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Development Cooperation in ESTONIA

Country Study

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*Data included is from the end of October 2007

Glossary

AKÜ	Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud – Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation
BAPP	Baltic-American Partnership Program
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DE/AR	Development education / Awareness raising
EC	European Commission
EDRT	Estonian Disaster Relief Team
EGA	e-Governance Academy
EME	European Movement Estonia
ENUT	The Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre
EU	European Union
GLEN	Global Education Network of Young Europeans
GNI	Gross National Income
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
JMK	Johannes Mihkelson Centre
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals (UN)
MFA	Estonian Ministry for Foreign Affairs
NGDO	Non-Governmental Development Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODACE	Official Development Assistance in Central Europe (CIDA)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEF	Open Estonia Foundation
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSI	Open Society Institute
Peipsi CTC	Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation
REC	The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe
The Principles	Principles of Estonian Development Co-operation
The Strategy	Estonia's Strategy for Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Aid 2006-2010
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	The UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction¹

In 2008, Estonia will celebrate a decade of being a donor country: financial resources for development cooperation were first allocated in 1998. Since then, both the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have increased their involvement in development cooperation as well as development education/awareness raising (DE/AR). The government has set up a legal framework, increased the visibility of development cooperation as a policy area and implemented numerous activities. Currently, it is dealing with the challenges of targeting its aid more effectively and becoming a respected donor country in the international community. As for the NGOs, many organisations whose focus has traditionally been on Estonian internal matters are now incorporating international development issues in their agendas, and new development NGOs (NGDOs) are being created. The downside is that many NGOs' development related activities remain as side projects that often lack a long-term vision and strategy. This is due to gaps in finances but also in knowledge and experience. Furthermore, the Estonian public is still largely unaware of notions of development cooperation and the opinion of 'we need to help ourselves first' tends to prevail. Thus, over the past decade Estonia has made significant progress in transforming from a recipient to donor country but considerable work still lies ahead.

1. Official Development Assistance

Estonia's main objectives and priorities for development cooperation are outlined in the *Principles of Estonian Development Co-operation*² (the Principles), first approved by the Parliament on 20 January 1999 and then an updated version passed on 15 January 2003. The document defines development cooperation as an 'integral part of Estonian foreign policy' and states that Estonia follows the principles established for humanitarian and development aid by international organisations, primarily the UN, OECD and EU. The Principles furthermore emphasise that Estonia focuses on fields where it can support both developing countries and transition economies by sharing its own experiences of reform.

In order to increase the transparency and effectiveness of development cooperation, and to improve planning processes and the use of financial means, the government adopted *Estonia's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian aid 2006–2010*³ (the Strategy) in spring 2006, to complement the Principles. According to the Strategy, contributing to global poverty reduction and achieving the MDGs are the underlying goals of Estonia's development cooperation. As for more concrete objectives, the document emphasises supporting (1) human development in developing countries (focus: education; women and children); (2) peace, human rights (especially indigenous people)

¹ Special thanks to Aivar Roop (Experts without Borders), Anu Eslas (AKÜ), Arvo Anton (AKÜ/FEST project), Jelena Katsuba (JMK), Johanna Helin (Jaan Tõnisson Institute/FEST project steering group), Kelly Grossthal (OEF/Support Group for Belarus), Reet Laja (Women's Training Centre/ENUT), Riina Kuusik (Fair Trade project) and Sue Tack (AKÜ) for their information and comments. I'm also grateful to Marje Luup (MFA) for Estonian ODA statistics.

² Available in English at http://www.vm.ee/eng/kat_178/3815.html

³ Available in Estonian at http://web-static.vm.ee/static/failid/219/AH_strateegia_2006-2010.pdf

and the development of democracy (focus: good governance, development of civil society and the media, use of ICT); (3) economic development and trade liberalisation; (4) environmentally sustainable development. A separate objective is to increase the effectiveness of Estonia's development aid, which is meant to be achieved through targeting specific priority countries; emphasising partnership, the needs of beneficiaries and long-term goals; increasing policy coherence; contributing more actively to international organisations and increasing the capacity of both the public sector and civil society to engage in development cooperation. And finally, enhancing DE/AR is a specific objective for 2006-2010, based on the assumption that through awareness raising, public participation in development cooperation and public support for Estonian activities in this field will increase. The document states that instead of one-off events or booklets, a better planned awareness raising series and systematic targeting of youth is necessary.

