

IFP CAPACITY-BUILDING AND TRAINING CLUSTER
COUNTRY CASE STUDY: BULGARIA

BULGARIAN OFFICIAL
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
AND PEACEBUILDING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper aims to provide an overview and analysis of Bulgaria's existing policies and practices, as well as future plans regarding official development assistance (ODA) priorities, plans and activities related to peacebuilding. A leading goal in the research and writing of this paper has been to provide a basis and direction for improving the way ODA and peacebuilding funds are planned and spent, so as to generate the maximum possible impact in beneficiary countries and to enhance knowledge of ODA and Bulgarian government ODA spending within Bulgarian society.

The policy framework for Bulgaria's international development cooperation¹ is established in *Bulgaria's Policy on Participation in International Development Cooperation: Concept Paper*, adopted in 2007. It sets out the main geographic and thematic priorities for Bulgaria's development assistance, and indicates that Bulgaria has been heavily influenced by the international ODA framework and particularly by the EU approach to development assistance. Bulgaria acceded to the EU in January 2007 and, while still a recipient of EU assistance, now plays a role as a donor in line with EU development assistance commitments.

Bulgarian political documents do not use the term "peacebuilding". The author of this report will therefore analyse the government's policies and actions in order to 'identify, establish and support structures for strengthening and consolidating peace'.² The 2007 concept paper does allude to activities that can be defined as "peacebuilding", even if they are not specifically referred to as such. For example, it refers to support of security and post-conflict rehabilitation. However, the main obstacle to developing Bulgaria's contribution to peacebuilding is the absence of a clear peacebuilding definition or strategy. Whilst some peace-related activities are referred to in the policy papers regarding ODA, most are seen as part of Bulgaria's peacekeeping commitments, leading to institutional and public confusion as to what peacebuilding means, what activities are associated with it and how it is funded. This confusion is exacerbated by a lack of publicly available information from relevant ministries.

Analysis of existing public opinion polls and other documents in the area of ODA reveals an overwhelming lacuna in public and institutional knowledge regarding the role of Bulgaria in development cooperation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts in "third countries" (i.e. outside of the EU). In fact, over 70 percent of prospective ODA project stakeholders within the country are completely unaware that Bulgaria is a donor country, as evidenced by the only public opinion poll conducted on this subject.³

1 It is essential to set out terminological differences in the Bulgarian context and political documents. Bulgarian policy papers use the term 'international cooperation for development' for ODA and related activities. In media publications, the term 'official aid for development' is often used interchangeably with 'international cooperation with development'. In the Bulgarian context, international cooperation for development includes: 'expenses of the donor countries for supporting developing countries, technical cooperation, forgiveness of debts not provided as official cooperation for development, humanitarian aid in emergency situations and related administrative expenses'. As long as this definition is based on, and correlates with, the ODA definition provided by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the term ODA has been used in this paper. For further information, see archive of Radio Bulgaria, at http://www.bnr.bg/RadioBulgaria/Emission_English/; www.dnevnik.bg, accessed 5th August 2008 which includes the following key document: UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). *Bulgaria's Policy on Participation in International Development Cooperation: Concept Paper*. Sofia, p.5. English version available at http://www.mfa.bg/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=8688&Itemid=453.

2 This extract was taken from the following definition of 'peacebuilding' used and provided by International Alert (January 2007). 'The concept of peacebuilding embodies a range of actions to identify, establish and support structures for strengthening and consolidating peace. Those actions need to be used and integrated so as to help address underlying drivers of conflict. It is as relevant to societies vulnerable to violent conflict and instability as those already suffering from violence. Whether started before, after or during the eruption of conflict, peacebuilding must be seen as a long-term exercise to change structures, attitudes and behaviours'. International Alert, *Initiative for Peacebuilding Work Plan*, p.19.

3 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (January 2007). *Bulgaria: Beyond the Facts*, Issue 24 – Special Edition. Sofia, Bulgaria. p.17. Available at <http://www.undp.bg/publications.php?id=92>.

Additionally, the review of stakeholder groups leaves the impression that there is a lack of architecture and dialogue mechanisms for management of ODA activities.⁴ On the one hand, governmental institutions disagree about procedures for discussing issues related to development assistance and even about the implementation of concrete projects and activities. There are currently two expert groups, for example, that are constituted for similar roles – one is associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and one with the Council of Ministers. Although the groups consist of many of the same people, they function separately and there is an obvious overlapping and/or duplication of activities and functions, which causes tension between the two bodies.⁵

On the other hand, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) participate in the process of ODA management and planning through the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform, a non-governmental development organisations' (NGDO)⁶ platform established with international support. Yet, for the most part, organisations (and citizens) remain completely isolated from the planning and discussion of ODA. The dialogue between the NGDO platform and government representatives remains limited, and involves insufficient participation from the organisations themselves. The platform itself has limited contacts outside the current members, which is also due to a lack of administrative capacity (the NGDO platform does not have a secretary, paid staff, nor office or communication allowances).

Awareness of gender issues within the peacebuilding context is also somewhat superficial and gender sensitivity could not be identified at the programming level. Transitional justice and human security issues have only a limited presence in official statements of Bulgarian political representatives and the strategic documents reviewed for the purpose of this research. However, it is hoped that future detailed annual ODA programmes will provide an opportunity to look at strategies, programmes and activities from the perspective of these cross-cutting issues.

Nonetheless, like many of its European neighbours, Bulgaria is both a recipient and donor of foreign assistance. This provides an opportunity for the government to both learn from other governments and to apply best practices in current and future ODA planning and implementation processes. The main recommendations from the research process are aimed at EU institutions, Bulgarian governmental representatives and civil society organisations (CSOs) – specifically, the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform.

Keywords: Bulgaria, International Development Cooperation, Peacebuilding

4 Here, stakeholder groups means NGOs, civic groups, business companies, academia and media representatives.

5 As witnessed by the author during an inter-governmental meeting on ODA issues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16th September 2008 in Sofia.

6 The terms “non-governmental organisation”, “civil organisation” and “civic organisation” are used interchangeably in the text. The term non-governmental developmental organisations (NGDOs) is used specifically in relation to the type of organisation formed to support development cooperation and ODA implementation. This reflects the terminology used by the media and governmental representatives in public, as well as by the organisations themselves.

