

# The Europeanisation of Slovak Development Cooperation?<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the Europeanisation of Slovak development cooperation. Development policy is an under-studied area within the Europeanisation literature but it provides an interesting case study as to how one new member state is taking on board the EU acquis in a crucial but marginalised field. It shows that overall Slovakia has made a successful transition from being a recipient of aid to donor and that organisations such as the UNDP and the OECD aided this transition. Overall, it concludes that the need to conform to both the financial, political and institutional demands of the acquis were a major driving force behind the re-emergence of Slovakia as a donor.*

**Keywords:** *Europeanisation, Slovak Development Cooperation, EU Development Acquis, New Donors, EU Enlargement*

## Introduction

The 2004 enlargement of the European Union (EU) has prompted a wave of books and articles examining the way in which the accession process shaped the behaviour of the new member states (see Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2006 for an overview). *It is argued that enlargement research will benefit from more research in under-researched areas, such as substantive policies* (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2006: 116). Development cooperation policy is an interesting policy area to study,

as it is identified as a key policy area for the EU and therefore new member state had to take on board the *acquis* in full. Despite this it is an under-studied area within the literature of Europeanisation. In part this reflects the fact that as a policy area, despite its key status, development policy is not a deal breaker. However, because of this, it offers interesting insights into the accession process (see Carbone 2004). This paper examines to what extent new member states have embraced the spirit as well as the letter of the *acquis*. What factors hinder new member states from taking on board the *acquis* in this field more fully? This article contributes to our knowledge by exploring the extent to which Slovak Development Cooperation has been Europeanised.

This leads us to the next question-why Slovakia? This process of Europeanisation has been seen to have had positive benefits in Slovakia (Harris 2004; Vachudova 2005). Slovakia has enthusiastically engaged with various elements of EU membership (Haughton and Malova 2007). In 2009 it became the first state from the new members to adopt the Euro so it clearly has taken on board the *acquis* in full in this policy area. In relation to development cooperation, Slovakia has experienced a remarkable process of transition. From being one of the worlds leading donors as part of Czechoslovakia, it entered a period of requiring assistance itself, but it is now re-emerging as a provider of help to developing countries (see Krichewsky 2003). To what extent has this transition been shaped by history, by other external actors or by the EU is the theme that runs through this whole paper.

The paper begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework: that of Europeanisation. It then goes on to provide context by outlining a brief history of development cooperation in Slovakia, including discussion of the role of external actors such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), etc. Substantive sections of the paper cover questions such as quantity of aid, the territorial focus of that aid (including discussion of the Three C's and public opinion), and institutional issues within the administration. It concludes by highlighting that many of the changes experienced by Slovakia in relation to development cooperation were as a result of ensuring conformity to the EU *acquis*, although we may now be seeing attempts by Slovakia to influence EU development policy-bottom up Europeanisation.

## **Europeanisation, Slovakia and the Development *acquis***

There are said to be three general approaches to the study of Europeanisation: European integration, top-down Europeanisation and bottom-up Europeanisation (Radelli 2006: 60). 'Europeanisation'-here to mean the way the EU affects institu-

tions, norms and practices inside the member states (Dimitrova 2002: 172) — has generally been understood in the case of the 2004 enlargement to mainly involve the downloading of policies due to the asymmetrical power relationship (top down Europeanisation) (Grabbe 2006: 4–5). The nature of the Copenhagen criteria, which sets down the rules of membership, involved the applicant states meeting strict criteria on political and economic development prior to accession (Vachudova 2005). *Because development policy was not considered to be a deal breaker in relation to accession (see Horky 2006) it offers an interesting case study to examine the process of Europeanisation as part of the enlargement process.* One crucial element of accession was the ability to take on the EU's *acquis* in full, including the key element that the countries develop the administrative capacity to implement the *acquis* effectively (Dimitrova 2002). *No previous enlargement had included this condition (see Dimitrova 2002: 178). However, Vachudova argues that in relation to some policy areas 'the Copenhagen criteria results in new countries only adopting superficial measures to regulate and harmonize their own behavior' (Vachudova 2005: 121). This article therefore focuses on the role of the EU in the following areas: the development of institutions for development in Slovakia and the shaping of norms and practices within these institutions rather than development cooperation on the ground. As such it examines whether the EU's conditionality in the policy field had a significant impact in Slovakia.*