The MFA is responsible for coordinating Estonian development cooperation both in terms of policy planning and implementation. A Development Cooperation Division that currently employs 5 people was established in 2001 within the MFA's External Economic and Development Cooperation Department and since 2004 the MFA has a separate budget line for development cooperation and humanitarian aid.⁴ Development cooperation projects (development assistance, DE/AR and humanitarian aid) are approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs based on the Principles, the possible effects of the project on the recipient country, the cost and recommendations from the Development Co-operation Commission. The latter consists of representatives of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and the MFA; other governmental agencies or experts are invited if needed. There are no open calls for project proposals; projects are submitted continuously '*by an institution or a person under an application for assistance made by the recipient country, under a call made by an international organisation or on the initiative of a non-governmental organisation*' and the MFA can also submit projects at its own initiative.⁵ Furthermore, other ministries, government agencies and local governments can plan and implement activities in the scope of their competencies from their own budgets.

Estonia's financial contribution to development cooperation increased sharply after Estonia's accession to the EU in May 2004, as a certain amount from payments to the EU budget is allocated for financing EC development and humanitarian aid programmes. Whilst in 2003 Estonia disbursed about €1,75 million (0,02% of GNI) for development cooperation activities, in 2004 this sum reached €6,58 million (0,08% of GNI). In 2005, Estonian ODA was approximately €7,66 million (0,08% of GNI) and in 2006 around €11,2 million (0,09% of GNI) when calculated according to the OECD DAC criteria. Funds earmarked for development cooperation and humanitarian aid in the MFA's budget accounted for around €500 000 in 2004, €511 000 in 2005 and €1,55 million in 2006. According to the Strategy, Estonia intends to steadily increase its ODA '*at least up to the level of 0,1% of GNI*' by 2010 and '*strives*' towards the target of 0,17% of GNI by 2010 as agreed in the EU Council of Ministers on 24 May 2005 and reiterated by the June

⁴ Until then funds were allocated from the Government's financial reserve, which meant that each project had to be approved by the Cabinet.

⁵ See also the *Procedure for the provision of development assistance and humanitarian aid*, available in English at: <http://web-static.vm.ee/static/failid/377/Procedure.pdf>

2005 European Council. By 2015 Estonia should strive to increase its ODA/GNI ratio to 0.33% according to those commitments.⁶

Estonia puts much faith in multilateral agencies and most of the ODA (81% in 2005, and 86% in 2006) is disbursed through them. More than 2/3 of ODA is channelled through the EU (e.g. in 2005 65%, and in 2006 81% of all ODA). Additionally, Estonia has been regularly supporting the operations of several UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, UNHCR, OCHA, UNFPA, UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, and UN Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People) through voluntary contributions. According to the Strategy, Estonia plans to increase these in the future. Estonia has also graduated from borrower status at the World Bank and aims to become a member of the bank's International Development Association (IDA). Estonia is working towards joining the OECD and gaining observer status in its Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

As for bilateral aid (in 2005 19% and in 2006 14% of all ODA), Estonia has made a commitment to focus on areas where it can provide significant added value. Thus, it emphasises transferring know-how to those regions and countries that are going through reforms similar to those that were undertaken by Estonia in the 1990s. As such, it has bilaterally supported projects in around 20 countries in Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, the Western Balkans and to a lesser extent in Central Asia, in fields as diverse as public administration reform and environmental protection, privatisation and EU integration, ICT and civil society support. In order to target Estonia's development aid more effectively, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Afghanistan⁷ have been defined as priority countries for 2006-2010 based on the needs and priorities of the countries and Estonia's own capacity. However, other countries can also be supported if they are interested in some specific Estonian experiences. As such, e-governance related projects were financed with Kosovo and with Macedonia in early 2007 for example. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Estonia is currently present only through multilateral agencies but, according to the Strategy, considers it important to develop bilateral cooperation with one of the Sub-Saharan African countries in the future.