ACRONYMS

CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EDF	European Development Fund
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
GNI	Gross National Income
IDDC	International Development Cooperation Council
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NGDO	Non-governmental development organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

INTRODUCTION

This research, conducted within the broad framework of the Capacity-Building Cluster of the Initiative for Peacebuilding (IfP), set out to explore policy and practices in central, eastern and southern EU Member States that have the potential to contribute to more effective peacebuilding through national foreign assistance programmes. This paper provides an overview and analysis of existing policies and practices, as well as future plans in Bulgaria with respect to ODA and peacebuilding. The process of desk research, interviews and focus group discussions had the general objective of providing clear and practical recommendations to EU policy-makers, the Bulgarian government and interested national NGOs on improving the country's commitment to ODA processes, with specific prioritisation of peacebuilding. The specific objectives of this report are the following:

- To reveal the current status and main actors in Bulgarian ODA and peacebuilding processes;
- Identify the gaps and challenges in current policies and procedures for ODA and peacebuilding;
- Identify the level of civil society involvement; and,
- To understand and, if possible, suggest recommendations for increasing public awareness on issues of ODA and peacebuilding.

While the recommendations and main findings of this research are aimed primarily at EU policy-makers, they will also be disseminated to relevant stakeholders and the broader public in order to achieve the objectives defined above. These research findings are also addressed to Bulgarian government officials, local civil society actors, and specifically to Bulgarian representatives within the EU, including those in the European Commission and the European Parliament.

METHODOLOGY

The following definition of peacebuilding was used throughout the author's research and was provided by International Alert: 'The concept of peacebuilding embodies a range of actions to identify, establish and support structures for strengthening and consolidating peace. Those actions need to be used and integrated so as to help address underlying drivers of conflict. It is as relevant to societies vulnerable to violent conflict and instability as those already suffering from violence. Whether started before, after or during the eruption of conflict, peacebuilding must be seen as a long-term exercise to change structures, attitudes and behaviours.'⁷

The methodology of this research combined the following mechanisms:

DESK REVIEW OF APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTS

A set of official documents and debate proceedings were reviewed and analysed as a first step towards understanding the current situation and planning the interviews. This desk review identified the main figures and active individuals to be contacted later on in the process.

REVIEW OF HISTORY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCHES ON THE CURRENT TOPIC.

Limited previous research on Bulgarian government preparedness to implement an ODA and peacebuilding strategy was recently conducted in Bulgaria. Bibliographical data as far as publicly available is provided below.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

Media publications on the topic of the research are quite scarce, which reflects the non-active communication strategy of the Bulgarian government and the lack of awareness among Bulgarian journalists. No more than 15 publications in printed media and less than 15 electronic publications (Internet news sites) discuss Bulgarian ODA and peacebuilding strategies and related events. Most of the publications follow official press releases of the MFA and Ministry of Defence (MoD) without including analysis or additional data. Less than 15 percent of the publications⁸ cover financial contributions of the Bulgarian government reported as ODA spending (e.g. donations responding to the China humanitarian crises after the Sichuan earthquake). Another considerably larger set of media publications deal with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); these are central to ODA planning, implementation and monitoring. While these publications were reviewed and classified for the purposes of this research, most do not relate to one another, and refer only to Bulgarian government ODA goals and objectives; they have not served to raise public awareness about the country's engagements as a donor.

REVIEW OF PUBLIC OPINION POLL RESULTS

One public opinion poll surveyed Bulgarian citizens' views on, and awareness of, the country's new engagements towards peacebuilding through foreign assistance. The poll was commissioned by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and MFA, and released in 2007. So far, the results from the poll are the only reliable quantitative data on public awareness and understanding of ODA and peacebuilding objectives and policies.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Throughout the research, nearly 20 one-to-one discussions were conducted with NGOs, business representatives and journalists. Out of these, seven are classified as conducted interviews. More than 70 percent of all individuals

⁷ International Alert (January 2007). *Op. cit* p.19.

⁸ A total of 150 publications and press releases have been reviewed from modern media (10 daily printed editions; national televisions) and media published before 1989 (*Rabotnichesko Delo*), as well as official press releases of the MFA and MoD.

approached were unable to provide opinions or participate in a focus group due to lack of information whatsoever on the topic.

OFFICIAL INTER-MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

Throughout the research process, it became clear that the official institutional position on the topic and outcomes of these meetings was not publicly accessible. Nevertheless, government representatives are the ones that currently define Bulgarian peacebuilding policy and thus their point of view is extremely important. For this reason, the author attended two inter-ministerial meetings devoted to development assistance planning. These meetings were accessible to NGO representatives. During these meetings, various representatives of governmental institutions were present, including the Council of Ministers⁹ (Kaloian Simeonov, Director International Relations), MFA (Boian Belev, Directorate for the UN and Global Issues Directorate; Ivan Spassov, Specialist, Directorate for the UN and Global Issues Directorate), Ministry of Economy (name not given for protocol); Ministry of Finance (Director, Legal and Administrative Department), Ministry of Environment (Director, Legal and Administrative Department) and MoD.

During the inter-ministerial meetings, governmental representatives spoke in their official capacity according to protocol and as representatives of their institutions. Through observations and follow-up informal discussions, government representatives' points of view were obtained. It should be noted though, that none of the official requests for one-to-one interviews were answered.

The methodology underpinning the research is essentially qualitative, with quantitative data inserted to reveal public opinion and awareness, as well as where media analysis is being used. Cross-cutting issues (human security, gender and transitional justice) were included both during the document review, interviews and focus groups. It is probably due to the very initial period of ODA and peacebuilding strategy and activities development that awareness of cross-cutting issues is lacking. Certainly, the concept of partnership, gender and other cross-cutting themes are included in the programme document for Bulgaria foreign assistance. Still, further analysis of the text and annexes, as well as of official statements of Bulgarian government officials, reveal that cross-cutting issues are still considered separately from the planning and implementation process.

⁹ The Council of Ministers is an inter-ministerial body that holds weekly meetings to review legal proposals as well as to discuss relevant state-level issues. It is also responsible for approving development assistance annual action plans, while the MFA is responsible for overall coordination.

BULGARIAN DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: AN OVERVIEW

For more than 15 years, Bulgaria has been a beneficiary of numerous development assistance programmes within the framework of the EU (initiatives funded by Germany, France and the UK), as well as support from countries outside EU agreements, including Japan, Switzerland and the US.