As an EU Member State, Slovakia acts in compliance with the European Consensus on Development and the conclusions of the European Council and the Council of the EU addressing various aspects of the EU's development policy. The over-riding objective of the European Development Cooperation (set out in articles 177–181 TEC) is the 'fight against poverty.' The new member states had to adopt the *acquis* on relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states in full and commit to joining European Development Fund (EDF) 10. The European Consensus on Development and the Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour in Development Policy of the EU represent the most important challenges in the current debate on EU development policy. In order to provide more effective and efficient aid, the Treaty also requires the '3Cs' principle of the European development cooperation: *Complementarity* (referring to the division of labour between EU and member countries), *coordination* (consultations and exchange of information between EU and member countries) and *coherence* (ensuring that other policies performed by member states are not in contrast with development objectives). The last but not least important driver of Slovak aid is the quantitative target set by the European Council in Brussels in 2005. New member states (NMS) of the EU are required to strive to achieve a 0.17 % share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) on total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2010 and 0.33 % by 2015.

## Slovak Development Cooperation: A brief history

*Before we can examine the Europeanisation of Slovak development cooperation, it is worth briefly outlining the history of development cooperation in Slovakia.* From being one of the world's leading donors as part of Czechoslovakia, it entered a period of requiring assistance itself, but it is now re-emerging as a provider of help to developing countries (although now in different capacities). Prior to the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Slovakia (as a part of Czechoslovakia) was one of the world's most significant donors, with its share of aid in line with recommendations from the United Nations (UN) set in 1970 about providing at least 0.7 % of GDP to developing countries (Halaxa and Lebeda 1998 in Horký 2006).

However, it is inaccurate to compare contemporary aid volumes with those during socialism due to the absence of market prices and non-transparent movement of resources in that era's centrally planned economy (Brzica 2002). Moreover, motives and mechanisms of providing aid were very different at that time. Indeed, it can be argued that donorship was driven not only by solidarity but also with the purpose of influencing countries ideologically. Most of the recipients were countries that sympathised with socialistic ideas (Cuba, Vietnam, Libya, Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, etc.) and aid was often directly provided to communist or labour parties. After the breakup of communism in 1989 the continuity of aid was interrupted and all programs cancelled due to momentous political changes along with a sharp deterioration of the economic situation. The country was suddenly transformed from donor to recipient. Therefore, previous experience will only be of very limited use in the contemporary system, as new laws, policies and administrative structures needed to be created (Horký 2006).

According to Zolcerová (2006), since gaining independence in 1993 Slovakia has gone through three periods of providing development assistance: inertial, transformational and growth. During the inertial period, which lasted up to 1998, aid consisted only of scholarships, contributions to international organisations and humanitarian aid. In this period, Slovakia was rather the recipient of foreign aid, especially EU funds. The change of government in 1998 was an important event, which gave an impetus to development assistance (see Vachudova 2005 for background). This transformational period (1998–2002) saw stabilisation of the political and economic situation under the government of Dzurinda. In particular, Slovakia began setting development assistance priorities so as to be in line with the OECD Development Aid Committee recommendations and with EU development cooperation policy (Horký 2006: 1). In particular, Slovakia adopted between 1999 and 2002 a variety of basic documents, including 'Strategy of Development Aid' and 'Charter of Active Development Aid and Cooperation' (1999) and 'Mechanism of Providing Governmental Development Aid of the Slovak Republic' (2001). In these documents, in and

in particular the 2003 'Medium-Term Strategy for Official Development Assistance,' Slovakia officially undertook a commitment to participate in alleviating poverty and hunger in developing countries — a core element of the EU *acquis* (see Szep 2004).