Humanitarian aid (in 2005 8,3% and in 2006 1,8% of all ODA), which is seen as an integral part of development cooperation policy, is mostly disbursed through targeted contributions to multilateral organisations. In 2006, for example, the Estonian government supported communities affected by the Indonesian earthquake through the IFRC, offered help to the Lebanese as well as the Darfur refugees through the UNHCR and supported through UNICEF children suffering from violent conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. National partners for delivering humanitarian aid are the Estonian Red Cross and the governmental Estonian Disaster Relief Team (EDRT). The EDRT contributed, for example, to the rescue and relief work in Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake and in Indonesia after the Tsunami disaster.

⁶ Brussels European Council 16-17 June 2005, Presidency Conclusions, document available at http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/85349.pdf

⁷ The choice of Afghanistan has met with criticism from civil society – Estonia is present in Afghanistan as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the decision to define Afghanistan as an ODA priority seems to be driven by the wish to offer political support to Estonia's NATO allies rather than genuine development objectives (see e.g. CONCORD 2007; Kuusik 2006).

Finally, it is worth highlighting a special part of Estonia's development cooperation: efforts directed towards the Finno-Ugric people in Russia. Both the Principles and Strategy mention it as a special focus and the work is mainly done through the Estonian Government's Kindred People's Programme.⁸ The Programme focuses on contributing to the development of Uralic people's native-speaking intelligentsia (e.g. providing them with opportunities to study in Estonia), preserving their cultural heritage, promoting information exchange (e.g. supporting the use of ICT between different Uralic groups, informing the international community about issues related to the Uralic people) and also working out Uralic peoples' survival strategies through healthcare and environmental protection programmes. The programme is financed from the state budget via the Ministry of Education and Research (in 2006 around €190 000). Occasional projects are also financed by the MFA's development cooperation and humanitarian aid budget (e.g. projects related to the Sami communities in the Kola peninsula and the Mari children mentioned in section 2.1). These activities are thought of as development cooperation although they cannot be counted as ODA because Russia does not qualify as a developing country according to OECD DAC criteria. As part of ODA, Estonia has regular financial support for the UN indigenous people's organisations, such as the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

1.1 Cooperation with NGOs

Both the Principles and the Strategy emphasise civil society as an important partner for the public sector. The Principles stress the significant role of NGOs in elaborating policies, designing and implementing specific projects and introducing international development issues to Estonian society. The Strategy reinforces this and furthermore states that it is the '*diversity*' and '*creativity*' as well as '*their relations with civil society in the partner countries*' that make NGOs valuable partners in policy planning, project implementation and public awareness raising. As for awareness raising, the Strategy states it is best done through NGOs. Consequently, the Strategy considers it important to allocate resources for building the capacity related to development cooperation not only in the public sector but also in NGOs. The importance of cooperation with NGOs is often reinforced in MFA publications, speeches by the minister etc.

This intention has been, more or less, translated into practice as well. The Development Cooperation Division of the MFA has been characterised as open, cooperative and constructive by NGOs. To prove it, the Estonian Network of Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) awarded the division the title '*Public sector organisation of the year 2006*' considering them as a role model for other public authorities in terms of information sharing and civil society inclusion. AKÜ, the Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation, has formed a close relationship with the division: there is permanent informal contact and common planning of activities. However, this cordial relationship between AKÜ and the MFA's Development Cooperation Division has not brought results in practice in a number of critical areas, such as establishing open calls for project proposals, or providing institutional support for AKÜ, despite extensive discussions and friendly promises over the years.

⁸ The programme is available in English at <http://www.suri.ee/hp/index-en.html>

Regarding participation in policy-making, NGOs were invited to comment on the draft Principles and Strategy and some of their important suggestions were taken into account. Additionally, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament has invited NGOs to share their ideas and concerns at its meetings several times. NGOs have raised issues on their own initiative through letters and requesting meetings. Although letting the decision-makers know NGOs' views and getting feedback on those views has functioned well, the NGOs' impact on the content has thus far been rather limited. The latter is, among other things, due to the low capacity of the NGOs themselves to provide well-argued professional input and to carry out continuous and professional advocacy work.

