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TOO WEAK TO INFLUENCE? A CASE STUDY OF THE LITHUANIAN NGDOs IN FOREIGN AID POLICY MAKING

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For the East Central European Countries (ECE), the membership in the European Union also meant an entry into the foreign aid donor community. To understand the international development policy change in over a decade and a policy divergence among the ECE countries that have started from relatively similar situations, this article offers the case study of Lithuania and the analysis of domestic policy actors, namely the non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) as one of the policy change facilitating factors. It provides an empirically-rich account of how Lithuanian NGDOs participate in the national foreign aid policymaking and explains factors that affect Lithuanian NGDOs' capacity to influence government decisions. Szent-Ivanyi's and Lightfoot's theoretical model guided the analysis of the Lithuanian NGDOs umbrella organisations composition and power relations, their organizational capacities, foreign donor assistance and attitudes of the state actors. The article concludes the limited, yet increasing Lithuanian NGDOs' role in shaping Lithuanian foreign aid policies, as undermined as they are by the chronic lack of resources to fund advocacy from national sources and the dependency on the EU project-based funding. Consequently, these circumstances constrain the NGDO Platforms' focus mostly on the EU de-

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velopment agenda and therefore mimic the European NGO networks' policy agenda. The lack of capacities among the NGDOs to adapt a European policy agenda to the national foreign aid policy reality makes it of limited relevance to the policy makers domestically.

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Introduction

Since the so-called 'NGO decade' (1980'ies) literature on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in international development has been growing focusing on their increased prominence as policy actors,¹ viewing them as prime facilitators of the civil society² or reflecting critically how international donor lead democratization strategies equating NGOs with the civil society in the post-communist East Central European (ECE) countries³ resulted in mushrooming NGOs, many dependent on donor funding, unrooted in grassroots and pursuing donor interests instead.⁴ Nonetheless, political science theories strongly support the argument that civil society organizations

¹ For a relevant literature review, see Mitlin D., Hickey S., Bebbington A., "Reclaiming Development? NGOs and the Challenge of Alternatives," *World Development* 35 (10), 2007, p. 1700.

² For a relevant literature review, see Lang S., NGOs, *Civil Society and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 61.

³ "ECE countries" refer to the EU member states that have joined the Union in 2004 and 2007, except for Cyprus and Malta. For a useful discussion on the term, see Szent-Ivanyi B., Lightfoot S., *New Europe's New Development Aid*, Routledge, 2015, pp. 9–11.

⁴ Fagan A., "Taking Stock of Civil-Society Development in post-Communist Europe: Evidence from the Czech Republic," *Democratization* 12 (4), 2005, pp. 530–534; Narozhna T., "Foreign Aid for a post-Euphotric Eastern Europe: The Limitations of Western Assistance in Developing Civil Society," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 2004, 7, p. 247.

facilitate democracy: NGOs providing citizens with access to public policymaking make governance more effective and reflective of the citizen priorities; they enhance mutual trust, social capital and lead to a stronger democracy.⁵

Research on civil society organizations in the ECE countries conclude their relative weakness in comparison to their Western counterparts, predominantly focusing on the low levels of population involvement, owing it to the post-communist legacies; therefore, the lack of influence in policymaking is also emphasized.⁶ Whilst contributing to debates on social capital and the promotion of democratic political culture, however, research focus on membership densities does not inform on how individuals participate in NGOs,⁷ how NGOs act on behalf of citizens as interest groups and as institutions of representative democracy⁸ – little is known what affects their influence on policymaking.

Foreign aid policy, as a low salience issue – therefore typically more prone to a greater interest group involvement⁹ – is an intriguing policy area to study such things as the role of an NGO. Indeed, as public and media interest in international development within the

⁵ Almond & Verba (1963), Putnam (1993), cited in Tusalem R., F., “A Boon or a Bane? The Role of Civil Society in Third- and Fourth-Wave Democracies,” *International Political Science Review* 28 (3), 2007, pp. 365–366; Gineitienė D., Vaidelytė E., Vaisvalavičiūtė A., „Nevyriausybių organizacijų ir viešojo sektoriaus sąveika“ [Interactions Between the Non-Governmental Organizations and the Public Sector], Raipa A. (ed.), *Įvadas į viešąjį valdymą*, Kaunas: KTU, Technologija, 2010, pp. 188–202; Raipa A., Smalskys V., „Demokratinio valdymo procesų plėtros raida, kryptys ir tendencijos“ [Democratic Management Processes: Developments, Issues and Trends], Raipa A. (ed.), *Modernus viešasis valdymas*, kolektyvinė monografija [collective monography], Vitae Litera, 2012, pp. 321–344.

⁶ Howard M., M., *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 206; Wallace C., Pichler F., Haerpfner C., “Changing Patterns of Civil Society in Europe and America 1995–2005. Is Eastern Europe Different?” *East European Politics and Societies* 26 (1), February 2012, pp. 3–19.

⁷ Lang, p. 45.

⁸ Cox T., “Interest Representation and State-Society Relations in East Central Europe,” *Aleksanteri Papers*, 2/2012, <http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/julkaisut/tiedostot/ap_2_2012.pdf>, 25 06 2017.

⁹ Lundsgaarde E., *The Domestic Politics of Foreign Aid*, Routledge, 2013, p. 23–24.

ECE countries is low, providing governments with a greater role in formulating policies, NGOs are important for translating and channelling the moral obligation feelings of the general public into the policy process.¹⁰ Furthermore, having joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, the ECE countries have started implementing their foreign aid policies, which, from relatively similar situations, have clearly diverged in just over a decade,¹¹ with characteristics and advocacy capabilities of the NGO sector among factors explaining such policy differences.¹²

Despite the growing recognition of the NGDO sector in the ECE countries' foreign aid policymaking, to date there has been little in-depth analysis with the notable exceptions of studies conducted by Szent-Ivanyi and Lightfoot,¹³ Bučar et al.,¹⁴ Chimiak,¹⁵ whereas Lithuanian international development policy and actors affecting the policy process remain generally underresearched.¹⁶ Thus, this paper offers an empirically rich account of how Lithuanian non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs)¹⁷ participate in

¹⁰ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 22.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 79.

¹² Szent-Ivanyi B., Lightfoot S., "Determinants of Civil Society Influence: The Case of International Development and Humanitarian NGOs in the Czech Republic and Hungary," *Comparative European Politics*, 2014, p. 3.

¹³ Ibid.; Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015.

¹⁴ Bučar M., "Involving Civil Society in the International Development Cooperation of 'New' EU Member States; The Case of Slovenia," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 13 (1), 2012 April, p. 83–99; Bučar M., Nastav E., Mešič A., "Development Cooperation in New EU Member States", Schulpel L., Hoebink P. (eds.), *Private Development Aid in Europe. Foreign Aid between the Public and the Private Domain*, EADI Global Development Series, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 257–291.

¹⁵ Chimiak G., "From Solidarność to Global Solidarity? The Engagement of Polish Civil Society in Development Cooperation," *Studia Socjologiczne* 3 (222), 2016, p. 165–198.

¹⁶ Delcour L., "Lithuania: A Hybrid Development Cooperation Policy," in Horky-Hluchan O., Lightfoot S. (eds.), *Development Cooperation of the 'New' EU Member States*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 170.

¹⁷ The term "non-governmental development organizations" (NGDOs) used throughout this paper is a narrower term than a non-governmental organization (NGO) in defining NGOs that have implemented at least 1 development cooperation or global education project.

the national foreign-aid policymaking and explains factors that affect Lithuanian NGOs' capacity to influence government decisions.