Bulgaria joined the EU on 1st January 2007. The country has since slowly transformed from a recipient to a donor country. Thus, in terms of funding, planning and implementing development assistance programmes, the country is in an interesting position. On the one hand, it is a recent beneficiary of development assistance, with extensive experience in managing this support and numerous mechanisms developed to assist donors' coordination. On the other hand, the challenges that confronted Bulgaria as a beneficiary of development assistance support are still fresh in the country's memory, and for this reason should be more easily recognised and addressed at the policy level as Bulgaria drafts its own donor strategies. A review of Bulgaria's experience of foreign development assistance between 1991 and 2000 can be of real benefit to future EU policies aimed at achieving its development assistance goals.¹⁰

During the period 1945–1990, Bulgaria engaged in bilateral relations with countries such as Angola and Libya, mainly through participation in infrastructure projects, knowledge transfer in healthcare and education, and humanitarian assistance.¹¹ The thematic priorities and mechanisms of these bilateral relations were entirely defined by Bulgarian foreign policy. Details of these agreements have not been revealed to the public, nor explicitly studied by historians, and are thus excluded from this analysis. Nevertheless, the motivation, benefits and outcomes of these relations represent an important foundation for current Bulgarian development assistance priorities. *Bulgaria's Policy on Participation in International Development Cooperation: Concept Paper*, clearly states that 'target countries will be chosen based on traditional bilateral relationships and former experience of Bulgaria in cooperation'.¹² It can be seen that a number of current target countries have been chosen based on previous relations established and developed between 1960 and 1989.

A thorough historical review of previous Bulgarian experience will support establishing viable development assistance programmes.

BACKGROUND ON BULGARIA'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Existing policies for Bulgarian development assistance programmes are outlined in the MFA concept paper, which was only finalised in 2007, though discussions begun in 2005.¹³

10 The benefit of analysing Bulgaria's experience as a beneficiary country in order to achieve more effective planning and implementation of the country's ODA was pointed out during interviews with agency representatives.

11 *Rabotnichesko Delo* (a daily edition of the Bulgarian Communist Party): A total of 50 editions issued between 1970 and 1980 were randomly selected and reviewed.

12 UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). Op. cit p.12.

13 'Can grant-making be sustainable in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the New Independent States (NIS)?', proceedings of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the EFC Grant-Makers East Group (GEG) in Sofia, 21st–22nd October 2004.

The paper is set within the international framework for development assistance, including policies developed by the UN, EU and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). It is evident that the paper is also heavily influenced by the legal bases of the EU's approach to external assistance (e.g. the EU Treaty, Cotonou Agreement etc.), EU secondary laws (such as regional regulations) that Bulgaria is legally bound to, and non-mandatory "soft laws", such as political declarations, EU contributions to global initiatives, and European Commission Communications, as well as the EU's development policies (specifically the European Consensus on Development). In acceding to the EU, Bulgaria assumed the rights, obligations and responsibilities inherent in EU membership, including a commitment to EU development goals. The EU's development assistance is firmly aimed at peacebuilding, particularly in establishing the principles of democracy, human rights and rule of law. Both normatively and politically, the EU has a strategic influence on the development of Bulgarian policy regarding ODA. This strategic influence should be exploited more fully by the EU and by the Bulgarian government itself.

The MFA concept paper identifies 'eradication of poverty' as Bulgaria's main development policy objective, in line with the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. However, the paper also firmly places its international development cooperation within the general framework of Bulgaria's foreign policy priorities, a link previously highlighted by the *Program of the Bulgarian Government for European Integration, Economic Growth and Social Responsibility*, of August 2005.¹⁴

GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES

The concept paper identifies two priority geographic regions of intervention: southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region – specifically Armenia, FYROM, Georgia, Kosovo and Serbia; Angola is also defined as a geographic priority, with the option to include other African countries based on 'experience and financial opportunities'.¹⁵ These priorities do not, however, preclude Bulgaria from providing urgent humanitarian or *ad hoc* support to other countries on the DAC list of recipients. Afghanistan and Iraq are also included as countries in which Bulgaria already has peacekeeping objectives as part of multinational agreements.¹⁶ The latter engagement is not further specified within the ODA concept paper. However, from official statements from the MoD, it is evident that they do not consider peacekeeping operations (particularly those in Afghanistan and Iraq) as part of Bulgaria's ODA strategy, even when those activities engaged in can be identified as "peacebuilding".

The criteria for identifying beneficiary countries include the following:

- Advanced level of political, diplomatic, commercial, economic and cultural connections with Bulgaria;
- "Comparative advantage" in providing assistance, either in comparison with other donors or enhanced knowledge of local needs and contexts; and,
- General conditions for cooperation with the donor community.

THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The concept paper also identifies the priority sectors for development assistance programming:

- Education and higher education.
- Support for infrastructure development.
- Support for economic, local governance, administrative and social sphere reforms.
- Cultural diversity and tolerance
- Sustainable development and environment

¹⁴ UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). *Op. cit.* p.16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.16.

¹⁶ Presumably operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have military objectives. Still, they are included in the official concept. As long as they are only briefly mentioned, this contradiction has not been further analysed.

- Security and post-conflict rehabilitation.

According to set criteria, Bulgaria will support programming in up to two sectors per country.

PROCEDURAL AND CONTENT GAPS IN BULGARIA'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE POLICY FRAMEWORK

People interviewed during the research expressed different perceptions and assessments of the government's process of drafting the ODA concept and priority areas. NGO representatives mostly felt that consultation with civil society actors was held at a rather advanced stage, when changing major features of the strategy was impossible. They pointed out that civic organisations were involved mostly through personal relations (i.e. organisations known to government officials were invited to comment, rather than those with extensive experience in humanitarian assistance or other related areas). At the same time, NGO representatives interviewed for this research recognised that the participation of the Council to the MFA was a positive development, even if 'effectiveness is to be considerably increased'.¹⁷ NGO representatives felt that in terms of priority areas, 'there is more which Bulgaria can provide: not only financial, but also technical expertise'.¹⁸ It can be concluded that the process of formulating priorities was not an inclusive one, but stayed at a rather expert level, including key professionals in the field and political representatives.

Regarding the participation of experts and professionals in the drafting of the MFA concept paper, international agencies' representatives have pointed out that their experts contributed extensively to the process of developing the concept draft. This is confirmed by the expert and professional outline of key areas, such as ODA monitoring and evaluation and international cooperation.

Furthermore, while the concept paper aims to detail Bulgaria's development assistance policy, it does not actually identify practical mechanisms and procedures for providing financial and technical support to third countries.¹⁹ Stakeholders identified the lack of concrete mechanisms, as well as the rather vague format of institutional infrastructure for assistance provision, management and evaluation, as serious challenges to the effective implementation of Bulgarian development assistance programmes.²⁰ While engagements of different ministries are well outlined, practical implementation, management and evaluation of concrete development assistance projects are far from being clearly defined.

