

Development cooperation and development education in Baltic countries, main challenges

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By declaring independence in 1991 and being accepted by international community, the three Baltic countries at the same assumed responsibilities for development of world poorest countries and global education of their own citizens. It is true that immediately after the declaration of independence, the Baltic countries encountered serious challenges, political, economic and social obstacles. But at the same time, they got unselfish and enduring aid from many foreign governments and international organizations.

In 1992, the most challenging years of transition, the Constitution of the new State was drafted assuming provisions, that “in implementing its foreign policy, the Republic of Lithuania ... shall contribute to the creation of the international order based on law and justice” (Article 135). In 1993 adopted Law on Charity and Sponsorship¹. Within the meaning of this Law, the purpose of international cooperation has been mentioned as the first presumed to be for the public benefit (Art. 3.3). Becoming members of the EU, Baltic countries have committed to strive to increase the official development assistance by 0.17% of its GNI by 2010 and by 0.33% by 2015. The 2011 Human Development Report ranks all three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, among countries with very high human development.

The political declarations mask the reality. Since Baltic countries reached their strategic goals - accession to the EU and NATO - in 2004, respect for international commitments, universal Human Rights and public support for development assistance has been declining steadily. Baltic countries encounter difficulties to integrate national [Polish and Russian] minorities [living there for ages] and to ensure

1 http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=253980

their right to public use of native tongue. Gay and lesbian rights are not based on human rights, but rather on international organisations and foreign countries governments pressure. The total ODA of the Republic of Lithuania in 2010 was 28.2 mln. Euros or 0,1% of its GNI. That constitutes only a bit more than half of 2005 commitments. Genuine ODA is decreasing in the past three years. Bilateral aid policy of Baltic countries is limited to regional cooperation with former Soviet Union countries with similar history and approximate level of human development. Bilateral aid budget of the Republic of Latvia in 2011 is 400 (four hundred) Euros.

In accordance with the Law on charity and sponsorship, the recipients of sponsorship may be Lithuanian communities abroad, other Lithuanian bodies or organisations as well as international charitable organisations indicated in the list approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (Art. 7.3.). Within the meaning of this Law, non international and local NGOs of non-Lithuanian origin (in developing partner countries) are not recognised as legitimate sponsorship recipients. The inadequacy of legislative framework and lack of national aid co-operation programs and funding hinders NGOs and allows them to implement only short term projects and small scale activities, which in turn has led Baltic countries to compromise their partnership commitments to countries who are on priority list and need assistance. Meanwhile, businesses prioritize making a profit over development purpose.

The internal quality assessment of development cooperation and global education in Baltic countries is not based on international standards such as media publications and published journal articles in international peer-reviewed literature. In response to challenge of emigration Lithuanian Government initiated the Program "Global Lithuania"² with emphasis on Lithuanian ethnicity building, support for Lithuanian ethnicity and language teaching and formation of Lithuanian diaspora organisations and similar activities.

Because of this system, actors of Baltic development cooperation sector have little incentive to research international organisations recommendations and join foreign countries aid organisations programs. Many NGOs lack the cooperation skills necessary to do internationally competitive development work and teaching. Talented workers with wider perspective are forced to realise their aspirations and potential in foreign development agencies, and as a result, there is a deficit of qualified staff.

2 <http://www.urm.lt/index.php?1026373345>

This socio-institutional recession in the development cooperation system is a result of incompetent governance at all levels - including ambiguous foreign policy guidances on Lithuania's role in processes of globalisation, inefficient budget spending, lack of knowledge and specific information and absence of independent external evaluation - and the still dominant Cold War mentality among the population, which places more value on a competition between the peoples than on public support for development cooperation and substantive changes in long term partnership and important in daily life of poor people in developing countries.

Renewal of the development cooperation system should focus on the quality of development assistance and global education programs and projects rather than misleading mono ethnic policy guidelines. This can be achieved by integrating independent evaluations of both public sector and non-governmental development organisations into the system, and by providing strong organisations with incentives to implement long term development assistance and global education projects, and to cultivate quality works and teaching that live up to international standards.

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