This all meant that upon accession to the EU Slovakia had a more or less detailed development cooperation strategy that had undergone at least one revision. We can therefore see accession to the EU as the beginning of the growth period. The election of Fico to Prime Minister in 2006 saw a certain change in orientation of foreign policy in general, with the rebuilding of contacts with communist allies such as Cuba, Venezuela or Libya (see Copsey and Haughton 2009: 276). In terms of development policy there was a slight change in orientation away from perceived Slovak strengths such as providing advice through democratisation and transformation projects towards technical infrastructure projects (see Havelkova and Benakova 2008)

Overall then, development assistance is seen as '*an integral part of Slovak foreign policy*' (Charter 1999 in Weiss 2007) with an emphasis on the principle of solidarity, a fundamental value of the EU. To administer development assistance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) took on the role of the main coordinator of the ODA. The creation of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007 was an important step in the institutionalisation of development cooperation in Slovakia, as it was the first new member state to establish its own development agency. However, it took until February 2008 for the '*Act on Official Development Assistance of the Slovak Republic*'<sup>2</sup> to provide a long-term framework, particularly its bilateral component, including defining basic principles, tools, goals and forms of realising development assistance, specifying further the status and competencies of the relevant ministries and of the Development Agency (MFASR 2007).

As there were limited capacities of Slovak ODA at the time of launching bilateral aid in 2003, receiving know-how from external agencies was the first essential step in capacity building. The government opted for close cooperation with the Bratislava regional centre of UNDP. The Centre and another experienced donor, Canadian Agency for International Development (CIDA), provided assistance in building the systems and capacities of Slovak ODA. Several public awareness campaigns were co-financed by CIDA, Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and North-South Centre of the Council of Europe. 'UNDP and CIDA provided technical co-operation concerning formulation of ideas and mechanism concepts, as well as building of capacities' (Szep 2004).

However, the broad strategic objectives of Slovak development cooperation were shaped by the requirement for the EU accession, which bounded all applicant countries to the implementation of the *acquis* (Bucar and Mrak 2007). EU membership meant Slovakia had political commitments as well as financial ones. The new system has been built to be coherent with the system of the EU (Szep 2004). The over-riding

importance of the *acquis* in shaping attitudes within applicant countries is a crucial aspect of Europeanisation literature (see Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2006). The next sections focus on key elements of the *acquis*: quantity of aid, territorial focus of that aid and the institutional capacity to deliver and monitor that aid.

## Quantity of Aid

The 2003 'Medium-Term Strategy' (MTS) determined the future direction of Slovak development assistance, but perhaps more crucially prepared Slovakia for EU membership, by the recognized financial, political, legal institutional and organisational commitments of the *acquis*. One crucial element of the *acquis* was the ODA targets as development aid is seen as a moral obligation following from EU membership (MFASR 2007). Prior to accession to the EU, development aid comprised 0.024 % of the GDP in 2002, a figure that had risen to 0.072 % when Slovakia joined the EU in 2004 (MFASR 2008a). On the surface then it appears that Slovakia was well on its way to achieving the EU target, a major theme of Slovak ODA (Hulényi 2004). This, in conjunction with enhanced territorial concentration, would enable Slovakia to perform more projects in certain regions and thereby increase the effectiveness of the Slovak ODA. According to Čaučík from the Slovak NGO Platform (2008) there is still an absorption capacity for a bigger development budget. Indeed, government representatives have repeatedly declared that an increase of aid provision as a strategic goal and one of the priorities of Slovak foreign policy.

However, the rapid growth of the economy and the restrictions of Maastricht criteria for the convergence of the economy (MFSR 2007) have seen volumes remain relatively constant, however the percentage has tended to decrease gradually. Estimates for 2008 are even more pessimistic — 0.06 % of the GNI, which is only half of the figures from 2005 (NGDO Platform 2008). This stagnation is caused by rapid growth of Slovak economy<sup>3</sup> and unwillingness of government to top up resources for bilateral aid. Insufficient political will, identified by Lightfoot (2008) as one of the major obstacles also in other new states of the EU, is a partial reason for the low volumes of Slovak ODA. Limited political will is related to domestic economic factors. The rate of unemployment in Slovakia is one of the highest in Europe and economic indicators are characterised by regional disparities. The country still receives significant financial support from the EU and although loans from the World Bank have come to the end in November 2008 (World Bank 2009), many people believe that development aid to other countries should not be given before the home economic situation is properly resolved. Furthermore, it seems there is a certain feeling of satisfaction with the institutional results achieved (the creation of SAIDC, the adoption of laws etc) among government representatives. For instance, foreign affairs secretary

Mrs Algayerová indirectly justifies the low amount of financial resources committed to development assistance by pointing to these successes. Instead of explaining why Slovakia lags behind the schedule towards 2010, she explains that the country is now on the road to achieve the target in 2015. She further uses comparisons with other new EU states where Slovakia fares better than other countries in setting development mechanisms or even in terms of volumes of provided aid (SITA 2008c).

