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Balázs Szent-Iványi

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Abstract: The paper examines the impact of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on the emerging foreign aid policies of the Central and Eastern European (CEEs) countries. The Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the DAC in 2013, and the committee has aimed to socialise them into the norms of the international development system. Generally, however, there is little evidence of impact due to the soft nature of the DAC's policy recommendations, and the fact that the committee, reacting to the challenges to its legitimacy from non-Western donors, has become much less demanding towards potential members than in the past. The paper, however, argues that one must examine the processes of how the norm and policy recommendations of the DAC are mediated domestically. The case of the Czech Republic's reforms in its foreign aid policy between 2007 and 2010 shows that domestic actors can use the OECD strategically to build support for their own cause and thus achieve seemingly difficult policy reform.

Keywords: OECD DAC, foreign aid policy, development assistance, EU, Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been a key point of reference in terms of specific policies for the Central and Eastern European (CEEs) countries in the past decades. Since the first countries from the region (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) joined the organization in the mid-1990s, the OECD has provided forums for learning and exchanging ideas on norms and policies in several areas. Joining the OECD was seen as an extremely important milestone for these countries on their journeys towards Euro-Atlantic integration. While the European Union (EU)

undoubtedly became a much more important source of norm and policy learning for these countries, the impact of the OECD should not be underestimated. This paper investigates the role of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in shaping the international development policies of its CEE members. The DAC is the main forum of coordination and policy formulation for donors of foreign aid. The CEEs have on numerous occasions acknowledged the central role it had in shaping their international development policies. The CEEs emerged as donors of foreign aid after the turn of the Millennium, in the run-up to their accession to the EU, and the literature has generally focused on investigating the role the EU had in this process (see e.g. Lightfoot, 2010; Horký, 2011; Timofejevs Henriksson, 2013; Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi, 2014; Horký-Hluchán and Lightfoot, 2015). However, it can be reasonably argued that the OECD DAC also played role, and it is thus surprising that it has not received more scholarly attention. While the DAC did not have the same kind of leverage over the CEEs as the EU did due to its accession conditionality, and methodologically it is difficult to separate the influence of the EU from that of the DAC, as they both promote similar norms and policies, there is at least some evidence of the DAC's influence on CEEs' foreign aid policies.

The paper uses the literature on international socialization to examine when an organization like the OECD DAC can have an impact on international development policies. To this end it employs the case of the Czech Republic's reforms of its international development system between 2007 and 2011 as an illustration. It uses existing empirical material, based mainly on interviews with development policy decision makers and practitioners in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, collected by the author with various co-authors between 2008 and 2013. These data collection rounds mainly focused on understanding external influence of CEE development policies, and have mainly focused on capacity building assistance to these new donors (see Szent-Iványi and Tétényi, 2013), and the impacts of the EU (Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi, 2014). The impact of the OECD has received some attention in Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot (2015), but this paper goes beyond that and provides a more comprehensive analysis. Following this brief introduction, the paper discusses the theory of international socialization and the role of international organizations in spreading norms and policies. This is followed by a discussion of

the OECD DAC and the interactions it has had with the CEEs. The subsequent section presents the Czech case. Brief conclusions follow.

1 Socialization in international relations

Examining how international organizations create and promote norms and policies has been an important theme in the international relations literature (see e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Gilardi, 2012). Several mechanisms have been put forward to explain these processes, which can be grouped into rationalist and constructivist approaches. Rationalists generally argue that states adopt norms when they perceive this to be in their best interest, based on a calculation of costs and benefits. This can often involve conditionality, such as the accession criteria formulated by the EU towards the CEE accession countries. But, it can also involve other mechanisms, such as competition, or simply learning lessons from other countries (Gilardi, 2012). Constructivist explanations on the other hand focus on how states are socialised into adopting certain norms through interactions with the organization, their peers, or norm entrepreneurs such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks. In the constructivist interpretation, states are driven by a logic of appropriateness as opposed to a logic of consequences (Checkel, 2005), and the ideal outcome of the socialization process is that states become convinced that the norms promoted by the organization constitute the only acceptable way of behaviour.

Although rationalist and constructivist approaches to international socialization are based on different paradigms within international relations, scholars have argued that they should be seen as complementary explanations (see e.g. Checkel and Zürn, 2005). For example, short term non-compliance may be based on the rational calculations of states, but that does not rule out long term, less visible socialization processes which can lead to change in the future. Socialization can potentially change the interests of states in the long term.

