resources for their operations as overhead costs cannot always be linked to project implementation. Since the "raison d'être" of a

national development cooperation platform is not always understood by NMS' governments, it is a constant struggle to get the necessary financial resources.

A few years ago, TRIALOG and CONCORD succeeded in getting €10 million extra budget for development education and awareness raising projects in NMS. In order to ensure the money could be absorbed, TRIALOG organised a partnership fair, which brought together 200 organisations from old and new MS to develop joint projects. All but one of the NMS projects funded under the call originated in the partnership fair. Such actions are vital to support the full absorption of such funds as is clear from the statistics from the latest call for proposals, which did not have such a sum allocated to NMS and sadly saw a very low level of success for NMS organisations.

CONCORD recently tried to evaluate the levels of funding available for civil society from development aid. **The lack of transparent information on aid to civil society** (and other development actors) made this exercise quite complicated.

It appears that civil society organisations are not alone in finding financial regulatory processes at times cumbersome and frequently disproportionate to the resources being delivered. We believe that administrative burden on the European Commission and its implementing partners is not always cost effective in delivering the desired results and impact in the field.

As you know, CSOs are important development actors in their own right and key contributors to vibrant democratic societies and more participatory decision-making processes. In order for CSOs to play the fullest role they can, they require support and strong political will behind their work.

You are able to provide some of the support and political will to strengthen the role of CSOs in NMS.

Projects and initiatives supporting the capacity building of development actors in NMS are vital and need your support.

Giving opportunities for NMS to benefit from funds through weaker eligibility criteria and funding directed specifically at them can result in valuable partnerships and successful projects. Your support could ensure these kinds of opportunities continue.

Supporting transparent calls for proposals at the national level in NMS for development projects and encouraging governments to include CSOs not just in the implementation of ODA, but in the development of policy and programming benefit all involved.

CSOs have a particularly important role to play in awareness raising and development education, as they are among the few actors working in this field, and as there is a special need for awareness raising in the new member states, as the EP resolution pointed out clearly.

We in NMS have progressed a lot in the last few years but we still have a long way to go. It would be too much to expect our countries to develop within a few years to a position that took older member states 50 years to achieve. There is the will, but we still need your support.

Thank you.