I argue that although limited,¹⁸ the Lithuanian NGOs' role in shaping Lithuanian foreign aid policy is increasing, yet it remains narrowly-focused on issues related to the EU development policies and mimicks of the European NGO networks' agenda. The article starts with a literature review, a description of the theoretical approach and methodology, followed by the overview of Lithuanian foreign aid policy and the NGOs within the Lithuanian NGO sector. After the analysis of the Lithuanian NGO Platform's key advocacy asks, factors that define limited NGOs role in the policy process are discussed and summarized in the concluding remarks.

1. Theoretical Approach and Methodology

Academic literature on Lithuanian foreign aid policy is limited. In a pioneering study, Panasevič concludes that aspirations for a positive image of Lithuania within the international community and concerns for a safe neighborhood drives its foreign aid policy.¹⁹ Jonavičius, Andrespok and Kasekamp indicate the weaknesses of Lithuanian NGOs and their limited influence in the policy process,²⁰ whereas Delcour also acknowledges the opening of opportunities with the Law on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (hereinafter – the Law) coming into force.²¹ Other studies related to Lithuanian NGOs analyze and measure stable yet low civic engagement,²²

¹⁸ Delcour, p. 170–189.

¹⁹ Panasevič A., “Five Approaches to Development Cooperation: An Analysis of the Lithuanian Case,” *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 29, 2013, p. 60–62.

²⁰ Jonavičius L. “The Democracy Promotion Policies of Central and Eastern European States,” *Fride working papers*, 2008, <http://fride.org/download/wp55_central_eastern_eu_eng_mar08.pdf>, 01 06 2015, p. 15; Andrespok E., Kasekamp A., I., “Development Cooperation of the Baltic States: A Comparison of the Trajectories of Three New Donor Countries,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 13 (1), 2012, pp. 117–130.

²¹ Delcour, pp. 170–189.

²² Žiliukaitė R., Ramonaitė A., Nevinskaitė L., Beresnevičiūtė V., Vinogradnaitė I.,

positive NGO contribution to political (civic) socialization²³ and limited NGO interaction with the municipalities, hampered by a divergence of attitudes toward cooperation and an existing civic culture.²⁴ The empirical study on cooperation between the public sector and NGOs concludes that “the absence of mutual acquaintance of the cooperating sides, lack of cultural traditions, low motivation and the key role of the human factor, rather than managerial and administrative procedures”²⁵ undermine successful cooperation. Nonetheless, Lithuanian NGOs’ participation in the public policy making and specifically the factors that determine limited political influence remain poorly understood.

Much of research on foreign aid policy fails to use theory-driven models to explain how these policies are made.²⁶ Therefore, Szent-Ivanyi and Lightfoot’s²⁷ theoretical model, which views foreign aid policymaking as a bureaucratic game within the government and which is influenced by the international actors, e.g., the EU, and domestic actors, such as NGDOs, provided the overall theoretical guidance for the research. The model hypothesizes that the characteristics and advocacy capabilities of the NGDO sector are

Neatrasta galia: Lietuvos pilietinės visuomenės žemėlapis [Undiscovered Power: Map of the Civil Society in Lithuania], Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2006, p. 380; Pilietinės visuomenės institutas, *Pilietinės galios indeksas 2012, 2013, 2014 metai* [Civic Empowerment Index of 2012, 2013, 2014], Vilnius, 2015, <<http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PGI-KNYGELE-SPAUDA1.pdf>>, 08 11 2016.

²³ Kėrytė Ž., „Pilietiško konstravimo globalumo kontekste: NVO vaidmens kaita Lietuvoje“ [Construction of Citizenship in a Global Context: The Change of NGOs’ Role in Lithuania], *Kultūra ir visuomenė* 1 (2), 2010, pp. 67–83.

²⁴ Guogis A., Gudelis A., Stasiukynas A., “The Importance of the NGO-Municipal Relations in Developing Local Democracy. A Case Study of Two Lithuanian Municipalities,” *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* 5 (15), 2008, pp. 15–33.

²⁵ Pilietinės visuomenės institutas, *Valdžios ir nevyriausybinio sektorių bendradarbiavimo viešosios politikos sprendimų priėmimo procese stiprinimas* [Research Results for the Enhancement of Cooperation between the Public and Non-Governmental Sectors in Public Decision-Making], Vilnius, 2015, <http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/VRM-tyrimo-ataskaita_final.pdf>, 08 11 2016, p. 202.

²⁶ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 13.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 23–24, 28–30.

among the explanatory factors for the chosen path of a country's foreign aid policy. In combining interest group literature and insights on the influence of civil society organizations in the ECE countries, the NGDO influence on foreign aid policy is determined by 4 mutually reinforcing factors: composition and power relations among the NGOs, their organizational capacities, foreign donor assistance, attitudes and administrative capacities of the state actors.

Two Lithuanian NGDO umbrella organizations (interchangeably called the NGDO Platforms), the Lithuanian NGDO Platform and LITDEA, uniting 32 Lithuanian NGDOs,²⁸ were chosen as study units. Such limited boundaries are legitimate given that in the ECE countries, the participation in public policy (here interchangeably referred to as advocacy) is generally performed by the NGDO Platforms.²⁹ Literature indicates that NGDOs' political influence is maximized when NGDOs delegate their advocacy work to the NGDO Platform and articulate clear demands toward the government.³⁰ Moreover, experienced policy staff, its sufficient financing,³¹ access to foreign funding and international networks increase the advocacy capacities of NGDOs. Finally, the influence of NGDOs depends on the receptiveness of the government, which is visible through the government's openness to NGO consultation, its existing structures and procedures.³²

The arguments are based on primary and secondary sources, qualitative interview data with stakeholders from the Lithuanian NGDOs and the government.³³ As an insider researcher, I bring the in-depth knowledge of the field and my personal observations; nevertheless, to overcome the insider bias, I am carefully drawing

²⁸ As of February 1, 2016, the Lithuanian NGDO Platform united 20 organizations, and LITDEA – 12 organizations.

²⁹ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 111.

³⁰ Lundsgaarde, p. 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³² Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, pp. 29–30.

³³ For reasons of confidentiality, 10 interview respondents remain anonymous.

my conclusions and basing them on the theoretical guidance and triangulated evidence.³⁴

2. Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy: Key Facts

The main driver for all ECE countries to introduce foreign aid policies was their membership in the EU: they were incorporated into the EU accession agenda as a requirement to implement the existing *acquis communautaire*.³⁵ Therefore, the study of domestic foreign aid policymaking must also weigh the Europeanization effects that manifest themselves in the pressure to adjust domestic policies to the EU policies,³⁶ namely by increasing aid budgets and aid effectiveness to address poverty reduction³⁷ and strengthening the geographic focus on the African Caribbean and Pacific countries,³⁸ also, by changing domestic political actor constellations with the new legal and political venues for NGOs to advocate their interests.³⁹ Those Europeanization aspects are addressed in the following sections.

From 2003 to 2013, Lithuanian development cooperation policies were guided by a number of Policy Directions, since 2013 by the

³⁴ Costley C., “Key Concepts for the Insider-Researcher,” Costley C., Elliott G., Gibbs P., *Doing Work Based Research: Approaches to Enquiry for Insider-Researchers*, Sage, 2010.

³⁵ Lightfoot S., “The Europeanisation of International Development Policies: The Case of Central and Eastern European States,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62 (2), March 2010, p. 332–333.