The ODA concept paper shows no evidence of preliminary needs assessments having been conducted in beneficiary countries. It can be assumed that the expertise of international agency representatives in this area has contributed towards setting priority areas, but this is not explicitly mentioned.

BULGARIAN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE>

In terms of financial information, the annex to the concept paper provides information on up-to-date financial spending for bilateral aid and Bulgarian contributions to international and multinational organisations. By MFA accounts, aid to development in the 2005-2006 period amounts to roughly 0.008 percent of the country's Gross National Income (GNI), out of which bilateral ODA is US\$1.33 million (project and programme aid: US\$1.2 million; emergency and distress relief: US\$130,000; multilateral ODA: US\$670,000).²¹ Projected spending for 2007 is displayed in Table 1 below. There is currently no up-to-date information or annual report on the MFA's ODA strategy implementation. ODA spending cannot be properly evaluated, therefore, due to a lack of publicly available information.

17 Quotation from transcript of NGO representatives focus group, held 22nd January 2008 in the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

18 Ibid.

19 UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). Op. cit. pp.12-14.

20 Interviews and focus group discussions held as part of the research on 22nd January 2008 in the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia. See Methodology.

21 UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). Op. cit. Annex 4.

TABLE 1. FORECASTED ODA (mln BGN)²²

	2007	2008	2009
Payments to international organisations	1,079	1,133	1,190
Payments to EU budget	620,00	695,00	731,00
Payments to European Development Fund (EDF)	0	2.5	4.5
Bilateral aid	0	28	44
Multilateral aid	100	72	56

Also presented are sectors to be covered by ODA strategy implementation. The concept paper gives a general overview of sectors into which Bulgaria will channel ODA funding. These are based on historic traditions and include education, healthcare, infrastructure support, post-conflict support and rehabilitation. It is assumed that detailed presentation of sectors of support will be made in operational annual programmes, even if this is not explicitly mentioned. However, according to experts interviewed for the purposes of this research, there are currently important gaps in the sectors planned to be supported through ODA. For example, according to a 2007 UNDP public opinion poll, more than 50 percent of Bulgarian citizens think that reducing child mortality and poverty should be explicit priorities.²³ The sectors to be covered by Bulgarian development assistance are elaborated on further in the recent *Project for Intermediary Program for Participation of Bulgaria in International Cooperation for Development 2009–2012*.²⁴ It is expected that specific activities, including opportunities for proposals coming from CSOs, will be set out in the annual programmes and annual action plans.

ODA MECHANISMS

Bulgarian ODA is provided both bilaterally and multilaterally, as Table 1 indicates. The majority of its ODA is channeled to international organisations, including UN agencies, the World Trade Organisations (WTO) and international organisations like the Red Cross. As of 2008, Bulgaria will also contribute to the European Development Fund (EDF). Private donors are mentioned only in general terms and are not specifically included in groups important to ODA strategy implementation. As a result, the role of private donors and humanitarian assistance organisations in Bulgarian ODA implementation is currently underestimated by responsible government officials. This has been pointed out by interviewees as one of the major weaknesses of the document and the actual strategy implementation.²⁵ International agency representatives suggested that the experience of international and private donors could significantly increase and enhance government efforts, were government representatives to request such assistance.

KEY INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

There are two key institutional groups that play a role in Bulgarian international development cooperation.

The first group comprises representatives of governmental institutions involved in development assistance programmes. The MFA leads and coordinates Bulgaria's international development cooperation, including coordinating cooperation with other ministries, representing Bulgaria in international forums, elaborating ODA policy and annual action plans, and negotiating agreements with recipient countries.

²² Non-published data provided by members of the Millennium (Development) Goals platform. Note: unpublished data received from platform, request for confirmation of source sent to MFA in March, but source not confirmed.

²³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (January 2007). Op. cit.

²⁴ The draft document was provided to the author during an attended inter-governmental meeting held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16th September 2008. Not officially published as of November 2008.

²⁵ Quotation from transcript of NGO representatives (representing organisations/members of the NGDOs platform) during a focus group, held on 22nd January 2008 at the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

Through the inter-institutional International Development Cooperation Council (IDCC), which assists the MFA, all institutions related to specific programming should be involved in development assistance policy-making. The IDCC approves the country's international development cooperation priorities and is meant to convene NGOs, business, media and academia to 'participate in IDCC activities to discuss issues related to the effectiveness and coordination of development cooperation activities, public support for the policy pursued, etc'.²⁶ Yet, it acts as a consultative body, rather than an entity responsible for the operational aspects of Bulgaria's ODA. A further related governmental body is the Council for European Issues within the Council of Ministers. While both bodies have different priorities and the IDCC is to be more focused on development assistance and ODA, there is room for tension and duplication of activities.

Again, the peacebuilding perspective is not integrated into the overall planning of development assistance. Bulgarian foreign policy between 1945 and 1989 identified recipient countries of assistance on the basis of political allegiances and opportunities, rather than on development or peacebuilding needs. However, this is slowly changing through membership in the EU and under the influence of the EU's development and peacebuilding policies. From another perspective, Bulgarian NGOs need to further improve their expertise and research capacity to adequately assist the government in the process of adopting a modern, holistic approach towards conflict prevention and development assistance.

The second institutional group that plays a role in Bulgarian international development cooperation is the international agencies, which have been providing financial and technical assistance and know-how to Bulgaria for the last 15 years. Agencies like the UNDP, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) have well established contacts with both Bulgarian government representatives and NGOs. Their representatives are savvy in both the theory and practice of development assistance processes, and are therefore able to influence the identification of development assistance goals and priorities, even without an official quota in the Council and working groups.²⁷

PEACEBUILDING IN BULGARIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

As mentioned earlier, Bulgarian political documents do not use the term "peacebuilding", nor do cross-cutting peacebuilding issues such as human security or transitional justice feature in policy literature. Yet, government understanding and acceptance of the peacebuilding concept and perspective is demonstrated clearly in all concept papers and other governmental documents reviewed for the purpose of the research.²⁸ The concept paper is itself framed by the recognition that 'there is no security without development and no development without security; neither is possible if human rights are not reliably guaranteed and protected'.²⁹

It is also recognised that poverty is multi-faceted and that its eradication requires a holistic approach, including the engagement of the fields of 'good governance, conflict prevention, protection of human rights (including the rights of the child and gender equality), etc'.³⁰ Furthermore, to ensure the sustainability of poverty reduction and development efforts, the MFA has recognised and institutionalised the importance of environmental protection, as well as ensuring minimum standards for health and education.