In areas where there are no legally binding international rules, such as the realm of international development, rationalist arguments can often be of little explanatory power, especially in cases when states comply with the recommendations of international organizations, despite the lack of clear net benefits. In international development,

states face little consequences for non-compliance beyond the costs of reputational damage. However, even reputational damage can be minor, as development is generally not seen as a topic of high salience for governments and publics. Non-conforming to norms and policy recommendations related to foreign aid rarely leads to headline news, as opposed, for example, to the area of human rights. The benefits of compliance can also be seen as relatively small, and reputational, e.g. the country could portray itself as a globally responsible actor, but again this may not be a priority for many governments, especially if domestic constituencies for more and effective foreign aid are weak. This then leaves socialization as the dominant explanatory factor (cf. Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi, 2014). Several variables have been identified which can explain the success or failure of socialization processes, which relate to the frequency and nature of interactions between the state and the norm-promoting international organization, how the promoted norms resonate with domestically accepted norms, or the presence and activities of norm entrepreneurs (see Sedelmeier, 2011).

An often overlooked variable in determining whether norms promoted by international organizations are adopted or not, both in the rationalist and the constructivist traditions, is the domestic mediation process. States are not unitary actors, but are composed of different interest and identity groups, and even the government is made up of politicians, parties and bureaucracies with potentially differing world views, perceptions, and motivations. Adopting norms or policies promoted by an international organization may have different impacts on different actors, or may resonate differently with each of the groups. NGOs for examples may be more committed to adopting certain international development norms than the wider population or the government. Officials in a development agency or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may be deep believers in increasing the effectiveness of foreign aid or maintaining the reputation of a country, but this may not be the case for other ministries. They may also have a difficult time convincing politicians, who are mostly assumed to be interested in re-election. Implementing many of the policies and norms recommended by the OECD DAC (discussed in the following section) also has important distributional consequences, thus creating winners and losers, and, as such, groups who are interested in blocking reform. The bottom line is that when attempting to understand the impact of international

organizations on the norms nation states subscribe to or the policies they pursue, one must pay attention to the domestic dynamics within the countries, as groups bargain with each other, or attempt to socialise each other into accepting certain norms.

2. The OECD DAC

The OECD's main activity is described as the generation and sharing of innovative policy ideas, norms and solutions (Marcussen, 2004), and this is exactly what the DAC does. The DAC dates back to 1960, and was established with the main goal of creating accurate and comparable statistics across donors on foreign aid. To this end, the committee adopted the definition of official development assistance (ODA) in 1969, which has remained the main statistical measure of foreign aid to this day. To support the DAC's work, a secretariat was also created within the OECD secretariat in the early 1960s, which gradually evolved into the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD).

The DAC's activities and mandate broadened throughout the years beyond the issue of harmonising data reporting, and is today seen as the main coordinating body among donors of foreign aid (Manning, 2008). It provides a forum for an exchange of ideas and practices, promotes the adoption of effective aid policies, and monitors the policies of its members in terms of how they measure up to what is seen as effective practice. Throughout the past decades, the DAC has been instrumental in developing the norms of the international development system. It played a key role in the formulating a proposal which later became the Millennium Development Goals (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme, 2011; Sumner and Mallet, 2013), and has championed the global aid effectiveness agenda, leading to important international declarations like the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). The DAC sees effective aid policies as those which promote development and poverty reduction in the aid receiving countries, as opposed to practices which put donor interests to the fore. As such, the DAC has been at the forefront of policy recommendations relating to decreasing the usage of tied aid (i.e. funding given to a developing country, but tied to procurement from the donor country); increasing coordination between donors; building partnerships between actors; increasing the accountability of do-

nors and recipients; and increasing donor transparency. This list is by no means exhaustive, and the annual Development Cooperation Reports published by the DAC give a good overview of the key policies and norms (see for example OECD, 2015).

The OECD members are not automatically members of the DAC, but need to fulfil additional criteria: the amount of aid they provide annually must reach 0.2% of their gross national income or at least 100 million dollars, and they must undergo an initial peer review, which assesses whether their institutional structures meet certain, vaguely formulated, criteria. They must also commit themselves to reporting their statistics on foreign aid in line with the requirements of the DAC's Creditor Reporting System, as well as pledge to meet some of the norms of the DAC, such as untying their aid from exports (OECD, 2016a). The DAC however aims to remain open and transparent towards non-members as well: the six OECD countries which have thus far not applied for DAC membership (Chile, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, and Turkey), participate fully in the meetings of the DAC, although they do not vote. A number of international development organizations, such as the World Bank, also participate in the meetings of the DAC as observers, but the European Union is full member in its own right.