Furthermore, in the period prior to 2009 Slovakia was occupied by focus on the adoption of the Euro and therefore state expenditures had to be tightly controlled due to endeavours to meet the Maastricht criteria for the adoption of European currency. In this situation it was impossible to prioritise development assistance. Nevertheless, this obstacle has been eliminated and the new currency has been adopted in 2009. Since then the budget for bilateral aid has been increased by 2 million EUR in 2009 but the increase has not actually been tripled as promised by former foreign minister Kubis last year (SITA 2008d). The government believes that target of 0.17 % in 2010 will be met but NGOs are more sceptical about it. The president of NGDO Platform Mr Čaučík is concerned that while before there was the obstacle of adopting the Euro; the fact that we are currently in the midst of a global economic crisis may act as another excuse (SITA 2008e). There is also a concern that the role of the Ministry of Finance in ODA implementation will continue to act as an obstacle (Dacho 2007). The extremely high growth of the Slovak economy required a significant increase of development resources in order to meet the percentage target for the ODA. This explains why, despite a 14.4 % increase in ODA in 2008, Slovakia was still not on track to meet its *acquis* commitments. At the time, in order for Slovakia to fulfil its EU target, it would have meant providing twice as much aid in 2010 than it did in 2008. Thus, target of 0.17 % in 2010 looked unlikely to be met (CONCORD 2008). However, the current recession has seen GDP growth slow considerably from 10.4 % in 2007 to 2.7 % in 2009 (EC 2009). This decline in GDP does produce the ironical situation where the share of development aid as % of the budget will actually increase as a percentage of GDP! It is therefore likely that Slovak aid as a percentage of GDP will go up whilst the real money allocated goes down. This means that making sure the money is spent well is crucial. It is therefore to the question of the territorial focus of Slovak aid that the paper now turns.

## Territorial Focus

The 'Medium-Term Strategy' (MTS) also set out to synchronize Slovak legislation with that of the EU and harmonize Slovak and European development policy to ensure coherence. In terms of institutional and organisational frameworks, the Strategy stated the need to adopt the '3 Cs from Maastricht.' Slovakia is a small country

with limited financial resources. As such it is crucial it conforms in particular to the complementarity C of EU development policy. According to recommendation of the EU for territorial priorities, preference should be given to *Least Developed Countries* (LDC's) and African countries (Hulényi 2004). Most Slovak ODA comprises multilateral aid via compulsory contributions to the EU budget. In 2005, 30 % went to debt relief to Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Albania, 40 % was a contribution to the common budget of the EU, which can be counted as ODA, 21% as contributions to multilateral agencies and small programs of Slovak line ministries and only about 9 % was allocated to bilateral ODA through Slovak entities (Caucik 2007). Of the 40 % committed to the EU, a significant proportion is committed to a programme administered and implemented by the EU Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (Carbone 2008: 47). From 2011, Slovakia should begin contributions to the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF, which will increase the amount of ODA provided under a broad EU umbrella.

However, bilateral ODA is important because it is a '*direct tool of foreign politics, draws on Slovak experience, deepens relations with developing countries and effectively helps Slovak subjects to entrench in developing countries*' (MFASR 2006: 3). According to the EU Code of Conduct, the direction of the bilateral aid, whilst up to the member state, should be used to support EU priority states and areas. However, there is clearly tension between development and foreign policy goals, as explicitly expressed in SITA (2008b). How can aid be provided to countries where it is most needed if these countries are not where Slovak comparative advantages determine effectiveness?

We can see this in the recently adopted Medium-Term ODA Strategy. In the period 2009–13 there will be three programme countries: Serbia, Kenya and Afghanistan. For these countries country strategy papers will be developed. The biggest part of the bilateral aid budget for 2009 will go to Serbia (1.6 mil EUR). This figure is three times as much as given to the other two programme countries Afghanistan (0.55 mil. EUR) and Kenya (0.56 mil. EUR) (MFASR 2009). The other project countries supported by the Slovak ODA will be Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia (FYRO), Moldova, Sudan, Tajikistan, the Ukraine, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Uzbekistan. Of these project countries, the majority are strategically important countries to Slovakia. A key factor in relations between Slovakia and the project countries is the similar political and historical experience of transition from socialism. A comparative advantage is also the knowledge of the Russian language by many Slovak actors.

