

## THE LONG ROAD TO COHERENCE

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FRIDE's initiative to review the Spanish development cooperation policy seems very relevant as the Government has just passed the half-way mark of its first legislature. The initiative aims to assess the Government's successes and identify the pending challenges requiring special attention before the next General Elections.

While recognising the undeniable turn of the Spanish policy on development cooperation (towards an emphasis on the quantity and quality of aid, on Africa, a return to international consensus, etc.), one of the greatest challenges at present is making a reality of the current Government's electoral campaign banner, which was later reproduced in its 2005-2008 Spanish Development Cooperation Master Plan: *from a policy of cooperation to a policy of development.*

Despite its significant qualitative weaknesses (an issue probably debated in other areas of this forum), the truth is that the development cooperation policy in the strictest sense of the term has started to "straighten itself out," thus attracting the attention of the international community specialised in this sector. However, the same cannot be said about another series of Spanish policies abroad which, with their application, question the Government's explicit commitment to the fight against poverty. We refer here to policies related to other lines of governmental action, such as the Government's trade policy, the promotion of Spanish investment abroad, or its defence and security policies. According to Article 4 of the Spanish Development Cooperation Act, all of these policies should take into consideration the main principles and objectives of said Act insofar as they affect developing countries. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

### **Trade and Poverty**

The current rules of international trade are responsible for the poverty of millions of people around the world. Every day 900 million farm workers suffer the consequences of trade policies which lead to unfair competition from subsidised agricultural products exported from rich countries.

Obviously, Spain cannot solve this problem by itself as this competence has been ceded to the European Union. However, as an EU member country, Spain does have a lot to say in the current debate on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as on defining EU policy regarding the process of trade negotiations which continue to agonise five years after the fanfare surrounding its launch during the World Trade Organisation's "Development Round."

Five years later, the proposals on the table are full of holes and its impending failure is due, in great measure, to the EU and the US' stubbornness and narrow focus.

The US wants greater access to European agricultural markets while the EU wants US farm subsidies reduced; neither wants to make any more concessions. At the same time, they make minimum gestures and in exchange demand disproportionate “compensation” from the poor countries which may further worsen their already battered economies.

While all this is happening, Spain is comfortably silent, abetted by France’s intransigent position. This silence is closing another door to development in Africa just as important summits are being held to debate on illegal immigration which cannot be resolved by police actions, but by taking daring positions on key topics such as this one.

### **Uncontrolled Weapons**

Another major problem forcing thousands of Africans from their homes is armed conflict. Every minute one person dies somewhere in the world, a victim of violence affecting the civilian population. Just a few days ago, the international community meeting in New York was unable to reach an agreement that would imply stricter control on the sale of small arms and light weapons.

On this matter, the Spanish position at the conference was ambivalent: while its opening presentation was initially brave, little by little it began to adopt a European position which started to become increasingly unclear as the meetings progressed. European countries were unable to speak with just one, consensual and energetic voice to neutralise the block advocated by countries that do not want any progress made on the international control of arms trade. Any advance in our discourse is little more than a vacuous gesture if this is combined with a policy which makes Spain the world’s leading exporter of light weapons to sub-Saharan Africa. Spanish munitions exports to this impoverished and embattled part of the world average 1,500,000 dollars per year, placing our country ahead of exporting powers such as the United Kingdom.

It seems that this discourse originates in a segment of the Government concerned with responding to pressure from citizens and the media while at the same time responding to considerable international support in favour of stricter controls. But there is no indication of a clear strategy from the Spanish Government as a whole to deal more responsibly with the sale of weapons from our country. Backing and promoting Spanish exports cannot be taken to the extreme of ignoring, generating or fostering the risk implied by a specific product such as weapons or munitions with respect to the stability of the extremely poor regions of the planet we are concerned with here.

### **Investment at all Cost**

In fact, promoting Spanish investment abroad goes well beyond the concrete case of weapons and munitions, creating a constant source of risk for the coherence of the Government’s fight against poverty.

Perhaps the best-known case is the controversial Development Aid Fund credits (FAD) which, thirty years after their creation, continue to await a reform that never seems to arrive. A recent Intermón Oxfam study<sup>1</sup> reveals some of the problems and incoherencies of these credits: they are excessively expensive and inefficient, slow,

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<sup>1</sup> *Renovarse o morir. Por qué la reforma de los créditos FAD no puede esperar* [‘Renovate or Die. Why FAD Credit Reform Cannot Wait’]. Intermón Oxfam, March 2006.

inappropriate, and they increase external debt. The Government itself has recognised on numerous occasions the need to open a debate, something promoted within the Spanish Development Cooperation Master Plan. This debate would, to an extent, lead to the evaluation of the FAD-financed operations, operations about which nothing is known to this day.