As for implementation, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, ODA was rarely channeled through NGOs. However, since then the NGOs' share has gradually risen and over the past few years NGOs have implemented about half of the MFA-funded bilateral development cooperation projects. Most of these projects are initiated by the NGOs themselves but some were conceived by the MFA together with its partners in recipient countries. In financial terms, this means that in 2004 NGOs implemented development projects with MFA funds⁹ for around €211 000, in 2005 for €137 000 and in 2006 for €321 000. Part of these funds covered NGOs' DE/AR projects: in 2004 around €22 600 (Fair Trade, Terveilm), in 2005 €29 500 (the World Day, GLEN) and in 2006 €37 500 (the World Day, GLEN). The problem remains that there are still no open and transparent calls for project proposals. The current system favours those NGOs that are already in close contact with the MFA and the lack of concrete guidelines for projects makes it difficult for 'newcomers' to enter the circle.

2. NGOs and international development¹⁰

Only three Estonian NGOs focus most or all of their activities on developing countries – e-Governance Academy, Experts without Borders and the NGO New Way for Belarus. No NGO apart from AKÜ spends most of its energy on DE/AR. However, quite a few other NGOs are engaged in cooperation with partners from developing countries and/or incorporating international development themes into their public awareness raising programmes, in addition to their core activities. Furthermore, efforts are ongoing to establish more NGDOs. Estonian NGOs' development cooperation activities mainly take the form of sharing experiences through consulting and training programmes, and many organisations have only recently started to classify those activities as development cooperation. On the positive side, these NGOs have strong experience and expertise in a specific field that can be leveraged in international development (e.g. civil society development, environmental protection, women's issues). The negative side, however, is that in many cases development related activities do not form a permanent component of the NGO but are implemented sporadically subject to project funding. As a result, it is challenging to keep the development issues continuously on NGOs' agendas and to work towards long-term goals.

⁹ Information on MFA funded projects is available at http://www.mfa.ee/eng/kat_178/3463.html

¹⁰ This section provides an overview and highlights examples but does not claim to be a comprehensive mapping exercise.

As for geographical focus, Estonian NGOs are active in various CIS countries: e.g. in Georgia, Russia (border regions, indigenous people), Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and to a lesser extent in the Central Asian CIS countries. The common Soviet Union experience and the Russian language skills of many Estonians explain this focus well. Occasional projects are also implemented in the Western Balkans. No NGO seems to be working with Africa or Latin-America but the number of individuals with experience in these regions is rising.

As for main sources of funding, the largest development cooperation projects are implemented with MFA funds (see also section 1.2). Furthermore, the Open Society Institute's (OSI) East-East programme¹¹ is a crucial source and NGOs also make use of EU programmes (e.g. the Youth in Action Programme). As for the EU budget line for co-financing with NGOs (the 21-02-03 line), in early 2006 four DE/AR projects co-financed from this budget line were launched in Estonia (although none of the projects has an Estonian lead agency). Yet, no Estonian NGO seems to have been able to use the 21-02-03 budget line for projects in developing countries. Although large amounts of private funds were raised for Tsunami relief, private funding for development cooperation is virtually non-existent. However, there is some potential for it in the future, considering the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) themes in Estonia and the fact that companies can get tax exemption of up to 10% of their pre-tax income or 3% of the salary fund for donations to charity if the recipient is featured in the list of non-profit associations that are entitled to tax benefits.

2.1 Development cooperation

The most prominent Estonian NGO in the field of development cooperation is the e-Governance Academy¹² (EGA). EGA was founded as an NGO by the UNDP, OSI and the Estonian government in 2002; it received core funding at the beginning but is now entirely dependent on projects. EGA has been the key NGO partner for the MFA regarding development cooperation and has received project funding apart from its founders from the World Bank, OSCE, EC, recipients' governments, Soros Foundation Moldova, the Open Estonia Foundation etc. EGA's mission is to train and advise leaders and stakeholders in using ICT to increase government efficiency and to improve democratic processes. Its geographic focus lies in the CIS countries, the Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Asia; it works occasionally also with other countries based on their requests and needs. For implementing its mission, EGA brings higher-level civil servants (also media representatives and on rare occasions NGO leaders) to Estonia for tailor-made training programmes offering an insight into how the effective use of ICT can have an impact on everyday life and contribute to a country's overall development. The training also emphasises the role political will, legal frameworks, governance processes, public private partnerships and the like play in materialising the benefits of ICT. Between 2003 and 2007 EGA trained over 500 decision-makers from around 35 countries. EGA also conducts research and provides consulting services. As for the latter, two long-term commitments are worth mentioning: EGA is working with Georgia and Moldova on their programmes to modernise educational systems through the introduction of ICT.¹³ Utilising experiences from the Estonian school