Of the six thematic objectives identified in the Bulgarian concept paper, 'security and post-conflict reconstruction' relates most directly to peacebuilding activities. However, as mentioned previously, current documents provide no further detail as to what activities are to be funded under this objective. Needless to say, it is thus impossible to

26 UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). Op. cit. pp.18-19.

27 The actual relation between Bulgaria's experience as a beneficiary and its future as a donor was pointed out during interviews with agency representatives. See Interview with UNDP representative conducted by Vessela Gertcheva, 20th May 2008.

28 These include: *Bulgaria's Policy on Participation in International Development Cooperation: Concept Paper*; *Concept for Participation of the Republic of Bulgaria in Operations for Peace Keeping*; *Program for Governance of the Republic of Bulgaria*; *Paper of the Council of Ministers No. 85*; *Strategic Directions of Bulgarian Foreign Policy Impact in European Security and Defence Policy*; and the *Framework concept for participation of Bulgaria in the Alliance of Civilization initiative*. These and other strategic documents reviewed were accessed on 1st September 2008 and are available in Bulgarian on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, at www.mfa.government.bg.

29 UN and Global Issues Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). Op. cit. p.7.

30 Ibid p.14.

evaluate implementation or analyse the impact of Bulgarian ODA related to these activities in recipient countries. The thematic priority relating to cultural diversity and tolerance is also a crucial peacebuilding principle, underlining a respect for human rights and recognising diversity as a potential source of conflict. Actual implementation of peacebuilding principles could not be identified, and hence analysed, on the practical level, as no practical steps have yet been taken to foster the implementation of this strategic document. Among the few activities that have been reported as ODA activities are humanitarian assistance acts and police training in conflict risk countries. The language and augmentation of other reported activities (e.g. police training) do not show peacebuilding elements. These could have been considered in the process of decision making, but are completely absent at the public level.

The *geographic priorities* also point to Bulgarian commitment to peacebuilding – again, even if not referred to as such. The concept paper indicates that ‘the geographical priorities of Bulgaria’s development aid do not limit the provision of humanitarian or any urgent *ad hoc* actions aimed at preventing or mitigating the aftermath of crises, armed conflict or action against international terrorism’.³¹ Such support for preventing or mitigating the aftermath of crises and armed conflict clearly demonstrates a commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities within ODA expenditures in Bulgaria.

Furthermore, the geographic priorities for Bulgarian ODA include those ‘countries to which Bulgaria has undertaken international commitments within the framework of international organisations or coalitions (e.g. participation in rehabilitation efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan)’.³² As regards Afghanistan, Bulgaria participates in EU-led initiatives aimed at stabilising and rehabilitating the country, including the Joint EU-Afghanistan Political Declaration and the Afghanistan Compact, launched in January 2006 with the stated aim of ‘consolidating democratic institutions, curbing insecurity, controlling the illegal drug trade, stimulating the economy, enforcing the law, providing basic services to the Afghan people, and protecting their human rights’.³³

It is obvious that there is an understanding of, and commitment to, peacebuilding within Bulgaria’s international development cooperation policies. However, as the following section will highlight, there are a number of obstacles preventing Bulgaria fulfilling its peacebuilding potential, both at policy and implementation levels.

31 Ibid p.16.

32 BOND, *Conflict Security, and Official Development Assistance (ODA): Issues for NGO Advocacy*. Draft only.

33 ‘Security Council Unanimously Endorses Five-Year “Afghanistan Compact” Aimed at Bolstering Security, Development, Counter-Narcotics Efforts’, UN Department of Public Information, accessed 16th October 2008, at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8641.doc.htm>.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING BULGARIAN ODA

Given the challenges outlined above and the weak cooperation between different sectors as regards ODA implementation, it is not surprising that Bulgaria lacks practical examples of successfully implemented development assistance programmes. There are three general challenges to Bulgaria's development of effective policy and practices.

UNCOORDINATED ODA POLICY AND PLANNING

In two newly developed political documents,³⁴ the overall framework of ODA has further been elaborated on. The documents specify that multinational and bilateral cooperation are an integral part of Bulgarian international development cooperation, but do not explicitly address peacebuilding activities in the scope and planning cycles. On the basis of these documents and information gathered from inter-ministerial meetings, it can be assumed that peacekeeping operations – where further reference to peacebuilding activities can be found – are for the moment planned and considered separately from development cooperation and development assistance policies. There is thus no clear strategy regarding peacebuilding as such. Activities that can be defined as “peacebuilding” are funded by different budgets and coordinated by different ministries, thereby preventing a holistic, comprehensive approach in Bulgaria to peacebuilding.

As stated previously, while there is a clear policy framework for Bulgaria's ODA, there is a lack of concrete mechanisms and procedures for actually providing *financial* and *technical support* to third countries. The absence of practical mechanisms, as well as a lack of clarity regarding the institutional infrastructure for assistance provision, management and evaluation, are serious challenges to the perceived as serious challenges to the effective implementation of Bulgarian development assistance programmes.

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AND DUPLICATION OF EFFORTS

The further development and implementation of an integrated Bulgarian ODA strategy is also challenged by the duplicated functions of the Council of Ministers and MFA, and the difficulty of coordination between the two institutions.³⁵ One specific example is the *Project for Paper of the Council of Ministers on Goals, Principles and Mechanisms for Participation of Bulgaria in International Cooperation for Development*.³⁶ As outlined in an official position of the Council of Ministers,³⁷ this report (drafted by the MFA) duplicates the tasks and responsibilities of the Council on European Issues. The MFA, however, argues that, as a consultative and operational body, the IDCC is necessary for making faster operational decisions (for example, in cases of humanitarian assistance), and to provide the added value of expertise in the area of community policies and bilateral cooperation.

Clearly both the Council on European Issues and the envisaged IDCC have duplicating functions and expertise in the area of planning and implementing development assistance policies and projects. In addition, the experts

34 Such as *A Project for Intermediary Program for Participation of Bulgaria in International Cooperation for Development 2009–2012* and *A Project for Paper of the Council of Ministers on Goals, Principles and Mechanisms for Participation of Bulgaria in International Cooperation for Development*. Both documents were obtained thanks to the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform and were not officially finalised as of October 2008.