³⁶ Henriksson Timofejevs P., “Europeanization of Foreign Aid Policy in Central and East Europe: The Role EU, External Incentives and Identification in Foreign-Aid Policy Adoption in Latvia and Slovenia 1998–2010,” *Journal of European Integration* 37 (4), p. 433, Lightfoot, 2010, p. 331.

³⁷ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 43.

³⁸ Horkey O., “The Impact of the Shallow Europeanisation of the ‘New’ Member States on the EU’s Actorness: What Coherence between Foreign and Development Policy?” Gänzle S., Grimm S., Makhan D. (eds.), *The European Union and Global Development. An Enlightened Superpower in the Making*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 65.

³⁹ Börzel T., Buzogany A., “Governing EU Accession in Transition Countries: The Role of Non-state Actors,” *Acta Politica*, Vol. 45, 1/2, 2010, p. 158.

Law. Here Lithuania's development cooperation policy is defined as a constituent part of national foreign policy, contributing to the achievement of poverty reduction goals agreed at the UN, the promotion of democracy, human rights, strengthening Lithuanian ties with partner countries and raising Lithuanian public awareness. Foreign policy priorities, such as good neighbor relations, security concerns, economic interdependence, normative considerations and aspirations for regional leadership shape Lithuania's foreign aid priorities,⁴⁰ namely its bilateral aid geographic focus on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the emphasis on the transition experience of the creation of a democratic state and market economy. Policy documents clearly distinguish between Lithuanian bilateral aid priorities focusing on the EaP countries, the transition experience and the Lithuanian multilateral aid, provided through contributions to the EU budget and the European Development Fund as meeting poverty eradication and sustainable development priorities, mostly in the ACP countries.⁴¹

The European Consensus on Development, to which the EU accession countries had to abide, required striving for an increase of

⁴⁰ Delcour, pp. 177–179.

⁴¹ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo 2006–2010 metų politikos nuostatų patvirtinimo [Resolution on the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy Directions for the Period from 2006 to 2010], Nr. 561, Vilnius, 2006 m. birželio 8 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo 2011–2012 metų politikos nuostatų patvirtinimo [Resolution on the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy Directions for the Period from 2011 to 2012], Nr. 10, Vilnius, 2011 m. sausio 12 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo ir humanitarinės pagalbos įstatymas [Law on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance of the Republic of Lithuania], Nr. XII-311, Vilnius, 2013 m. gegužės 16 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo 2014–2016 metų politikos kryptių patvirtinimo [Resolution on the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy Directions for the Period from 2014 to 2016], Nr. 41, Vilnius, 2014 m. sausio 15 d.

Joint declaration by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, *The European Consensus on Development*, Official Journal C 46 of 24.2.2006, 2006, <http://ec.europa.eu/development/body/development_policy_statement/docs/edp_statement_oj_24_02_2006_en.pdf#zoom=125>, 08 06 2015.

a 0.33% share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) on Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015.⁴² Since the accession, Lithuanian ODA has been constantly increasing: from 7.44 million euros⁴³ to 43.7 million euros, reaching 0.12% GNI in 2015.⁴⁴ Interinstitutional agreement defining policy priorities for 2017–2019 and aid levels⁴⁵ signify a step toward multiannual programming; a predictability of resource flows has thus increased aid effectiveness. However, there is no clear roadmap for an ODA increase to a 0.33% of GNI by 2030, and the previewed decreasing financing demonstrate a low commitment to the ODA target.

The bulk of Lithuania's ODA is composed of multilateral aid⁴⁶ with the amounts defined by the joint decision at the EU Council,⁴⁷ where Lithuania's influence over priorities is limited.⁴⁸ Bučar and Udovič⁴⁹ argue that countries thus prefer bilateral aid, which they can

⁴² Joint declaration by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, The European Consensus on Development, Official Journal C 46 of 24.2.2006, 2006, <http://ec.europa.eu/development/body/development_policy_statement/docs/edp_statement_oj_24_02_2006_en.pdf#zoom=125>, 08 06 2015.

⁴³ Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, „Lietuvos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo dešimtmetis“ [The Decade of the Lithuanian Development Cooperation], Vilnius, 2014, <http://pilieciams.eu/data/files/vbd_desimtmečio_leidiny_fina.pdf>, 03 08 2015.

⁴⁴ Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, „Patikslinta Lietuvos parama vystymuisi 2015 metais“ [Specification of the Lithuanian ODA in 2015], 2016, <<http://urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/patikslinta-lietuvos-oficiali-parama-vystymuisi-2015-metais>>, 21 07 2016.

⁴⁵ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas „Dėl Vystomojo bendradarbiavimo tarp-institucinio veiklos plano patvirtinimo“ [Resolution on Interinstitutional development cooperation activity plan], Nr. 937, Vilnius, 2016 m. rugėjo 21 d.

⁴⁶ 81% in 2015.

⁴⁷ International Agreements, Official Journal of the European Union L 210/1 of 6.8.2013, 2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/internal-agreement-11edf-2013-2020_en.pdf>, 21 07 2016.

⁴⁸ Panasevič A., “Lithuanian Development Cooperation: 10 years for Finding a Place in the Donor's Community,” *Latvijas intereses Eiropas Savienībā* [Latvia's Interests in the European Union], 2014 (3); Interview with the key MFA informant no. 5, 21 07 2016.

⁴⁹ Udovič B., Bučar M., “Slovenia's International Development Cooperation: Between (Declarative) Commitments and (Outspoken) Reality,” *Studia Historica Slovenica*, Maribor, 14, 2014, No. 1.

directly shape based on political and/or economic motives, with the Lithuanian bilateral development cooperation efforts concentrating on the EaP countries⁵⁰ and Afghanistan⁵¹ confirming the thesis. Lithuanian bilateral aid interventions on average consist of small,⁵² consequently short-term projects; their content is loosely connected with Lithuania's declared aid priority of transition experience and less so with the overarching EU aid objective of poverty reduction.⁵³

The policy formulation and coordination role is assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) with the "Development Cooperation Department"⁵⁴ in charge of foreign aid. For policy coordination purposes, the National Commission for Development Cooperation (hereinafter – the National Commission) was established in 2007 consisting of representatives from national and municipal government institutions. With the Law adoption in 2013, a representative from each of the NGDO Platforms have been included in the National Commission,⁵⁵ in 2016 – a private businesses uniting association was allocated with a seat.

The Lithuanian presidency to the EU Council in 2013 increased Lithuanian policymakers' exposure and their attention to the global development agenda; also, it incited socialization within the EU, consequently building up expertise on development cooperation.⁵⁶ It has also provided an opportunity to upload foreign policy goals related to good neighborhood relations through prioritizing the EaP

⁵⁰ I.e., Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.

⁵¹ Lithuanian Development Cooperation information, <<https://orangeprojects.lt/lt/sitemap/>>, 11 06 2016.

⁵² Approximately 10 000–15 000 EUR.

⁵³ Delcour, p. 186.

⁵⁴ Renamed several times, last time in 2013.

⁵⁵ Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo ir humanitarinės pagalbos įstatymas [Law on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance of the Republic of Lithuania], Nr. XII-311, Vilnius, 2013 m. gegužės 16 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas „Dėl Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos sudarymo ir jos nuostatų patvirtinimo“ [Resolution on the Establishment of the National Development Cooperation Commission and Its Regulations], Nr. 42, Vilnius, 2014 sausio 15 d.

⁵⁶ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

initiative⁵⁷ and emphasising the transition experience in the post-2015 agenda,⁵⁸ the upload of which has been rather rhetorical.