Serbia is expected to receive constant support in absolute financial terms. This once again highlights the tension between poverty reduction and foreign policy. The



First Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mrs Algayerová, has recently stated, 'We are firmly interested in our geopolitical space' (SITA 2008b). Indeed, it is a foreign policy constant, as 'under both the Dzurinda and Fico governments Slovakia articulated strong support for further EU enlargement, especially to the Western Balkans, partly shaped by geographical concerns, but also thanks to the perceived economic opportunities enlargement would provide' (Copsey and Haughton 2009: 280). Another reason is that Slovakia sees its expertise in the region as bringing 'added value' at the European level (Haughton and Malova 2007). The challenge for Slovakia in terms of the *acquis* is to 'combine well-focused priorities, based on their distinct expertise, with meeting their responsibilities to support development in less-developed countries' (PASOS 2007: 33). In particular, the goal of eradicating poverty is deemed paramount, as the European Consensus on Development sets out clearly. If poverty reduction and level of development is taken as a measure, Africa would be explicit priority for Slovakia. However, despite the rhetoric, poverty is unlikely to ever be the single determining factor because as Orbie and Versluys argue 'new member states tend to focus on regional security rather than poverty reduction *sensu stricto*' (2008: 87).

In relation to geographical focus, 'the European Consensus on Development provides an impetus, but does not oblige new Member States to target their development cooperation towards Africa.' East Africa, including Kenya, has been chosen as a priority region for Slovakia. Unlike some other EU members Slovakia does not have significant historical ties with African countries. This can also be seen as giving Slovakia 'added value' in that it has no historic ties that can often complicate development cooperation. 'In most countries we are not perceived as colonizers and are often very welcomed' (Interview Brussels 2007).

However, two of Slovakia's four African embassies are in East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia), so from a logistical point of view, it was a logical priority region. However, the choice raised issues of coherence and complementarity. Kenya is one of the more prosperous economies in the region and many NGOs argue that its choice as a priority country goes against the aim of eradicating poverty in ACP states, especially sub-Saharan African countries. There are many other donors involved with much higher budgets (European Commission, 'old' EU member countries, and recently China in particular). Indeed, Slovak aid has been identified as only a drop in the ocean (Mrs Algayerová in SITA 2008b), although it is clear that Slovak projects in Kenya were successful. NGOs have recently argued that the Slovakian government tends to look for a strong national involvement in development cooperation projects, which means that sometimes they may overlook the goal of the eradication of poverty, and the real needs of recipients in developing countries (Caucik 2007).

Afghanistan is a 'complicated' region because of the insecurity and permanent threat of conflict. Therefore the announcement of foreign minister Kubiš about a

potential increase of Slovak aid to Afghanistan alongside a strengthening of the Slovak military presence (SITA 2008a) was controversial. Nevertheless, Slovak presence has contributed to development in some sectors. Educational projects for girls and women have been particularly valued as education is an important asset for future development as there was restricted access to education during the Taliban regime (Námerová 2008). Aid to Afghanistan raises issues of transparency. In 2006 Slovakia cancelled significant debts to Afghanistan, some of which may have been included in their aid figures for 2006 (Hayes, 2007, p. 9). Both the European Commission and NGOs call for increased transparency in how the ODA figures are calculated by the MFA.

Overall, it is clear that Slovak development cooperation plays a role in development.

However, does it meet the *acquis's* focus? The positive fact is that aid will be more concentrated on specific regions (the Balkans, East Africa, Central Asia). On the other hand, considering the limited ODA budget, this is still a large number of countries to support. This means an even bigger split of resources and worse effectiveness of aid in line with the division of labor between EU donor countries, as it is better to split resources among a smaller number of countries. Although Balkan and Eastern European countries belong to development priorities of countries like Slovakia, it is arguable whether support to these countries should indeed be prioritised. The Human Development Index (HDI) shows that out of Slovak ODA recipients, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Macedonia belong to group of countries with High Human Development. Kazakhstan and Ukraine are just slightly below the line dividing High and Medium Human Development<sup>4</sup>. As a result, NGO critics argue that unless the amount of ODA rises there is no reason for Slovak aid to target 19 countries. They argue that, 'Slovakia should keep in mind that it has committed itself to the goal of putting appropriate emphasis on the least developed countries of Asia and Africa.' (Havelkova and Benakova 2008)