35 All of the information regarding inter-institutional challenges was obtained through participation in inter-ministerial meetings. The MFA did not respond to the official invitation for meeting and comment sent as early as May 2008.

36 *Project for Paper of the Council of Ministers on Goals, Principles and Mechanisms for Participation of Bulgaria in International Cooperation for Development [Draft]*. Paper obtained thanks to Bulgarian NGOs platform and accessed September 2008.

37 Official position expressed during an inter-ministerial meeting held on 16th September 2008.

expected to participate in both councils are for the most part the same people. Coordination and division of responsibilities is therefore crucial to actually proceed with concrete activities and projects in the area of development assistance.

LACK OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE INFORMATION

One of the most pressing problems is the lack of publicly available information. The concept paper, while obviously important for establishing the framework for Bulgaria's international development cooperation, does not provide details regarding the activities to be funded. Thus, it is difficult to determine how Bulgaria can and will contribute to peacebuilding efforts. Information regarding Bulgaria's participation in international missions is classified and thus it is not possible to determine whether Bulgaria is fulfilling its objectives and obligations. There are as yet no annual reports or evaluations to assess implementation thus far. As Bulgaria only acceded to the EU in 2007 and only very recently became a donor, this is understandable to a certain extent. However, there is a fear that this is also due to a lack of prioritisation of the monitoring and evaluation process.

Furthermore, one interviewee pointed out that 'a main current challenge is there is little evidence on actual progress and achievements'.³⁸ Thus, even if planned activities and spending targets are reasonable and adequate, there is practically no information regarding how much – if any – progress is being made. This is especially true for financial spending. While officially agreed on financial targets are being included in all official documents, it is practically impossible to provide evidence as to whether plans are actually implemented. There is no public report of the projects and issues on which funds were spent in previous years (i.e. in 2007), and such information could not be obtained from the MFA.

³⁸ Quotation from transcript of NGO representatives (representing organisations – members of the NGDOs platform) during a focus group, held on 22nd January 2008 at the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In written documents and official government press releases and statements, NGOs are highlighted as actors 'of crucial importance for achieving the country's development assistance goals'.³⁹ According to NGO representatives interviewed, their input and feedback on political documents have indeed been taken into account; they are consulted on specific issues and occasionally invited to meetings with MFA representatives. There are also NGO representatives in working groups and task force groups convened by the MFA. Still, those NGO representatives interviewed described the influence of NGOs as limited and insufficient. In some cases, governmental experts have refused to issue partnership declarations to support NGO's applications for funding; in others, a call for comments on political documents was issued at extremely short notice, which in practice prevented NGO experts from effectively taking part in discussions.⁴⁰

Even if an NGDO platform is up and running in Bulgaria,⁴¹ the role of NGOs and civic groups remains limited. Their experience in grant-making, fund management and even field experience in beneficiary countries has not been sufficiently utilised. Certain organisations in Bulgaria have know-how and support experience of conflict management, prevention and mediation. It seems indicative that these organisations do not have a role in the process of development assistance planning and implementation. As such organisations have a deep understanding of peacebuilding, as well as experience in international projects, it could also be assumed that their participation would support the process of planning peacebuilding and development assistance processes. NGO-government relations are effective only on an individual basis, with certain experts regularly consulted on specific issues. A major reason could be the lack of regular, accessible and transparent mechanisms for public consultations.⁴²

Some organisations/clubs with a rather elite status (i.e. the Atlantic Club in Sofia) have achieved a more advanced and effective role in supporting government institutions.⁴³ As a result, such organisations have more influence in affecting policy formulation and can be active in its implementation as well.

Other ODA stakeholders include academic and business representatives, who should be actively involved, but are currently left outside the planning and decision-making processes – at least officially. Based on interviews and focus group discussions, it can be assumed that business representatives are informally consulted on a very general level.⁴⁴ Still, as illustrated for NGO-government relations, the transparent position of both business and government in this regard are missing.

Some academic representatives (i.e. the American University in Bulgaria) do participate in discussions and have communicated their opinion publicly. Yet, academic institutions are not involved in preliminary discussions on the primary targets and beneficiaries of development assistance. Representatives of some academic disciplines, such as historians and current affairs specialists, could be especially helpful in laying the foundation for effective bilateral relationships based on historic ties.

39 Address of Minister Ivailo Kalfin to UN Secretary General, Sofia, 2006 (press release of Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Available at www.mfa.government.bg. In Bulgarian. Accessed on 10th February 2008.

40 Quotation from transcript of NGDO representatives focus group, held on 22nd January 2008 at the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

41 The platform has not been formally established, but has active mechanisms for communication and information exchange. See: <http://mg-platform.kinyra.com>.

42 The point of view of the MFA, Ministry of Finance and Council of Ministers on the NGO-governmental relations regarding development assistance has been requested, but so far not provided.

43 Atlantic Club, Atlantic Club discussion series, Sofia 2006 (brochure). Obtained through NGDOs platform.

44 Quotation from transcript of NGO representatives (representing organisations/members of the NGDOs platform) during a focus group, held on 22nd January 2008 at the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Judging by formal criteria, citizens and civic organisations are fully permitted and welcome to participate in both the formulation and implementation of development assistance plans and peacebuilding-related activities. CSOs are explicitly mentioned in each official document, political statement, governmental press release and consultative group structure related to development assistance topics.⁴⁵

Interviews, focus group discussions and public opinion polls, however, reveal a different picture. Public access to information on development assistance is extremely limited, as pointed out by representatives of the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform⁴⁶ and as evidenced by public opinion polls.⁴⁷ More than 60 percent of NGO representatives contacted for the purpose of this research were completely unaware of new donor engagements in the country, including development assistance goals and the potential role for their organisations. The activities related to the development assistance objectives remain a mystery not only to NGOs, but also to the local organisations that have the potential to implement projects in beneficiary countries. Certainly, such lack of information is a serious barrier for citizens' and local organisations' involvement in development assistance programming and implementation. This also limits partnerships between organisations and institutions, which are crucial for cost-effective programmes and projects.