To conclude, since its inception, Lithuania's foreign aid policy has changed: its ODA has increased, the Law signals the establishment of the foreign aid policy within Lithuania's policy system, the circle of domestic policy actors have widened, the global and EU development agenda is now better reflected in the policy documents. The EU mechanisms and their conditionality before the accession and the social learning, especially during the Lithuanian EU presidency, have certainly contributed to this. However, the disparity between the multilateral and bilateral foreign aid policies remain, with the latter reflecting foreign policy priorities for the close neighborhood.

3. How Do the Lithuanian NGDOs Participate in the Policy Making Process?

3.1. The Lithuanian NGO Sector: Locating NGDOs

Since its independence, Lithuania has witnessed a significantly growing NGO sector: according to different estimates, there were around 10 000 active NGOs in 2011,⁵⁹ in 2015 – 14 000.⁶⁰ In comparison, the Lithuanian NGDO sector is very small: there are approximately 68 Lithuanian NGDOs,⁶¹ less than a half of them

⁵⁷ Jurkynas M., Daukšaitė J., "A Feather in Its Cap? The Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2013," *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 31, 2014, p. 35.

⁵⁸ Delcour, p. 187.

⁵⁹ Žiliukaitė R., "Quantitative Growth of the NGO Sector in Lithuania: When the Number of Organizations Increases Without Significant Effects on Participation Level," *Sociologija. Mintis ir veiksmas* 1 (30), 2012, p. 243–244.

⁶⁰ USAID, "The 2015 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia," 2015, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Europe_Eurasia_CSOSIRreport_2015_Update8-29-16.pdf>, 08 11 2016, p. 140.

⁶¹ This research is deliberately limited to NGOs that are established exclusively by the citizens and the legal entities of Lithuania. Therefore, the development NGOs, which, though established under the Lithuanian Law (e.g., PACT Europe, International Republic Institute etc.), are the country offices of foreign NGOs, with different activity implementations and governing patterns, thus they are excluded from this research. An

belong to one of the NGDO Platforms indicating a not entirely united sector.

Most Lithuanian NGOs are small: according to a representative survey conducted among the Lithuanian NGOs, the annual budgets of around 40% of the NGOs surveyed do not exceed 3 000 EUR.⁶² Moreover, according to the data of the Department of Statistics majority of NGOs have fewer than 4 employees.⁶³ Project-based funding from EU, national and foreign donors comprise the majority of NGOs' budgets; other sources, such as donations, service provision income have been increasing; however, overall the sector is financially weak.⁶⁴ Citizen participation in the NGOs is low: 8% of population engagement in political and civic activities through public organizations and movements was registered in 2008; in 2015, it has plummeted to 7.3%.⁶⁵ Eurobarometer surveys measuring volunteering in the NGDO sector record between 1% to 2% Lithuanian public engagement.⁶⁶ On the one hand, scholars

approximate number of Lithuanian NGDOs is derived from the Lithuanian Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Program grant beneficiary data and the Lithuanian NGDO database by calculating NGOs that have been implemented at least 1 development cooperation and/or education awareness project, any of which being financed by the EU, Lithuanian foreign aid, its own funds or grassroots donations.

⁶² 19% have budgets between 3 000 to 15 000 EUR, 10% have budgets between 15 000 to 30 000 EUR, 7% – 30 000 to 85 000 EUR, 4% – 85 000 to 145 000, 3% – 200 000 to 300 000 EUR, 1% – over 300 000 EUR. Transparency International Lietuvos skyrius, Tyrimo rezultatai „Lietuvos NVO skaidrumas“ [Research Results for the Transparency of the Lithuanian NGOs], 2016 m. sausis, <<http://www.transparency.lt/tils-tyrimai-ir-analizes/>>, 07 11 2017.

⁶³ Transparency International, Lietuvos skyrius “NGO Landscape in Lithuania: Legal Setting and Current Practices,” 2016, p. 14.

⁶⁴ USAID, „2014 metų Pilietinės visuomenės organizacijų (PVO) tvarumo indeksas – Lietuva“ [Civil Society Sustainability Index 2014 – Lithuania], 2014, <http://www.3sektorius.lt/docs/2014m_2015-10-07_23:34:24.NVOIndeksas.pdf>, 08 11 2016; USAID, 2015.

⁶⁵ Žiliukaitė, p. 247; Pilietinės visuomenės institutas, „Pilietinės galios indeksas 2012, 2013, 2014 metai“ [Civic Empowerment Index of 2012, 2013, 2014], Vilnius, 2015a, <<http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PGI-KNYGELE-SPAUDA1.pdf>>, 08 11 2016.

⁶⁶ Eurobarometer, The European Year for Development – citizens' views on development, cooperation and aid, no. 421, 2015, <http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/ar

ascertain that low levels of citizen participation in the emerging NGO sector of the ECE countries reflect the detachment of the NGOs from the grassroots; thus, a reliance on donor funding and their perceived needs is seen instead of mobilization of the grassroots.⁶⁷ On the other hand, NGDOs' unrepresentativeness also stems from the fact that they advocate the development interests of the Global South, i.e., the benefitting constituencies beyond their immediate reach.⁶⁸

Taking into consideration that Soviet Communism has virtually eliminated the entire NGO sector,⁶⁹ since Lithuania's independence in 1990, the sector has transformed qualitatively. NGOs and their umbrella organizations have become more professional and visible in the policymaking, networking among NGOs was also enhanced.⁷⁰ EU membership has opened the possibilities for the NGOs to link with like-minded organizations in Europe, join transnational networks, such as CONCORD,⁷¹ providing Lithuanian NGOs with the "international prestige" and thus increasing their advocacy capacities domestically.⁷² Moreover, the EU has pushed the governments of the newly accessing countries to open up public policymaking by involving the key NGOs.⁷³ However, literature indicates that those

chives/ebs/ebs_421_en.pdf>, 12 08 2015; Eurobarometer, EU Development Aid and the Millenium Development Goals, no. 405, 2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/commfront-office/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_405_en.pdf>, 12 02 2017; Eurobarometer, Europeans, Development Aid and the Millennium Development Goals, no. 352, 2010, <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_352_en.pdf>, 12 02 2017.

⁶⁷ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 107.

⁶⁸ Beyers J., Rainer E., Maloney W., "Researching Interest Group Politics in Europe and Elsewhere: Much We Study, Little We Know?" *West European Politics* 31 (6), 2008, p. 1118.

⁶⁹ Palubinskas G., T., "Democratization: The Development of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Central and Eastern Europe," in *Public Administration & Management: An Interactive Journal* 8 (3), 2003, p. 150–163.

⁷⁰ Žiliukaitė, p. 250.

⁷¹ The European Confederation for Relief and Development.

⁷² Kutter A., Trappmann V., "Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: The Ambivalent Legacy of Accession," *Acta Politica*, Vol. 45, 1/2, 2010, p. 60.

⁷³ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2014, p. 6.

EU measures aiming to empower civil society in the ECE countries have not been entirely successful, because they failed to address the lack of sustainable income, of grassroots support and of formalized interactions with the state and primarily strengthened actors whose agenda was compatible with Brussels.⁷⁴

The participation in public decision-making of Lithuanian citizens, also NGOs, remains low: a representative survey carried out in 2014⁷⁵ indicated that only 28% of respondents sought for information about public decision-making and aimed at influencing it. Though means for public participation in policymaking is adequate, their implementation, however, is sparse and not obligatory, thus NGO engagement depends also on the motivation and initiative of the public sector employees. Moreover, there is a mutual mistrust between the NGOs and public institutions, also observed in other ECE countries and explained by Bučar⁷⁶ as dating back to pretransition periods, when NGOs articulated themselves in opposition to the government; also, a disagreement over the roles in public decision-making as well as NGO financial instability undermine the process. Whereas collaboration success is often attributed to the existing informal personal relations and attitudes held by the public administration and NGO leadership.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Kutter, Trappmann, p. 61; Börzel T., A., “Why You Always Don’t Get What You Want: EU Enlargement and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Acta Politica* 45 (1), April 2010, p. 1–4.