¹¹ <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/east>

¹² <http://www.ega.ee>

¹³ See more about the Georgian 'Deer Leap' programme at <http://www.dlf.ge/en/>

computerisation programme '*Tiger Leap*' EGA is involved in elaborating digital study materials, establishing sustainable training systems of teachers, integrating ICT into the curricula, and monitoring the Georgian *Deer Leap* programme.

In early 2007, a few activists founded the NGO Experts without Borders – the first Estonian NGDO to emerge from a private initiative. The aim of the organisation is to send experts to developing countries in the fields of environmental awareness (potentially also environmental technology) and local development. As for the latter, the NGO Experts without Borders intends to focus on sharing specialist advice on social entrepreneurship and smart solutions for providing local services. The NGO does not yet have paid staff and depends entirely on volunteers. To date, the team has been busy identifying needs, potential activities and local partners in Moldova and Georgia (initial target countries) as well as preparing and submitting project proposals – in other words preparing for its first assignments.

As for NGOs implementing occasional development cooperation projects next to their core activities, the most active have been environmental NGOs. For example, the Estonian Fund for Nature¹⁴ worked for several years with the Sami communities in the Kola Peninsula in Russia with financial support from the MFA and the Danish government. The Fund supported the Samis in establishing and developing associations based on kinship through which the Samis would have the possibility to ensure their livelihoods (e.g. apply for land for long-term use, deal with traditional fields of trade). To enhance the capacity of those community organisations the Fund for Nature, for example, provided training sessions on means of communication and organisational democracy as well as sharing information on nature preservation and the role of NGOs in this field. To continue, the Estonian Society for Nature Conservation¹⁵ implemented a project in 2004 to increase the institutional capacity of the Georgian Ministry of the Environment and environmental NGOs: both high level civil servants and NGO leaders learned about Estonian experiences in institutional reforms and about the possibilities for cooperation between NGOs and the government.¹⁶ Currently discussions are ongoing to start a training programme for regional leaders of environmental organisations in Georgia, with the aim of increasing their capacity to participate in policy-making. In 2004, REC Estonia¹⁷ organised a training programme for local government officials from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria and Croatia on ecotourism as a field for cross-border cooperation, with financial support from the MFA and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. In 2006, they launched an MFA co-financed project to assist the Ukrainian town of Kozelets to develop environmentally friendly small businesses.

To continue with environmental organisations, the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation¹⁸ (Peipsi CTC) has been sharing their experiences accumulated from promoting sustainable development and cross-border cooperation in the Lake Peipsi basin with other transboundary water regions for years. This year, they have been active in enhancing the capacity of Moldovan water management experts

¹⁴ <http://www.elfond.ee>

¹⁵ <http://www.elks.ee>

¹⁶ This MFA and CIDA financed project was the result of CIDA ODACE funded fact-finding mission of a group of Estonian environmental NGO leaders to Georgia in 2003.

¹⁷ <http://www.recestonia.ee>

¹⁸ <http://www.ctc.ee>

in promoting cooperation in the border area water bodies and in using EU funds for environmental projects in Moldova as well as increasing public awareness on the environmental conditions and problems of the transboundary river Dniestr. Since 2003, Peipsi CTC has been contributing to developing the use of good practices in governing the transboundary waters of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Talas and Chu rivers): they have supported the development of relevant institutions and procedures, promoted cooperation between the various actors involved in governing the transboundary waters and contributed to increasing public participation in administering the border-rivers.¹⁹ Peipsi CTC has also worked on enhancing cooperation in the Lake Orchid region bordering Macedonia and Albania. Peipsi CTC's development cooperation activities have received co-funding from the MFA, OSCE, the OSI East-East programme, and UK and Swedish governments, among others.