THE BULGARIAN NGDO PLATFORM

The Millennium (Development) Goals Platform, established in 2006 to cooperate with government institutions regarding ODA, has more than 30 members and is currently the only mechanism for involvement of civil society representatives in discussions regarding foreign development assistance. Its formation was stimulated and supported by the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD).⁴⁸ Representatives of the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform have pointed out that insufficient funding and basic daily routines (i.e. no office and hired secretariat) are obstacles to their acting to their full potential. NGOs participating in the platform urge for more active governmental support, including designated funding and office provision. Practically speaking, current platform members have clearly structured ideas and suggestions for support and involvement in ODA implementation, which cannot move forward due to capacity and access limitations. From a peacebuilding perspective, NGOs respect the need for actions addressing causes of conflict – this is evident in their project proposals and activities. While the need to holistically integrate the peacebuilding concept is not a priority theme for NGO discussions with government, organisations are looking to actions supporting peace, conflict management and conflict prevention, following their own missions and values.

Interviewees described one particular incident⁴⁹ in which MFA officials refused to sign a partnership declaration the NGDOs platform needed to complete as part of a project application for capacity development funding. While there were no specific (financial or other) requirements for MFA support and no principal objections to partnership from government officials, the bureaucratic procedures delayed the actual signing of the partnership declaration to such an extent that it practically became irrelevant. This is a clear illustration of the isolation NGOs often find themselves in – without formal and official approval of their participation, effective government-civil society cooperation in the field of ODA and peacebuilding is impossible to achieve in practice.

Members of the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform are mostly interested in the opportunity to participate in the process of development assistance through providing know-how and expertise in beneficiary countries on a project basis. Some of the members (such as the EKIP Foundation) also have expertise in providing humanitarian assistance, which can be utilised by the government.

45 MFA strategic documents accessed 20th January-15th May 2008, at www.mfa.government.bg, including *Bulgaria's Policy on Participation in International Development Cooperation: Concept Paper*.

46 Transcript of NGO Focus Group held on 22nd January 2008 at the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

47 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (January 2007). *Op. cit.* pp.15-22.

48 CONCORD is an EU confederation of NGOs established in 2001 which coordinates analysis and debate, organises political action campaigns and regularly engages in dialogue with the European institutions and CSOs. Its 22 national associations and 18 international networks represent more than 1,600 NGOs, which are in turn supported by millions of people across the EU and its candidate countries.

49 Quotation from transcript of NGO representatives focus group, held 22nd January 2008 in the office of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, Sofia.

PUBLIC OPINION ON ODA POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The first (and currently the only) public opinion poll on ODA and the new role of Bulgaria as a donor country was commissioned by UNDP and officially announced jointly with the MFA in 2007. The poll reveals weak awareness and skepticism about Bulgaria's new role and engagements. Less than 30 percent of respondents are aware of the country's commitments to development assistance; more than 50 percent support such development in principle, but less than 22 percent believe aid in reality improves the lives of beneficiaries. Only two percent think that aid should be monetary.⁵⁰

For the period between 2004 and 2007, there are no more than 30 media publications dealing with Bulgaria as a donor country. More than 50 percent of media publications merely covered the Minister of Foreign Affairs' announcement of the opinion poll, without providing further analysis or background data. None of the journalists who have published material on ODA have followed up their work with a review or analytical article. The subject is not covered by the main business and economic editions, and critical opinion papers have not yet been published. Linking development assistance to the security-related objective of Bulgaria's involvement with third countries is non-existent in media publications.

During interviews with journalists,⁵¹ many respondents expressed the opinion that this situation is also due to the lack of specialisation in daily editions – one journalist can cover both healthcare and the social sector, which makes developing expertise in a certain area very difficult. It is certainly clear that the media – one of the main mechanisms for distributing information to the public – is itself unaware of trends and changes in development assistance.

This picture is enhanced by the lack of official reports and evaluations on Bulgaria's development cooperation and assistance, including activities related to peacebuilding objectives. It is indicative that current public debates stay on the level of planning ODA and potential areas of involvement. For example, a recent study by the State Cultural Institute – and the follow-up public discussion – focused on opportunities to support cultural projects as part of Bulgarian assistance in third countries.⁵² While the topic is interesting and valuable, the discussion has the character of a preliminary review, rather than a practical step toward implementation of ODA assistance. The overall impression portrayed by the few media publications⁵³ and official statements on ODA progress is that practical results can still not be demonstrated. Among the few concrete successes included is the establishment of the Millennium (Development) Goals Platform – even if further action is needed to improve its sustainability and effectiveness.

50 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (January 2007). Op. cit. pp.15-18.

51 Interviews with Savelina Savova on 13th March 2008 and Yana Yordanova on 15th March 2008 in Sofia, Interviewed by V. Gertcheva.

52 A resumé of research conducted by the State Cultural Institute to the MFA, Sofia, 2008. Provided by the MFA press office in Bulgarian.. Accessed 1st May 2008, at <http://sic.mfa.government.bg>.

53 A search for publications was made in an online database of 10 daily editions, four weekly editions and three TV stations (National Television, bTV, Nova TV).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above findings demonstrate that the Bulgarian government, CSOs and the media are in the very initial stages of developing and conceptualising a comprehensive approach to ODA and peacebuilding. For this reason, the following recommendations are mainly aimed at improving structural areas, as opposed to identifying existing gaps. The primary aim of the recommendations is to facilitate action, which will bring improved public awareness, as well as increased interest and support from different actors.

It is our understanding that the initial process of strategy formulation should be hastened and finalised. This means that action plans, budget structure, mechanisms for management and control, as well as public information and consultation procedures, should be put in place. This process can be facilitated by all parties: EU policy-makers, Bulgarian government, CSOs, international organisations, media, private sector and the public.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU

Promote the EU peacebuilding agenda in Bulgaria. Support the government to integrate the EU peacebuilding agenda into the ODA strategy of Bulgaria. If necessary, provide technical assistance to ensure that issues like conflict prevention, crisis management, human security and gender mainstreaming are addressed in the upcoming *Program for Participation of Bulgaria in International Cooperation for Development 2009-2012*.

Encourage fulfillment of ODA commitments. Encourage the Bulgarian government to fulfill its commitment to dedicate 0.17 percent of its GNI to ODA by 2010 and 0.33 percent by 2015. The government should publish and explain the source of funding for its annual ODA budgets, budget structure, and mechanism for management and control.

Assist the government to ensure coherence in all ODA phases. Assist the Bulgarian government to ensure coherence with various providers of development assistance and to find an effective way to incorporate Bulgarian ODA into the current complex aid architecture. This requires good knowledge of all initiatives for cooperation with developing countries.