The DAC has no legal or coercive means to force countries to implement the norms and policies it promotes. As opposed to other committees of the OECD, it does not prepare or facilitate the negotiation of international treaties, and must thus find other ways to promote compliance. As a solution to this, the DAC has developed one of the most systematic monitoring practices among the committees of the OECD. This latter activity is carried out through the annual reports mentioned above. These provide data for each member, allowing easy comparison and identification of good and bad performers. More importantly, however, the DAC has developed a system of periodic peer reviews on the foreign aid activities of its members (Pagani, 2002). Each member is reviewed every five years by a team consisting of experts from two other member states and staff from the DCD. These reviews point out where a given country falls short of its commitments and implementation of the norms of international development. They also include specific recommendations for that country which should be implemented before the next review is due. In es-

sence, these peer reviews can be seen as examples of peer pressure that employ the mechanism of naming and shaming, and rely on the power of publicity to promote norm adoption. According to Mahon and McBride (2006: 8), benchmarks and reviews of the OECD permit cross-national comparison and ranking. The resulting 'league tables' allow an assessment of each country's relative performance and thus put pressure on the 'laggards' to improve. While the DAC peer reviews have been prone to diplomatic softening, they are none the less seen as providing accurate diagnoses of the state of development policies in the member states' (Liverani and Lundgren, 2007).

There has been some scholarly literature on how effective this pressure and specifically the mechanisms of naming and shaming at the DAC have been. In an early study, Mosely (1985: 378) argued that the DAC played an important role in pushing countries to maintain aid levels in times of crisis, but also highlighting the role the DAC played in increasing Japanese aid in the 1970s. Round and Odebokum (2004) argued that aid provided by a donor is positively correlated with the aid efforts of other donors, and thus peer pressure can be meaningful. Lim (2012) concluded that adherence to the norms and policies of the DAC is determined by domestic institutional structures, which relates closely to the concept of domestic mediation outlined in the previous section. Variables related to these can explain why some countries implement DAC recommendations while others do not. Having a powerful domestic agency which champions implementation, and has the resources and creativity to convince (or coerce) other actors is key to understanding compliance. The ability to create coalitions for reform is also an instrumental factor. In institutional structures which are fragmented and lack a strong central player, the likelihood of reform remains low. These are important insights for understanding the role of the DAC in the CEE region, a topic the paper turns to next.

3. The CEE countries and the DAC

In the past decade, the DAC has been facing an important challenge to its legitimacy. The rise of non-Western donors, like China, India, Brazil or many Arab states has raised the question of to what extent the DAC's membership is representative of the donors of foreign aid (Rowlands, 2012). Many of these new donors have openly

expressed scepticism about the principles promoted by the DAC, viewing them as contradictory to their vision of development cooperation (see Bräutigam, 2011 or Eyben, 2012 for more details). The new donors have championed the creation of a rival to the DAC in 2007, i.e. the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) established under the auspices of the UN's Economic and Social Council. Until now, the DCF has proved to be little more than a talk-shop with few visible activities (see Verschaeve and Orbie, 2015 for more details). None the less, there is clear evidence that the DAC may be losing its relevance as the main coordinating body of foreign aid donors.

Sensing the challenges to its legitimacy, the DAC has made clear attempts to open towards the new donors and engage them either in its activities or at least in some form of 'dialogue.' There has also been a clear 'expansion frenzy' in the past years, as the DAC admitted six new members in just three years (more than in the previous 20 together!), with Korea joining in 2010, and the Czech Republic, Iceland, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia in 2013 (OECD, 2013). Slovenia and Slovakia did not even meet the requirement of minimum aid spending, but were nevertheless allowed to join the committee. The DAC has also created a new role, that of 'participant,' for the United Arab Emirates (OECD, 2016b). These examples suggest that the DAC is clearly on a quest to increase support for its activities, demonstrate its continued relevance, and therefore ensure its survival.

The relationships between the DAC and the CEEs however go back much earlier. In fact, the CEEs began engaging with the DAC already during the creation of their new international development policies after the turn of the Millennium, and have all expressed their desires to eventually join the DAC. During this early period, the DAC played a role in helping these countries develop systems for recording and reporting their statistics on ODA. Interestingly however, the CEEs received much more substantial capacity building assistance in this regard from organizations other than the DAC, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the Canadian International Development Agency (see Szent-Iványi and Tétényi, 2013). The DAC/DCD was unable to provide substantial funding for such capacity development activities as it is not a donor organization, and thus most of its rules on reporting foreign aid were transferred to the CEE countries indirectly through DAC members or international or-

ganizations already using these rules. The CEE countries adopted the ODA reporting rules quickly and began reporting their aid activities along these criteria soon after the turn of the Millennium.