⁷⁵ Pilielinės visuomenės institutas, „Valdžios ir nevyriausybinių sektorių bendradarbiavimo viešosios politikos sprendimų priėmimo procese stiprinimas“ [Research Results for the Enhancement of Cooperation between the Public and Non-Governmental Sectors in Public Decision-Making], Vilnius, 2015b, <http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/VRM-tyrimo-ataskaita_final.pdf>, 12 02 2017.

⁷⁶ Bučar, p. 85.

⁷⁷ Pilielinės visuomenės institutas, „Valdžios ir nevyriausybinių sektorių bendradarbiavimo viešosios politikos sprendimų priėmimo procese stiprinimas“ [Research Results for the Enhancement of Cooperation between the Public and Non-Governmental Sectors in Public Decision-Making], Vilnius, 2015b, <http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/VRM-tyrimo-ataskaita_final.pdf>, 12 02 2017.

3.2. Lithuanian NGDO Platforms' Policy Agenda

In Lithuania, the NGDO Platforms mostly participate in the foreign aid policy formation on behalf of their members. Nevertheless, their heterogeneous membership consisting of big and small NGOs, some of which are not involved in development cooperation work,⁷⁸ presents an ample variation of different interests and experiences, making it difficult to speak with a single voice. Thus, the NGDO Platforms' advocacy should be considered as the lowest common denominator for the NGDOs involved,⁷⁹ which does not preclude individual member organizations from trying to influence foreign aid policy outside the NGDO Platforms.

The Lithuanian NGDO Platform and LITDEA use a number of means for participation and influence in public decision-making: they request for information, participate in the working groups and the National Commission, meet with the elected politicians and bureaucrats, write letters, policy papers, make public statements and invite government representatives to their events. Their public statements, official letters, policy papers, recommendations, presentations and annual AidWatch reports were reviewed by summarizing the key advocacy asks from 2007⁸⁰ to 2015 (Table No. 1).

⁷⁸ 5 out of 21 Lithuanian NGDO platform member organizations haven't started their development cooperation and awareness-raising activities (2015 data), whereas around half of 12 LITDEA members are continuously engaged in development cooperation/education activities. Lithuanian NGOs that qualify also as NGDOs, such as Save the Children Lithuania, Eastern Europe Studies Center, Lithuanian Kolping Society, Modern Didactics Center etc. are better known for their poverty alleviation, educational and policy analysis work in Lithuania.

⁷⁹ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 111.

⁸⁰ Despite the fact that initiatives to establish the NGDO Platforms date back to 2003, little consistent data is available about the advocacy actions until 2007, making it the starting point of the analysis here.

Table No. 1. Lithuanian NGDO Platform's Advocacy Asks 2007–2015

Year	Ask	Year	Ask
2007	<p>Development education and public awareness raising;</p> <p>Fulfil ODA commitments: increase ODA;</p> <p>Enter into partnership with CSOs.</p>	2011	<p>Partnership with CSOs in policy formation, project selection.</p>
2008	<p>Partnership with CSOs for increased poverty reduction focus;</p> <p>Fulfil ODA commitments: ODA transparency, long-term planning;</p> <p>Wider geographical focus (beyond EaP);</p> <p>Reaction to events in Georgia;</p> <p>Provide NGO project cofinancing.</p>	2012	<p>Fulfil ODA commitments: increase ODA, aid effectiveness, focus on poverty reduction;</p> <p>Sustainable Development Goals based on human rights principles;</p> <p>Partnership with CSOs in policy formation;</p> <p>Regulate Development education.</p>
2009	<p>Fulfil ODA commitments: aid transparency, focus on poverty reduction;</p> <p>Wider geographical focus (beyond EaP);</p> <p>Development education and public awareness raising;</p> <p>Volunteer Program;</p> <p>Partnership with CSOs in project selection;</p> <p>NGO project cofinancing and increased financing.</p>	2013	<p>Sustainable Development Goals based on human rights principles;</p> <p>Policy Coherence for Development ensured;</p> <p>Fulfil ODA commitments: increase ODA, aid effectiveness and transparency;</p> <p>Partnership with CSOs in policy formation;</p> <p>Increased financing to CSOs, addressing unfavorable DEAR call conditions;</p> <p>Distinguish Development education as a separate aim for development cooperation.</p>

2010	<p>Fulfil ODA commitments: increase ODA, aid effectiveness and transparency, focus on poverty reduction;</p> <p>Gender issues;</p> <p>Wider geographical focus (beyond EaP);</p> <p>Partnership with CSOs in policy formation;</p> <p>Development education.</p>	2014	<p>Fulfil ODA commitments: increase ODA, aid effectiveness, focus on poverty reduction;</p> <p>Ambitious Climate change policy;</p> <p>Alignment of policy with Sustainable Development Goals;</p> <p>Policy Coherence for Development ensured;</p> <p>Ensure the implementation of Global education.</p>
2015	<p>Fulfil ODA commitments: increase ODA, ensure aid effectiveness;</p> <p>Policy Coherence for Development ensured, especially nationally;</p> <p>Ensure funding for Global education;</p> <p>Sustainable Development Goals based on human rights principles.</p>		

This review confirms the conclusion in the literature that as implementers of foreign aid policies, the NGDOs are both advocates of their own interests and the interests of the developing countries.⁸¹ Thus, two general advocacy themes can be distinguished, namely asks reflecting local NGDO needs aiming at changes of mostly Lithuanian bilateral aid policy and practice, which could directly affect Lithuanian NGDOs role in development cooperation policy formation and implementation. The second theme relates to broader issues, such as aid effectiveness and the perceived interests of developing countries aiming at influencing both the Lithuanian and EU foreign aid policies.

Throughout the years, the NGDO Platforms have continuously called the government to meet its ODA commitments, specifically to increase ODA, achieve aid effectiveness and transparency, and better express poverty reduction aim, especially through widening its geographic focus. Other priorities addressing Lithuanian bilateral aid

⁸¹ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 94; Lundsgaarde, p. 26.

policy, such as the inclusion of civil society organizations in selection of projects for funding, increased NGO financing/project cofinancing, need for volunteer and awareness raising programs, particularly visible in 2008–2013, reflect local Lithuanian NGDOs' needs, some of them seemingly as one-off asks. No mention of budget support modality and instead the calls for the opposite, i.e., increased NGO financing/project cofinancing, indicate the selectiveness towards aid effectiveness measures, which could potentially harm the access of NGDOs to government funding.

With the accession of the NGDO Platforms to CONCORD in 2012, such issues as Policy Coherence for Development, a human rights-based approach to sustainable development, climate change etc., i.e., issues advocated then jointly by the European NGDOs, began to significantly occupy the Lithuanian NGDO Platforms' policy agenda. Contrary to the local NGDO needs in targeting Lithuanian bilateral aid policy and practice, it primarily aimed at influencing the EU development cooperation policy through advocacy actions targeting the decision makers on the national level.