In response the Slovak Republic has adopted policies that limit the number of sectors they are active in to three per partner country. The sectoral priorities tend to focus on those areas where Slovakia sees itself having a comparative advantage: Civil society (social revitalization, regional development, educational programs); Entrepreneurial activities and technical infrastructure; Assistance in integration to the EU (Havelkova and Benakova 2008). There is no doubt about the importance of these goals and priorities but their wide definition hinders the ability to carefully concentrate the Slovak ODA. Moreover, some of the areas are covered by many other donors as well. Thus, it would be more effective to focus more explicitly on partial sectors where Slovakia has comparative advantages. Hence it is the area of building democratic institutions and market environment where Slovak knowledge is valued most due to direct experience of economical and political transformation in last two decades (Letková 2008).

Indeed Slovakia 'feels well placed to advise, persuade and galvanise actors involved in the enlargement process in countries that have experienced complicated processes of democratisation and state-building.' (Houghton and Malova 2007)

Clearly *'increasing the development assistance budget itself is not sufficient. Slovak institutions, human resources and public opinion have to be prepared for a growing ODA.'* (Hulényi 2004) This leads us to the challenge of public opinion. In 2005 The Institute for Public Affairs (IPA) commissioned a specialised poll about development aid (IPA 2005). 84 % of the population is aware that Slovakia provides development assistance and 83 % agrees that country should provide aid<sup>5</sup>. Participants think that the most important reasons for providing aid are to help people in need. According to participants, aid should be directed firstly to Africa, followed by Asia, South-eastern Europe, the Middle East, European countries and Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union. This highlights that the territorial preferences of the government differ from the people's. In fact, 77 % of Slovaks support aid to Africa, compared to only 45 % to 'former Soviet countries in Central Asia.' Overall development cooperation is therefore considered by the people surveyed as a tool intended to reduce poverty rather than a tool of the national foreign policy. (Horky 2007)

## Institutional Capacity

The quote above from Hulényi highlights that Slovak institutions and human resources need to be prepared for a growing ODA. Indeed, to make a difference in the developing world Slovakia needs both the institutional capacity and robust mechanisms to evaluate projects. One crucial obstacle during the building of ODA capacities has been the lack of experienced personnel. After the break up of the communist system, the provision of development assistance was hindered by the release of employees at related governmental departments. Only a limited number of personnel were allowed to work in this field (Weiss 2007). Nowadays, problems persist due to the lack of personal experience of ODA employees. Education of development experts is therefore a crucial challenge. Another obstacle hindering the quality of aid provision is the huge rotation of posts in government service. For instance, the current director of the Department of Development Aid at MFA has been in the position less than two years. With personnel changes there are usually associated changes of ideas and methods, which is a certain impediment for work strategy. The danger of this rotation can be *'a loss of institutional memory due to the small number of staff active in the field of development cooperation'* (Biesemans 2007 in Lightfoot 2008: 131). From this point of view one of the improvements in the Slovak ODA is the existence of the independent implementation agency, which

entails greater stability at posts unlike at the MFA (Brocková 2006). Nevertheless, despite improvements, there is still a small number of staff working in areas of development assistance. The Department of Development Aid at MFA consisted in June 2008 of only 6 employees. This is a remarkably low number, particularly considering the work involved in just preparing the new Medium-Term strategy. SAIDC consists of 11 employees (SAIDC 2008), but has also suffered from rotation of posts having had three directors since the establishment of the Agency in 2007. It is argued that the dependency of the agency on the state budget, which results in the weak position of the executive director of the agency and a vague impact on decision making at MFA contribute to this turnaround. This means it can be 'difficult to keep continuity as the government and staff changes frequently' (Interview Brussels 2007).

Recent discussions, such as the evaluative conference of Slovak Aid held by the MFA in Bratislava on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2009, have focused upon another important challenge relevant to the context of Europeanisation of Slovak development cooperation. This is the evaluation of the Slovak ODA. There are no mechanisms for collecting data from target countries, no common system of qualitative evaluation and very diverse regulations for quantitative evaluation of ODA. It is argued that without good quality data, it is hard to formulate proper policy, develop more efficient strategies to coordinate with the policies of other donor states and with the EU policy, whilst at the same time allowing Slovakia to use its comparative advantages and make real impact on developing countries. With this comes another challenge. Without real understanding of the policy, economic and social development in the developing countries and without a good overview and comparison of the effectiveness of other EU donor strategies, it is argued that Slovakia will not be able to move forward even if they manage to achieve the EU targets on ODA and respect fully the principle of solidarity found in the EU *acquis*.