Meanwhile, Parliament is finalising its debate on a law to manage external debt, half of which has been generated precisely as a result of these very credits. In fact, in 2006 this agency's financial capacity increased notably and various impoverished and indebted countries have continued to receive credits this way, at times to finance non-productive activities, thereby going against the recommendations established by international organisms.

But FAD is not solely responsible for threatening the coherence of Spanish policy abroad with respect to promoting its firms. At a time when a focus on the private sector as an agent of development cooperation is being strengthened, it is disturbing that the lively debate surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility has yet to take into account the role of the State in this area. The Government still needs to face the challenge of ensuring that Spanish firms fulfil the basic rights the Spanish Government has committed itself to protecting, even beyond the Spanish territory. To this end, it has to establish incentives to reward and guarantee that Spanish companies investing and operating in other countries fulfil international norms on this matter.

### **Exporting Security**

Lastly, though this topic is expressly addressed in another section of the forum, we cannot close this discussion on the coherence of the Spanish Government's development policy without referring to Humanitarian Action, especially regarding one of its most controversial aspects: the role of the armed forces.

While it is undeniable that the armed forces have contributed to saving lives in interventions in natural disasters and armed conflicts, it is also true that these interventions have not been problem-free. Especially in conflict and post-conflict situations, the participation by the armed forces in providing assistance and distributing aid has created some confusion among the civilian population, unable to distinguish between armed forces on the one hand and civilian humanitarian agencies on the other. This makes it more difficult for the agencies to present themselves as completely impartial in the conflict, having a negative effect on the fundamental principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality which must be the norm in humanitarian aid. This situation has also eroded the so-called "humanitarian space", thereby reducing the ability of humanitarian agencies to offer the victims assistance and protection.

This is perhaps one of the most sensitive points and one which generates the most embattled positions within the current debate on development policy. This, however, does not mean that it should be removed from the current discussion so as to make it seem that there is no conflict. Spain must honour the commitments made within the framework of the Good Humanitarian Donor Initiative, the UN's Oslo and MCDA Guidelines, and the DAC recommendations, adopting the necessary measures to guarantee the correct application of all the actors involved in Spanish humanitarian action.

### **The Difficult Transition from Theory to Practice**

These areas and others constitute risks which the Spanish Government must carefully watch to ensure that the principles and objectives outlined within the Development Cooperation Act, "are taken into account in all policies applied by public administrations within the framework of their respective competencies and which might affect developing countries."

However, these risks not only need to be identified. To embark upon the route to coherence, two essential elements are needed: political will and adequate procedures. Political will has to be at its maximum because the firm commitment of one minister in particular will be of little use if he or she has to permanently fight corporatist visions of other administrative bodies, each one focused on defending its own interests. And adequate procedures are needed to guarantee the existence of appropriate spaces and timeframes to debate topics within the context of the orientative criteria established by the Development Cooperation Act.

Thus far, neither of these two aspects can be taken for granted. The long process, which seems to be on the verge of closing within the Cooperation Council, has borne silent testimony – and at times probably astonished testimony – to the long road we have yet to travel. The list of disagreements is long (ranging from initial conceptual differences, conflicts of interest, not being accustomed to negotiating with multiple players, etc.). In addition, the panorama of pending tasks can only remind us of the urgency and importance of the challenge. Ending the legislature without having taken concrete steps in this area would mean abandoning one of the Government's key messages as well as disappointing the expectations of all those whose lives and future depend on our decisions.



## **Foroaod – Spanish Development Aid**

FRIDE organised the project "Spanish Development Aid - Mid-term Review and a Proposal for a Participative Consultation" between June 2006 and April 2007. This project aims to develop a consultation process about the current Spanish government's development cooperation policy. We have created a forum for participation and debate, in order to assess the Spanish development cooperation reform agenda and to identify the main achievements and shortcomings in operationalising the initiatives based on the principle of "More Aid, Better Aid". A set of recommendation guidelines were developed, through participative methods, with the objective of putting into practice the aspirations of the Spanish development cooperation policy.

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