The DAC involved the CEE countries as observers of its work, providing a forum for learning for the participating government officials. There was however a general feeling among these officials, that while seeing what the DAC and its members do is interesting, it is not really relevant for them as they are so different than the 'established, Western donors.' Foreign aid policies in the CEE countries were much smaller in their scope, capacities, and even ambitions than those in most DAC members. Due to these significant differences many CEE officials perceived that they do not have much to learn in the DAC. Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot (2015: 82-104) have argued that the CEE countries also had little capacities to meaningfully take part in the work of the DAC. Development departments in Ministries of Foreign Affairs were rather small and characterized by frequent staff turnover, and thus it was impossible for these agencies to devote the necessary time and attention to meaningful engagement with the DAC. Thus, the socialization impact of the DAC, in general, was likely to have been small for most of the years after 2004, due to the fact that the norms and policies it promoted had little resonance with the ones officials in the CEEs thought relevant, and that the interactions were not particularly dense or deep.

The DAC had the chance to impose conditionality and have a more direct impact on the CEEs with its membership criteria. However, as shown by Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot (2015: 82-104), the application of this conditionality was not really strict or consistent. As mentioned above, the DAC had strong incentives to admit new members, and in practice it seemed rather relaxed about its own admission criteria. Indeed, Slovenia and Slovakia were admitted as members without meeting the quantitative benchmarks. Hungary would have been allowed to join without an initial review, although it has decided not to apply for membership. The DAC carried out initial 'special reviews' on the Czech Republic (2007), Poland (2010), Slovenia and Slovakia (both in 2011), but it was not really clear what these countries needed to implement from the recommendations in these reviews in order to become members. While the Czech Republic clearly acted on some of the recommendations in the review, as discussed in the following

section, the actions of the other three countries were more ambiguous. Poland actually viewed the final version of the review with some degree of hostility, as it was expecting more praise and less criticism (see Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot, 2015: 99). Despite these issues, all four countries were admitted as full members in 2013. Why did the Czech Republic act on a good portion of the DAC's recommendations, while the other countries did not? The following section focuses on explaining this, and argues that the answer lies in the domestic mediation process of DAC socialization pressures in the Czech Republic.

4. Case study: The DAC and the transformation of Czech international development policy¹

The DAC special review on the Czech Republic (OECD, 2007) pointed out, among other issues, that the institutional set-up of Czech aid delivery was highly fragmented, and in need of centralization. Most ministries had some degree of responsibility in planning and implementing the country's international development policy, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs playing a relatively weak coordinating role, and disposing of roughly 25% of the country's aid budget. This meant that the small resources that the Czech Republic devoted to development aid were fragmented across several actors, all with slightly different interests and understandings of what development is, resulting in very small individual projects without any identifiable development impacts. Fragmentation also meant that it was very difficult to guide the activities of the individual actors, making most of Czech foreign aid seem ad hoc and lacking any strategic vision.

The DAC special review however argued that the "Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have sole authority over development co-operation policy, management and implementation" (OECD, 2007: 19). It also listed a number of recommendations related to increasing Czech aid and making it more effective. Clearly, implementing most of these recommendations would have significantly strengthened the MFA by centralizing the aid budget under its control, while simultaneously hurting other ministries, which would as a consequence lose a part of their budgets. The MFA, and the department responsible for international development within it, would have been the only clear winner of the reform, and a number of other ministries, including the highly

influential Ministry of Finance, would have ended up likely losers of implementing the DAC's recommendations. Putting these recommendations into practice was thus seen as rather slim. Indeed, other CEEs, including Poland and Hungary, are facing similar situations, and despite similar recommendations, they have not really addressed the problems of fragmentation in their aid delivery structures to this day.

This situation clearly points to the importance of the domestic mediation process when attempting to understand the compliance with OECD DAC norms and policy recommendations. Using a rationalist argument, the different domestic actors had different utility functions and thus different interests. The constructivist argument would however argue that the recommendations of the DAC resonated with the MFA, which may have already been socialised by the committee, but not with the views of other actors, including potentially more powerful ministries. As financial resources were clearly at stake here for the different ministries, allowing cost-benefit analyses, the rationalist approach probably has better explanatory power than the constructivist argument.