Support Bulgarian CSOs committed to cooperation on development. Support CSOs in Bulgaria and contribute to their capacity-building, exchange of experience and implementation of programmes in line with EU development policies. Bulgarian NGOs need support through funding programmes that reflect their current situation and allow them to apply for funding in broader coalitions, which include NGOs and academia, to be able to transfer their experience gained during the years of transition to third countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT

Integrate peacebuilding as one of the strategic lines of Bulgarian development cooperation. Security and post-conflict rehabilitation, local governance, administrative and social sector reforms, cultural diversity and tolerance, sustainable development and environment, and reliable guarantee and protection of human rights, are already identified as priority areas by the Bulgarian government. Now an explicit peacebuilding strategy should be proposed underlying Bulgarian support to target countries to peacefully prevent, manage and resolve conflicts, and to create security and sustainable development through structural improvement in the social, economic and political spheres.

Engage in monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding-related policies. The Bulgarian government would benefit from monitoring the implementation of planned activities in the area of development assistance. International and local expert organisations and consortia could be helpful in setting a monitoring and evaluation plan to ensure that a holistic approach towards peacebuilding is followed.

Increase knowledge about peacebuilding and how ODA can contribute to its implementation in recipient countries. It is important to clarify the main concepts and connections between ODA and peacebuilding. Awareness-raising of conflict theory, improving knowledge on conflict sensitivity and implementing peacebuilding approaches, will all be necessary for governmental agencies, embassy staff and NGOs. Without clear understanding of the concepts and practice of peacebuilding, the Bulgarian government and its implementing partners will be unable to ascertain the degree of their impact. Furthermore, educating the Bulgarian public about the country's ODA strategy is a must, and has the potential to lead to better understanding and wider support about the country's strategic orientation and development policy objectives. It is also urgent to develop research competence to reflect on ODA and peacebuilding issues. Even though many NGOs in Bulgaria are involved in international development work, their capacity to reflect on the field work they are doing is limited, often because of a lack of sufficient human and financial resources. Assisting these organisations to extract and present lessons learned may lead to a very valuable contribution to ODA planning. The existing research centres and think tanks should be encouraged to cooperate with NGOs experienced in the field and become part of the consultation and dialogue process with decision-making bodies.

Formulate policy through participation and dialogue. Bulgarian ODA policy should be formulated through dialogue with Bulgarian development and international NGOs, think tanks and the public. They should be consulted at all stages of ODA planning, implementation and monitoring, which should be based on existing experience, research findings, reflections and public concerns. The Millennium (Development) Goals Platform should be opened for wider participation and should facilitate overcoming the existing isolation of experienced organisations and citizens' groups.

Assess the needs of recipient countries in order to ensure complementarity with development programmes. The local interests of recipient countries should be an important factor in ODA policy formulation and planning. A consultation process with key stakeholders and CSOs in countries of interest should be initiated in order to gather information based on local knowledge and to connect research with local needs. This dialogue around priority settings and policy formulation can be facilitated by organisations experienced in peace and change management, and used as a means of promoting peacebuilding. As a donor country promoting human rights and democracy and building peace, Bulgaria should engage with local communities, national governments and international organisations active in regions. Information sharing, and exchange of good and bad practices will strengthen international cooperation and ensure that the policies are designed through participation and dialogue.

Introduce mechanisms to manage ODA budgets in a transparent manner. It is important that the government establish an actual mechanism for financial and technical support to third countries as soon as possible. The institutional infrastructure should be clarified, established and prepared for assistance provision, monitoring and evaluation. It is necessary to commission the management of the ODA budget to a highly qualified entity, whose staff should be trained in international development cooperation, peacebuilding and aid coordination. Upcoming grants and calls for tenders under ODA programmes should be widely advertised, together with information sessions for interested organisations. It is important to ensure that the whole process is open and transparent, and that all eligible organisations have access to these grants and tenders. The website of Bulgarian aid should be developed to provide accessible and comprehensive information regarding management of development assistance funds. The media should play an important role in this process, and should be kept informed and engaged in public outreach and consultation processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AIMED AT CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Enhance capacity to work abroad in developing countries. Bulgarian NGDOs need to further build strong capacity to design good programmes, conduct research and needs assessment, and deliver successful projects abroad. It is important for NGOs to collaborate with CSOs in recipient countries and to develop working relationships with local partners. Failure to show high standards of performance and lack of knowledge about the local context and needs will make them a weak competitor for Bulgarian ODA funds in comparison with international NGOs. On the other hand, collaboration with international NGOs and those experienced in the targeted regions is crucial for the successful development and implementation of programmes.

Engage the media and educate the public. The newly established Millennium (Development) Goals Platform should work closely with the media to promote ODA and peacebuilding priorities. Seminars and meetings with journalists should be organised to inform the media about Bulgarian international development cooperation and the need for the country to develop a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy. The Bulgarian public is lacking consistent information about ODA priorities, plans and mechanisms for supporting third countries. CSOs should engage in public awareness campaigns and educate both the public and the media about the country engagements in international development work.

Build on lessons learned from the transition period. Bulgaria benefited from foreign assistance support during the period 1990–2006. The whole NGO sector has been developed during this period and has gained extensive experience in programming related to human rights and the rule of law, conflict resolution and integration of ethnic minorities, accountable governance and community development, to mention just a few areas. It is important to extract relevant lessons learned from this experience and to adopt a holistic approach to development assistance.

Consolidate and encourage Millennium (Development) Goals Platform cooperation. The Millennium (Development) Goals Platform should continue to expand and unite organisations experienced in development work, conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Associations, coalitions and networks are extremely important to consolidate experience and prepare the best programmes according to the needs of developing countries. The Millennium (Development) Goals Platform should speed up its expansion and capacity-building, in order to respond to the challenges and requirements of international cooperation. Cooperation with international organisations and existing NGDO platforms in Europe will bring knowledge and experience about EU development policy, EU countries and their ODA and peacebuilding strategies.

Contribute to the introduction of concepts of human security, gender equality and transitional justice in ODA and peacebuilding strategies. Bulgarian NGOs promoting human rights, gender equality, rule of law and democratic development in Bulgaria and abroad, developed an important experience during the period of transition. NGOs should continuously bring their experience and lessons learned forward in public presentations, press conferences and meetings with government officials. They should be able to contribute to introducing the concepts of human security, gender equality and transitional justice into governmental ODA and peacebuilding strategies and specific programmes targeting countries of interest. NGOs acting as part of international networks should bring and utilise their international experience to the policy level, and should assist in formulation of frameworks for programmes that reinforce gender mainstreaming, transitional justice and the human security perspective.

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