Peipsi CTC has furthermore been active in promoting cooperation between NGOs from Estonia and from countries right across the EU eastern border. For example, together with the European Movement Estonia²⁰ (EME) they initiated in 2004 with co-financing from the MFA and CIDA the *Eastgate* programme to strengthen cooperation between civil society organisations (as well as local governments) from Estonia, North-West Russia, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine through conferences, summer schools, networking, publications and mailing-lists. In the framework of the programme, they prepared a study in 2005, which provided an overview of democracy and civil society development in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus as well as highlighting possibilities for Estonia's support to civil society in those countries.²¹ *Eastgate* is inactive for the time being but Peipsi CTC carries on organising summer schools on cross-border cooperation themes bringing together participants from Estonia and the EU eastern neighbourhood. EME also continues to implement occasional projects. For example, with financial support from the East-East programme, they brought Ukrainian, Moldovan and Belarusian civil society actors to monitor the local elections in Estonia in 2007 with the aim of providing them with a first-hand observation about democratic processes and election procedures in Estonia as well as establishing contacts and developing ideas for future cooperation.

The study mentioned in the previous paragraph was financed by the Open Estonia Foundation²² (OEF), an organisation that has contributed to civil society development in the EU eastern neighbourhood in other ways as well. Over the past few years, the OEF has been financially supporting the participation of NGO leaders from the CIS countries in conferences and other events in Estonia. Furthermore, OEF usually organises side meetings between its guests and Estonian NGO activists as well as other stakeholders. On several occasions these side meetings have given rise to further projects and cooperation.

The OEF has been particularly active regarding Belarus. Since 2004, they have been promoting cooperation among Estonian NGOs, politicians, researchers and other interested individuals to support democratisation efforts in Belarus. The OEF

¹⁹ Peipsi CTC also assisted in developing a website for the region, see <http://www.talascchu.org/>

²⁰ <http://www.euroopalikumine.ee>

²¹ *The new Eastern neighbours of the European Union on the way to democracy. How to support civil society?*, available in English at http://www.oef.org.ee/en/hot/2005-12-01_102615/

²² <http://www.oef.org.ee>

has also put strong emphasis on finding local partners, planning activities together with them as well as organising training sessions and meetings for them. In spring 2006, the OEF sent Estonian election observers to monitor the presidential elections in Belarus. Many of these observers were profoundly touched by their personal experiences (including arrests) there and became enthusiastic about contributing to change in this last dictatorship in Europe. Consequently, together with some other activists they formed the Support Group for Belarus – an informal network of about 20 individuals (NGO activists, young politicians etc) that organise ad hoc solidarity actions, protests and the like to draw attention to limitations to personal freedom in Belarus. Together with the OEF they send out a press release on the 16th day of every month – on the Day of Solidarity with all those repressed or persecuted in Belarus. Immediately after the 2006 presidential elections, the Support Group for Belarus and the OEF lobbied the Estonian government and universities to start a programme enabling Belarusian students that have been expelled from universities for political reasons to continue their studies in Estonia. The lobbying was successful: in the same autumn a group of Belarusian students started their studies in Estonia and another group followed this autumn. The Estonian government pays the students' tuition fees as well as offering a stipend to cover their living expenses; the OEF administers the programme together with the Support Group for Belarus, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs.

The increased interest in and activities around Belarus also fuelled the creation of the NGO New Way for Belarus in early 2007. This NGO enables, on one hand, an activist of the Third Way Community²³ to continue his activities from Estonia after having fled Belarus due to facing a prison sentence there for producing cartoons mocking Lukašenka and his administration.²⁴ On the other hand, the NGO offers a legal body for Estonian activists to submit Belarus-related projects for funding as well as accommodate some private financial donations that have been made for the benefit of democratisation efforts in Belarus. The NGO New Way for Belarus, for example, continuously arranges 'extra-curricular' seminars for Belarusian students studying in Estonia, helped to find financial backing for Juri Hašiševatski to produce his film '*Kalinovski Square*' and showed the photo exhibition '*Spark of Bravery*' by Alexandr Polo in Tallinn.