The department responsible for international development within the MFA engaged in coalition building with other actors to increase support for reform. The need for reform, from the department's perspective, was apparent even before the DAC review was published, and the department worked closely with the DAC on the report in order to ensure that the proposed recommendations, while sound from an aid effectiveness point of view, also reflected the its interests in terms of larger authority and budget. Indeed, it was the MFA which turned to the DAC in September 2006 and requested the review (OECD, 2007: 5). Once the report was published, the department was able to frame it towards the government as an unbiased, external opinion on how the government should reform the policy area. The Czech Republic, being the first country to join the OECD from the CEE region in 1995, ahead of Poland and Hungary, always seemed to value OECD advice slightly more than other countries in the region. According to analysts, the DAC special review played a key role in convincing the wider government that reform is necessary (see e.g. Sládková, 2011).

The MFA however also needed domestic allies to further reform. While successfully portraying its own interests in terms of credible international recommendations was a good start, it would have probably

not been enough to sustain reform. The Czech community of NGOs working in the field of foreign aid, led by their advocacy association, the Czech Forum for Development Co-operation (FoRS), proved to be a natural ally in this process. While the MFA and NGOs have often had a confrontational relationship in the past, with the NGOs being highly active watchdogs of the MFA's activities, the NGOs realised that reform is in their interest as well. First, they have normatively committed themselves to increasing the effectiveness of Czech development policy. Second, they realised that centralizing funds at the MFA could potentially make foreign aid policy more transparent, and increase their own access to funding. In practice, the alliance between the MFA and the NGOs meant that in their advocacy work, the NGOs began formulating demands towards the government similar to those in the DAC's special review (see e.g. CONCORD, 2007: 33), and refrained themselves from criticizing aspects of the MFAs work which could weaken the Ministry's position towards other governments actors.

The development NGO community proved to be a powerful ally for the MFA. Not only did Czech NGOs have stronger capacities than similar organizations in the other CEEs countries, the region's largest development NGO, People in Need, was also from the Czech Republic (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot, 2014). This organization had strong political connections, partly due to the fact that it had important relief and social care activities within the Czech Republic, but also because its chairman, Šimon Pánek, was a student opposition leader during the Velvet revolution, who had excellent personal connections with many in the political elites. Many have cited his informal lobbying activities in support of adopting the DAC's recommendations as key elements of pushing the reform through.

The coalition of the OECD, the MFA and the NGO community was powerful enough to push through and sustain reform. In 2007, the Government accepted resolution number 1070/2007, which spelt out the main tasks for reforming the country's international development system. This included gradually shifting most international development projects to the MFA through a three-year transition period, and line ministries phasing out their activities in the field. The Czech Development Agency was created under the MFA to act as the main body responsible for implementing international development projects. In

2010, the Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid was accepted by the Parliament, which centralised full responsibility for decision making to the MFA, and created a single strategic vision for Czech development policy in terms of poverty reduction. Some line ministries, most notably the Ministry of Finance, retained some authority and funds in foreign aid policy, but the system has clearly left behind its highly fragmented past.

The brief case study of the 'transformation' of Czech international development policy highlights the impact of the OECD. A clear lesson from it is that proposing innovative and effective norms and policies alone is not enough to guarantee implementation, as there needs to be a domestic champion who is able to promote implementation.

Conclusions

The objective of this paper was to briefly assess the role of the OECD's DAC in shaping the foreign aid policies of the CEEs. The conclusion is that the DAC, while often referred to by the CEEs' policy-makers as a key point of reference, has so far failed to have a strong impact in the region. The DAC had the opportunity to apply conditionality to the countries in the region when admitting them as full members, but it squandered this due to its own motivations aimed at consolidating its legitimacy and proving its relevance as the main forum for representing foreign aid donors. None the less, the paper has also shown that the DAC can have an impact when the domestic conditions are right, as in the case of the Czech Republic.

Now that many of the CEEs have become full members of the DAC, it is possible to speculate whether the dynamics of socialization will change, making the CEEs adopt more of the norms and policy recommendations originating from the Committee. There are two reasons on why pessimism in this regard is warranted. First, there is a great variation in the degree of compliance with DAC norms among earlier members as well. Their experience has shown that if a country does not want to implement certain recommendations, then the DAC cannot force it. Second, membership of the CEEs will not change all that much, as they have been fully participating in DAC meetings well before their accession. On the other hand, as members, the CEEs will now be subject to regular peer reviews and much tighter scrutiny of

their aid policies than before. This might stimulate some change, provided of course that there are domestic actors willing to promote implementation of the DAC recommendations.

Endnotes

- 1 This section builds on more detailed analyses in Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot (2014; 2015).

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