4. Factors Influencing Participation of NGDOs in the Policy Process

4.1. Composition and Power Relations

Structure and power relations within the NGDO Platforms enabling them to speak with a single voice are indicative of their influence in policymaking: a healthy balance of large and small NGDOs' able to articulate unified collective demands through the NGDO Platforms towards the government increases their policymaking impact.⁸²

Until 2007, the Lithuanian NGDO sector was marked by competing initiatives to establish a countrywide platform, which negatively

⁸² Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 28–29; Lundsgaarde, p. 28.

affected their political influence⁸³ and organizational development.⁸⁴ The initial rivalry was overcome by establishing the NGDO Platform; however, in 2010, it split into two associations, i.e., the Lithuanian NGDO Platform and LITDEA. In 2011 the NGDO Platforms formed an informal structure of Lithuanian Umbrella, which became a member of CONCORD in 2012. Both NGDO Platforms address the government jointly in advocacy actions initiated by CONCORD, yet to date they remain separate associations, both having a seat in the National Commission and occasionally coordinating their advocacy actions targeting Lithuanian bilateral foreign aid policy. The existence of two NGDO Platforms increases competition for limited financial resources, thus affecting their operational capacities and consequently reducing their advocacy capacities. Nevertheless, given the increased collaboration among associations, also because of the Lithuanian NGDO Platform's growing recognition within the MFA as the main NGDOs' representative due to its more sizeable membership⁸⁵ and more active participation in the policy formation, such sector fragmentation plays an increasingly less negative role in the sector unity assessment.

NGDO Platform membership is diverse: it includes such big NGOs as the Humana People to People Baltic, Eastern Europe Studies Center (EESC), Lithuanian Kolping Society and smaller ones. Though their expertise and consequently differing interests in development cooperation, the overall Lithuanian NGDOs engagement in development cooperation is limited,⁸⁶ thus limiting the understanding of development context, successful interventions

⁸³ Kool A., "Development Cooperation in Lithuania. Country Study," Trialog, 2007 December, <http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/lt_countrystudy_final_dec2007.pdf>, 01 06 2015.

⁸⁴ Andrespok, Kasekamp, p. 127.

⁸⁵ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 4, 30 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

⁸⁶ NNVBO Platforma, Narių apklausa [Membership Survey], 2015.

and consequently affecting NGOs interests to participate in the policy formation.⁸⁷ This lack of specific development expertise has been indicated among the reasons for advocacy weakness of the Lithuanian NGOs,⁸⁸ certainly affecting the authenticity of the key demands of their representative umbrella organizations and the membership interests to participate in shaping the NGO Platforms' advocacy.

Moreover, Lithuania's membership in the EU, by prompting the exit of easily accessible foreign funds, thus increasing the scarcity of resources yet opening new avenues for funding, lead Lithuanian NGOs to search for new areas of work with the development cooperation being among them.⁸⁹ Indeed, empirical data indicates that the majority of the Lithuanian NGO Platform's members have started their international development activities after Lithuania's accession to the EU.⁹⁰ Therefore, NGO advocacy asks between 2008-2009 (see Table No. 1) requesting NGO funding increase and NGO participation in the project selection affirm key informants' thoughts⁹¹ that Lithuanian foreign aid and its projected growth due to commitment to increase ODA to 0.33% GNI was considered as yet another substantial source of the NGOs' income.

Thus, in the early days of the NGO Platform, the heterogeneity of its members, increased resource scarcity and expectations for NGOs' funding from projected ODA growth resulted in a small number of strong organizations advocating their narrow and,

⁸⁷ Lewis D., Kanji N., *Non-governmental Organisations and Development*, Routledge, 2009, p. 91–120.

⁸⁸ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 2, 25 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 3, 26 05 2016.

⁸⁹ Kool, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Out of 14 organizations that indicated the starting year of their development cooperation and/or awareness raising activities, 71% indicated the year 2004 or later. The other member organizations haven't started their development cooperation and awareness-raising activities. NNVBO Platforma, Narių apklausa [Membership Survey], 2015.

⁹¹ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 3, 26 05 2016; Interview with the Lithuanian NGO representative no. 4, 13 06 2016.

sometimes, conflicting interests through the NGDO Platform but also doing it separately.⁹² Nevertheless, despite its later split into two associations, with the increased engagement of member organizations, subsided expectations for the growth of Lithuanian ODA as a significant income source, the political priorities of the NGDO Platforms became more unified and as such recognized by the government and NGDOs representatives interviewed.⁹³ Simultaneously, key advocacy asks since 2012 (see Table No. 1) have embraced more issues related to aid effectiveness and the perceived interests of developing countries, less targeting Lithuanian bilateral aid policy, but more of the EU development policies, the predominance of which could be also explained by the organizational changes analyzed further.

4.2. NGDOs' Organizational Capacities

To assess organizational capacity, the attention should be drawn to human resources and expertise, available finances for policy work, also abilities to analyze and coordinate the NGDO community, engage with the state actors,⁹⁴ in particularly the MFA, the key actor responsible for foreign aid policy formation in Lithuania.

Though advocacy and their membership interest representation are part of NGDO Platforms' missions, membership fees make a small fraction of their annual income,⁹⁵ thus their very survival depend on the project funding received either from national sources – mostly the bilateral aid program administered by the MFA that supports

⁹² Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 4, 13 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 4, 30 06 2016.

⁹³ Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 4, 13 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

⁹⁴ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 29.

⁹⁵ For example, for the Lithuanian NGDO Platform, income from membership fees, individual donations and other sources in 2013 was ~ 3%, whereas in 2014 it composed of ~ 13%.

awareness raising but not advocacy,⁹⁶ or from the EU-financed projects. Therefore, the Secretariats of the NGDO Platforms are small: for much of their existence, each of them have been working with 1 or 2 part-time staff, 4 at most and only during the Lithuanian EU Presidency (2013–2014). Moreover, up until the end of 2012, the advocacy of both of the NGDO Platforms was coordinated and implemented by their volunteer board members with the paid staff mostly responsible for project administration. By the end of 2012, with the European Commission funded project, the Lithuanian NGDO Platform employed its first policy officer, who took over the coordination of advocacy from the governing board. At the same time, a policy officer in LITDEA was employed for the EU-funded TRIALOG project,⁹⁷ however, here advocacy remained primarily within the responsibilities of the governing board.

Direct EU funding to strengthen NGOs' participation in the policy process during the Lithuanian Presidency to the EU boosted the NGDO Platforms' organizational capacities. Through the organization of events, participation in the political meetings, issuing the position papers, both associations were able to demonstrate their experience in the field, therefore to become more visible and recognized as professional partners by the local and national authorities.⁹⁸ The end of the Presidency grant (mid-2014) meant significant staff reductions and a reliance on smaller Lithuanian bilateral aid project grants. With no specifically devoted resources for advocacy, NGDO Platforms' participation in the policy process became limited to forwarding CONCORD's letters to the MFA and participation in the working groups, ad-hoc statements.

⁹⁶ Moreover, nationally there aren't specific calls to fund advocacy of NGO umbrellas.

⁹⁷ The TRIALOG project was created in 2000 under the auspices of the Austrian NGDO Platform; it ran until 2015 with the aim to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) in the enlarged EU for active engagement in global development. Trialog information, <<http://www.trialog.or.at/>>, 13 06 2016.

⁹⁸ External Project Evaluation Report of the Project "Quality Partnership for Development – EU Presidency Project for the Lithuanian EU Presidency, 2013" (no. DCI-NSA 2013/319-214), p. 13, 17.