To continue with examples of NGOs that implement development cooperation projects in addition to their core activities in Estonia, it is worth highlighting women's organisations. For example, the Women's Training Centre²⁵ has been active in the Southern Caucasus for several years: they have been providing training and consultations supported by OSCE funding in Georgia since 2000, and more recently in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Their main mission in the region is to promote gender equality. To achieve this aim, they provide support in various specific fields depending on the local needs: for example, training and advising women's groups on NGO management and working in NGO networks; sharing Estonian experience on government-NGO relations as well as women entrepreneurship. The Women's Training Centre experts mostly provide consultations and training in the field, and analyse the situation and plan subsequent activities after each visit. Occasionally, they bring their local partners

²³ <http://belarus.3dway.org/about>

²⁴ The cartoons are available at <http://multclub.org>

²⁵ <http://www.nkk.ee>

on study visits to Estonia. For example, in the summer of 2005 Georgian and Kyrgyzstan grass-root leaders were brought to visit various private local initiatives in Estonia with the aim of demonstrating that there are numerous ways people can improve their lives through grass-root initiatives. Additionally, in 2004-2005 the Women's Training Centre implemented a project with MFA funding through which they organised a joint 3-day seminar for Georgian parliamentarians, NGOs and civil servants in Tbilisi. The aim was to share Estonian reform experiences in enhancing entrepreneurship, employment and participatory democracy but the activity proved particularly successful due to there being space for Georgian public authorities and NGO leaders to come together. The Women's Training Centre has also had occasional engagements with Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Belarus and Macedonia. The Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre²⁶ (ENUT) launched a two-year EC-funded project on human trafficking in the Southern Caucasus in May 2007. In the first phase of the project, a study on the current situation of human trafficking in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan is being prepared and training programmes will subsequently be organised for related actors (social workers, journalists, the police, border guards, and judges). The NGO Women's Shelter²⁷ has worked with partners from Kazakhstan and Georgia, with financial support from the East-East programme: in 2005 they carried out a project to share experiences and innovative methodologies used in Estonia regarding domestic violence with partners from Kazakhstan, and in 2006 they shared Estonian specialists' experiences regarding mistreated women with their partners from Georgia.

In 2006, the think-tank Praxis²⁸ worked on a project to transfer Estonian and Polish experiences of planning and implementing National Health Accounts to health care specialists from Kazakhstan, with financial support from the East-East programme. In the summer of 2007, the Estonian Union of Child Welfare²⁹ and the Fenno-Ugria Association³⁰ brought children from Mari-El to a children's camp in Estonia with financial support from the MFA development cooperation budget. This was done with the aim of creating opportunities for cultural exchange and building contacts between the children and their families. The Johannes Mihkelson Centre³¹ implemented an East-East project in 2006 that organised an exchange of Estonian and Georgian journalists to analyse the implementation of European neighbourhood policies, promoted regular information exchange between Estonia and Georgia, and offered an opportunity to the Georgian colleagues to gain knowledge on how the self-regulatory system of the media functions in Estonia. There are also other NGOs that run occasional projects or are planning to do so in the future.

On a different note, one should also mention the Estonian School of Diplomacy³² which is not a genuine NGO but operates as a foundation to promote theoretical and practical experience of international relations and European studies in Estonia. The school has been active in development cooperation for several years

²⁶ <http://www.enut.ee>

²⁷ <http://www.naistetugi.ee>

²⁸ <http://www.praxis.ee>

²⁹ <http://www.lastekaitseliit.ee>

³⁰ <http://www.fennougria.ee>

³¹ <http://www.jmk.ee>

³² <http://www.edk.edu.ee>

focusing on providing training courses on EU and NATO issues for civil servants and young diplomats from e.g. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. The Estonian School of Diplomacy has been one of the MFA's key partners.

Regarding humanitarian aid, the Estonian Red Cross³³ occasionally participates in international humanitarian aid activities. It provided, for example, humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Beslan tragedy (Russia, 2004) in cooperation with the MFA and it implemented the MFA's donation of equipment to the children's department of the Helmand Provincial Hospital in Afghanistan. The Estonian Red Cross also arranged a collection of funds for the 2005 Tsunami-affected areas.

