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Expert Seminar “The Future of Civil Society Development Organisations (CSOs)” November 10-11, 2009

Minutes of the keynote speech by

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The actual role of European CSOs in development cooperation

Many challenges which NGOs face now are not new. NGOs are not automatically perceived as “good”. They need to prove their effectiveness; new mechanisms by the EU push NGOs to look thoroughly at their work. The financial constraints are not only resulting from the crisis, but it is a fact that they create serious competition.

Particularly on European level, there is a renewed discussion on the definition of CSOs: what is a CSO? What is the source of your funds? how much is the percentage of your independence looking at your funding? And similar questions.

The situation which development CSOs face is a paradigm shift in development cooperation. The majority of EU member states have centre-right governments now, which will impact a lot on the development policies and the development budgets. Also at the European level, the new Barroso-Commission will be dominated by centre-right politicians. This new context is a serious change; in connection with the crisis it creates new pressure on the development budgets and pressure on governments to justify their development cooperation expenses.

Another point is that a lot of objectives are added to development cooperation; it is not just about poverty eradication, there are new parameters such as e.g. climate change. We can see first signs of shifts in institutional frameworks, e.g. Germany tries to incorporate its development cooperation service into the foreign affairs agenda.

The Lisbon treaty will come into force and bring simplification of development cooperation. In the new structure, it needs to be looked at very closely, how development cooperation is justified. The Lisbon treaty foresees an European External Action Service (EEAS). It aims at more policy coherence and the EU speaking with one voice, but the Lisbon treaty does not define where development cooperation is placed in this new European External Action and how much policy coherence for DEVELOPMENT it will imply. What will happen if security, defence and diplomacy are put together with development cooperation within one service?

To look at this shift, is the actual task for European development CSOs at the moment. It could put the development budget in danger, which is quite pressed already with all

objectives and constraints attached to it. The question is what are the objectives of foreign affairs and what are the objectives of development cooperation in the EU and on the national government level. What happens when you put all together into one policy field? The aim of overall poverty eradication gets into conflict with external relations and diplomacy which aim at promoting the EU outside the borders.

The Lisbon treaty does not only affect the institutional system within the EU, it will also affect the project work in the field and with the EC delegations. The new principle of labour division will lead to a very different dialogue in the field.

Timetable:

November 3, 2009: Signature of the Czech president

December 1, 2009: Lisbon treaty to come into force

It is not known yet which person will become the Development Commissioner and whether he/she will have the portfolio for policy AND for implementation. It might be that the High Representative will have co-signature rights. The European External Action Service (EEAS) will be under the authority of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It is quite unsure what position development cooperation will have within the EEAS. The EEAS will become fully operational by 2012, it has an agenda for 4 years.

Within the EEAS, conflicts of interest are to be expected also due to the new personnel. Personnel will not only be appointed from the EC, but also from the Council and delegated by Member States. The question is who and what will guide the policy of the personnel which has to deal with a broad range of different issues; interests might be quite different among the personnel.

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