What is interesting in 2009 is that we are slowly seeing the beginning of a more bottom up Europeanisation. To some extent this appears to support Haughton and Malova (2007) when they say that following the accession period, dominated by conditionality and accession, new Member States are now accorded room for manoeuvre. Since being 'released from the accession straitjacket' Slovakia is able to try and amend the development focus of the EU, something the 2009 mid-term strategy commits Slovakia to doing. Orbie and Versluys (2008) argue that Slovakia, as a new member state, has two clear priorities for EU development policy. The first is the strengthening of the 'eastern dimension' of EU external relations as a part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (see MFASR 2009). The second appears to be related to the objectives of development cooperation, which Slovakia sees as an instrument to achieve broader foreign and security policy aims, rather than to reduce poverty as an end in itself (Orbie and Versluys 2008: 87).

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the Europeanisation of Slovak Development Cooperation. It has shown that, overall, Slovakia has made a successful transition from being a recipient of aid to a donor. The paper started by asking the question of to what extent this transition has been shaped by history, by other external actors or by the EU. It is clear that history provides a context. As one interviewee argued, 'On becoming a donor I must say we didn't start from scratch. However, there was a huge period of reconstruction which we are finally coming out of.' (Interview Brussels 2007) It is this reconstruction that was aided by external actors, including the EU. The role of organisations such as the UNDP, the OECD, CIDA and the Council of Europe, especially with regard to help and support with setting up technical and practical projects, was clearly important and merits further research. However, EU membership provided a conditionality that focused minds with the Slovak government after 1998. Although development cooperation was never going to be a deal breaker, the need to conform to both the financial, political and institutional demands of the *acquis* were a major driving force behind the re-emergence of Slovakia as a donor, a clear example of top-down Europeanisation.

We have seen the build up of development capacities, including the creation of SAIDC. The adaptation of an Act in 2008 on the 'Official Development Assistance of the Slovak Republic' determined the principles, motives and the main responsibilities of governmental organisations. Overall, Slovakia is committed to the EU target of achieving a 0.17 % share of the ODA on GNI, although slow progress is being made, in part due to potentially conflicting foreign policy priorities such as the adoption of the Euro and domestic economic difficulties. Officially, Slovakia is committed to poverty reduction in the least developed countries, although there are questions about its choice of Kenya as a programme country. Importantly, public opinion appears to be broadly in favour of providing development assistance, although it is hard to tell how much the current recession will affect this support. Therefore despite the relatively short time frame, it is possible to see how the 'top down' nature of EU conditionality has helped re-orientate a recipient of aid to a relatively successful donor of aid, although admittedly one still with work to do.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the following people. The members of the Department of Development Assistance at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representatives from the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation, UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre and the Slovak NGDO Platform for valuable consultations surrounding development issues. We would also like to thank the two referees for their insightful comments and

suggestions for improvement. This article forms part of a wider project examining EU Development policy since enlargement. This project is funded by the British Academy (SG-46721) and the Elisabeth Barker Fund, whose support is acknowledged with thanks.

- <sup>2</sup> According to the Act, the fundamental objectives of Slovak ODA are reduction of poverty and hunger in developing countries, sustainable economic and social development, promotion of peace and security by strengthening democracy and rule of law, human rights and good governance, promotion of universal access to education, enhancing of basic health care, support of economic and social cooperation (Act 2007) – almost word for word the same as those in article 177.
- <sup>3</sup> This stagnation was caused by the rapid growth of Slovak economy until 2009 and unwillingness of government to top up resources for bilateral aid (see EC 2009).
- <sup>4</sup> Serbia and Montenegro are not included in UNDP HDI Report.
- <sup>5</sup> It should be noted that a special Eurobarometer report found that in Slovakia, respondents were more reluctant to take a strong stance on the statement that ‘it is important to help people in poor countries,’ although the overall proportion believing that this is important remains very high.

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