To sum up, the NGDO Platforms' unstable income puts a strain on their abilities to qualitatively and continuously engage in the policy process. Nevertheless, EU project funding, dedicated to advocacy, has strengthened their organizational capacities: the employment of policy staff and financing of advocacy activities have significantly increased the frequency of advocacy actions and the range of issues, contributed to the professionalization of policy work and ensured its better coordination within the NGDO community, which was also confirmed by an MFA informant.⁹⁹

The impact of EU funding to NGO operational capacity across ECE countries is ambivalent: though it contributes to advocacy-related capacity building, as a short-term funding, it fails to address the chronic lack of resources and rather stimulates the existing capacities, also prioritizing donor agenda instead of local needs.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, failure by both NGDO Platforms to ensure funding after the EU presidency and maintain the same level of engagement in the political process indicates the short-lived NGDO Platforms' operational capacity improvement, which was brought by EU funding. Furthermore, the period from 2012 to 2014 (see Table No. 1), when NGDO Platforms were funded mostly from the EU project grants, stands out as dominated by the issues related to the EU development cooperation policy and CONCORD's agenda; the limited relevance of which to the Lithuanian foreign aid policy, due to its limited resources and focus on the neighborhood, was noted by the MFA informants.¹⁰¹

4.3. Foreign Donor Assistance

Access to foreign funding and international support could supplement weak NGO capacities, facilitate the influence of NGOs

⁹⁹ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Kutter, Trappmann, p. 58; Börzel, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 4, 30 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

in policymaking by opening up learning opportunities; however, overreliance on foreign donor funding may result in the NGOs' detachment from the grassroots and instead a better responsiveness to foreign donor needs.¹⁰²

The empirical data gathered resonates with studies from the ECE countries indicating that benefits of NGOs participation in European umbrella organizations are mixed. On the one hand, the exposure to European networks and the EU policy agenda through them could contribute to NGO professionalization, increased prestige domestically, acquaintance with higher policy standards on the European level thus bolstering NGOs' position vis-a-vis their national governments. On the other hand, the influence of NGOs from the ECE countries on the political agenda of the European networks is marginal.¹⁰³

Indeed, international contacts established through TRIALOG and CONCORD, attendance of their events helped Lithuanian NGDO Platforms' representatives to better understand the international context of development cooperation, provided with the opportunities to nationally showcase the best foreign practice, especially in the development education area, and as one NGDO representative claimed – accelerated policy reforms.¹⁰⁴ A more systematic NGDO Platforms' advocacy since 2013 and the increased thematic focus on the EU and global issues have been clearly caused by NGDO Platforms' membership to CONCORD and the EU funding for advocacy.

Nonetheless, NGDO Platforms' representatives admit their limited influence in shaping CONCORD's policy agenda¹⁰⁵ and the little relevance of CONCORD's advocated policies in the Lithuanian foreign aid context,¹⁰⁶ which have been also expressed by the MFA

¹⁰² Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 107, 29.

¹⁰³ Pleines H., "Is This the Way to Brussels? CEE Civil Society Involvement in EU Governance," *Acta Politica*, 2010, Vol. 45, 1/2, p. 229–246; Kutter, Trappmann, p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 4, 13 06 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 5, 05 07 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 3, 10 06 2016; Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 4, 13 06 2016.

informants.¹⁰⁷ Thus, we may conclude that EU funding and the access to European networks strengthened the advocacy capacities of the NGDO Platforms; however, with the limited abilities of the NGDO Platforms to adapt the European network policies to the national context, foreign donor assistance-caused capacity enhancement remains limited to the EU foreign aid policy agenda.

4.4. Attitudes and Administrative Capacities of the State Actors

Lastly, the influence of NGDOs on foreign aid policy depends on the access they have to the policy process and the concentration of authority over policymaking in the issue area.¹⁰⁸ The former refers to the government openness to NGOs consultation, existence of formal and informal procedures to channel NGO inputs to the policy process with the nature and level of access of conditioning NGDOs' influence and the strategies used.¹⁰⁹ Whereas the concentration of authority concerns domestic institutional arrangements, where NGDOs have "the best prospects for advancing pro-poor policies when institutional setting in which policymaking takes place is both centralized and permeable to influence."¹¹⁰

The Lithuanian MFA coordinates foreign aid policy:¹¹¹ the MFA Development Cooperation department initiates policy,¹¹² but the final policy outcome is affected by the decision-making processes within the MFA, other executive and legislative institutions as assigned by

¹⁰⁷ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Lundsgaarde, pp. 32–33.

¹⁰⁹ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, pp. 32–33.

¹¹⁰ Lundsgaarde, p. 35.

¹¹¹ Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo ir humanitarinės pagalbos įstatymas [Law on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance of the Republic of Lithuania], Nr. XII-311, Vilnius, 2013 m. gegužės 16 d.

¹¹² Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016.

the national legislation.¹¹³ Empirical data confirms the participation of multiple institutions and their varied preferences for the Lithuanian foreign aid policy,¹¹⁴ and though NGDO Platforms target various government agencies, due to the scope of this article, the government attitudes analysis is restricted to those within the MFA Development Cooperation department.

Until the registration of the NGDO Platform in 2007, the relationship between the NGDOs and the MFA representatives was marked by mistrust on capacity and expertise of NGOs, also undermined by frequent MFA staff changes and NGDO rivalry.¹¹⁵ The dialogue has been gradually improving owing to several facilitating factors, identified by both the NGDOs and the MFA representatives. Firstly, the NGDO Platforms' capacity increase, driven by the EESC, enjoying good working relations with the MFA and the policy staff with relevant educational background having joined the Lithuanian NGDO Platform, also the NGDO Platforms' more unified, collective demands.¹¹⁶ Leadership change at the NGDO Platforms' and the MFA Development Cooperation department has also facilitated a more collaborative relationship.¹¹⁷

Simultaneously, legal documents reflect the gradually changing attitudes toward NGDOs' participation in the policy process: Policy Directions for 2006–2010 referred to NGOs as implementers of foreign aid policy,¹¹⁸ in the Directions for 2011–2012, the

¹¹³ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 31.

¹¹⁴ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 4, 30 06 2016.

¹¹⁵ Kool, p. 6; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 2, 25 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 3, 26 05 2016.

¹¹⁶ Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 3, 10 06 2016; Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 4, 13 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

¹¹⁷ Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 3, 10 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 4, 30 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

¹¹⁸ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas „Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo 2006–2010 metų politikos nuostatų patvirtinimo“ [Resolution on the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy Directions for the Period from 2006 to 2010], Nr. 561, Vilnius, 2006 m. birželio 8 d.

consulting of NGOs in an aid priority setting was mentioned as an aid effectiveness measure.¹¹⁹ Whereas with the Law coming into the force in 2013, the NGDO Platforms were formally included into the policy formation process indicating high access to the policy-making process. Consequently, a representative of each of the NGDO Platforms was included in the National Commission, set up in 2007 to ensure policy coherence and the coordination of development cooperation policy.¹²⁰ The effectiveness of this structure to channel the NGDOs' opinion to the policy process, however, could be questioned as it mainly serves as a forum to present development cooperation activities carried out by the members of the National Commission and their next year plans.¹²¹ Thus, informal meetings, official letters, NGDO Platforms' public statements and invitations of government representatives to the NGDOs public events to date

¹¹⁹ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas „Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo 2011–2012 metų politikos nuostatų patvirtinimo“ [Resolution on the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy Directions for the Period from 2011 to 2012], Nr. 10, Vilnius, 2011 m. sausio 12 d.

¹²⁰ Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Lietuvos Respublikos vystomojo bendradarbiavimo ir humanitarinės pagalbos įstatymas [Law on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance of the Republic of Lithuania], Nr. XII-311, Vilnius, 2013 m. gegužės 16 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas „Dėl Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos sudarymo ir jos nuostatų patvirtinimo“ [Resolution on the Establishment of the National Development Cooperation Commission and Its Regulations], Nr. 42, Vilnius, 2014 m. sausio 15 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, nutarimas „Dėl Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos sudarymo ir jos nuostatų patvirtinimo“ [Resolution on the Establishment of the National Development Cooperation Commission and Its Regulations], Nr. 1091, Vilnius, 2007 m. spalio 10 d.

¹²¹ Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos posėdžio protokolas, Nr. 1 [The Minutes of the National Development Cooperation Commission's Meeting, No. 1], Vilnius, 2014 m. birželio 5 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos posėdžio protokolas, Nr. 2 [The Minutes of the National Development Cooperation Commission's Meeting, No. 2], Vilnius, 2014 m. gruodžio 2 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos posėdžio protokolas [The Minutes of the National Development Cooperation Commission's Meeting, No. 1], Nr. 1, Vilnius, 2015 m. gegužės 7 d.; Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija, Nacionalinės vystomojo bendradarbiavimo komisijos posėdžio protokolas, Nr. 2 [The Minutes of the National Development Cooperation Commission's Meeting, No. 2], Vilnius, 2015 m. gruodžio 22 d.

continue to be among the main means for participation in the foreign aid policymaking.

Though confirming the collaborative relationship between the MFA and the NGDO Platforms and their growing recognition in the policy formation, interview data indicates that NGDO Platforms are primarily viewed as awareness raising and development project implementers by the MFA.¹²² The NGDO Platforms' policy role is constrained by the lack of development cooperation experience and also little relevance of the advocated policy asks to the Lithuanian bilateral foreign aid policy rather reflecting European networks' and the EU development cooperation policy agenda,¹²³ Lithuanian influence, to which the key MFA informants feel is limited. Finally, when asked about the examples of the NGDO Platforms' influence to the policy process, interviewees mentioned minor policy changes, such as an increased funding to development education and awareness raising, NGDO Platforms' comments to policy documents, bilateral aid priorities, contributions to the national input on the EU Foreign Affairs Councils.¹²⁴

Conclusions

Since 2004, when Lithuania became a donor country, its foreign aid policy has been gradually changing: since 2013, this policy area is regulated by the Law, global and EU development cooperation agendas are better reflected in the policy documents, the ODA has been gradually increasing. Moreover, the circle of domestic policy actors has widened, recognizing and including the Lithuanian NGDO

¹²² Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016; Interview with the Lithuanian NGDO representative no. 1, 07 08 2015.

¹²³ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

¹²⁴ Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 1, 13 05 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 4, 30 06 2016; Interview with the key informant from the MFA no. 5, 21 07 2016.

Platforms as sector representatives in the policy process. Szent-Ivanyi and Lightfoot¹²⁵ argue that foreign aid policy changes are the result of a bureaucratic negotiation game within the government, which is influenced by the outside pressures from the international and domestic actors aiming to modify policy outcomes, therefore the advanced understanding of NGDO capabilities allows to better comprehend the country's foreign aid chosen policy path. Given the incremental Lithuanian foreign aid policy changes in over a decade and the well-documented general weakness of the NGO sector in the post-Communist countries,¹²⁶ the data collected has confirmed the limited influence of small Lithuanian NGDOs' sector to the national foreign aid policymaking. By providing an empirically rich account on how Lithuanian NGDO Platforms, as sector representatives, advocate for policy change and their characteristics, the study aimed to reveal what are the mutually reinforcing constraining factors.

In conclusion, the analysis of structure and power relations among the NGDOs indicated that the existence of two NGDO Platforms in Lithuania often referred in the literature as weakening the sector¹²⁷ plays an increasingly less negative role. The NGDO sector continues to mature with subsiding conflicts within and between the NGDO Platforms, a better coordination of the NGDOs' views, increasing membership engagement and professionalization of NGDO Platforms' advocacy work. Foreign donor, in particular the EU, assistance in enabling to employ policy staff and finance advocacy activities, especially during the Lithuanian EU presidency, has strengthened the organizational capacities of the NGDO Platforms and helped increase the frequency of advocacy actions. It also enabled a more active participation in the international learning alliances, mainly through CONCORD, consequently widening the thematic scope of the NGDO Platforms' advocacy to the EU and global issues. Finally, the legal basis for NGDO Platforms' participation in the foreign aid

¹²⁵ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015.

¹²⁶ See Pleines, p. 230.

¹²⁷ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, p. 31; Andrespok, Kasekamp, pp. 117–130.

policy formation is widening, the attitudes of MFA officials toward the NGOs participation are more welcoming, and, nonetheless, the success of collaboration continues to be dependent on informal, personal relations.

Nonetheless, the interplay of other factors, such as the Lithuanian NGO sector's lack of specific development expertise – therefore a limited membership interest to participate in shaping the NGO Platforms' advocacy, the organizational capacities constrained by the dependency on irregular EU funding, all reduce the advocacy capacities of NGO Platforms. It also forces the NGO Platforms to mostly mimic CONCORD's policy agenda, which, given the disparity between the Lithuanian and the EU development cooperation policies, is often found irrelevant for the national foreign aid policy agenda by the government actors.

Such interplay of mutually reinforcing factors, indeed, explains the weakness of the Lithuanian NGO sector in influencing the government decisions over foreign aid. This case study, however, is not unusual in the ECE countries context – Polish and Slovak NGO Platforms face similar challenges in securing the EU funding or ensuring strong collaboration with the government.¹²⁸ In a wider sense, this study once again indicates the continuous underlying challenges for the civil society participation in the ECE countries' public policymaking. It draws the attention to the “lack of sustainable income, of formalised interactions with the state and of grassroots support”¹²⁹ as well as the ambivalent EU accession legacy plaguing the civil society structures and consequently undermining a more open and nationally relevant/authentic public policy decision-making.

¹²⁸ Szent-Ivanyi, Lightfoot, 2015, pp. 130–131.

¹²⁹ Kutter, Trappmann, p. 41.

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SUMMARY

TOO WEAK TO INFLUENCE? A CASE STUDY OF THE LITHUANIAN NGDOs IN FOREIGN AID POLICY MAKING

For the East Central European Countries (ECE), the membership in the European Union also meant an entry into the foreign aid donor community. To understand the international development policy change in over a decade and a policy divergence among the ECE countries that have started from relatively similar situations, this article offers the case study of Lithuania and the analysis of domestic policy actors, namely the non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) as one of the policy change facilitating factors. It provides an empirically-rich account of how Lithuanian NGDOs participate in the national foreign aid policymaking and explains factors that affect Lithuanian NGDOs' capacity to influence government decisions.

Szent-Ivanyi's and Lightfoot's theoretical model guided the analysis of the Lithuanian NGDOs umbrella organisations composition and power relations, their organizational capacities, foreign donor assistance and attitudes of the state actors.

The article concludes the limited, yet increasing Lithuanian NGDOs' role in shaping Lithuanian foreign aid policies, as undermined as they are by the chronic lack of resources to fund advocacy from national sources and the dependency on the EU project-based funding. Consequently, these circumstances constrain the NGDO Platforms' focus mostly on the EU development agenda and therefore mimic the European NGO networks' policy agenda. The lack of capacities among the NGDOs to adapt a European policy agenda to the national foreign aid policy reality makes it of limited relevance to the policy makers domestically.