2.2 Development education / awareness raising (DE/AR)

The Jaan Tõnisson Institute³⁴ was one of the first Estonian NGOs to take up DE/AR activities: in 2001 they published, with the financial support of the MFA and the Finnish Service Centre for Development Cooperation (KEPA)³⁵, a compilation of articles on international development cooperation and the experiences of some Estonian and Finnish NGOs.³⁶ This was the first publication ever to introduce concepts of development cooperation in Estonian. The Jaan Tõnisson Institute was then inactive for a few years in terms of DE/AR but has recently started looking for opportunities to enhance DE in schools. As a result, in early 2008 the institute will launch a 3-year EC-funded project '*Watch and Change – Development education by documentary films*' in cooperation with Czech, Slovak and Polish organisations. This project aims to contribute to DE/AR in the four countries by using an audiovisual toolkit as an educational method. Planned project activities include preparing and distributing educational materials for secondary schools (documentary films and methodological guides); engaging in advocacy (stakeholder meetings for integrating development themes into national curriculum and preparing ground for national strategy for DE); and providing training for teachers, teacher trainers, future teachers, and film and media students in teaching DE through audiovisual tools and modern methods.

Since 2003, AKÜ has played a key-role in enhancing DE/AR Estonia and inspiring other NGOs to incorporate development themes in their public awareness raising activities. As for the latter, the environmental NGOs have become very active: the Estonian Green Movement-FoE has incorporated raising awareness on Fair Trade in its programme (see section 2.3), the *Greengate*³⁷ news portal run by the Estonian Fund for Nature has started publishing development cooperation related articles and the Fund for Nature itself has taken a lead in conceptualising development education in the framework of AKÜ. The OEF, EME and the Peipsi CTC have become the most active NGOs, organising conferences, seminars and roundtables on development cooperation themes; most of their events as well as continuous information sharing through mailing-lists and websites focus on issues related to the developing countries in the EU neighbourhood.

³³ <http://www.redcross.ee>

³⁴ <http://www.jti.ee>

³⁵ <http://www.kepa.fi>

³⁶ Jaan Tõnisson Institute (2001) *Avarduv maailm: eestlased rahvusvahelises arengukoostöös*

³⁷ <http://www.greengate.ee>

AKÜ has also been working on DE/AR in its own capacity. Its mailing-list has become an important source for information on international development issues and it has organised numerous training programmes, seminars and talks for NGO activists and other interested individuals. In 2004, AKÜ started working on the [Terveilm.net](http://www.terveilm.net)³⁸ web-portal that was supposed to centralise information in the Estonian language on development cooperation practices and policies and news on developing countries as well as becoming an exchange forum for Estonian organisations that are active in international development. A lot of work has been put into it over the years but whilst the portal contains some quality texts and is occasionally updated for news, it has not yet become fully operational due to a lack of financing and human resources.

AKÜ has been the Estonian partner for the [GLEN](http://www.glen-europe.org)³⁹ project since 2004. As in other European countries, the GLEN project provides opportunities for young Estonians to learn about development cooperation through direct exposure to the developing world. Young people are sent out for three months with their German tandem partners to various projects in developing countries where they can get first-hand experience in development cooperation and cultural exchange. Young Estonians have already worked through GLEN on projects in e.g. South Africa, Malawi, Cameroon, Georgia and in 2007 five youths went out to work on Fair Trade in South Africa, the reintegration of war returnees in Uganda, organic agriculture in Moldova, rural tourism development in Georgia and public relations for rural development in India. Since 2005, the participation of Estonian youths in GLEN development cooperation projects has been financed by the MFA. A significant aspect of the GLEN initiative is the idea that the *Glennies* should engage in DE/AR activities once they are back in Estonia. As such the former *Glennies* have published articles in newspapers, given lectures, organised photo exhibitions etc.

Together with the MFA, AKÜ has developed a tradition of [World Days](#)⁴⁰ – annual open air festivals held in one of the central parks of Tallinn with the specific aim of raising public awareness about international development. During the World Day, various organisations (NGOs, MFA, EC, embassies, EDRT etc) set up information stands in the park to introduce their international development related activities; informative workshops and debates take place in discussion tents, and key-note speeches alternate with music and dance attractions from developing countries on the main stage. The first World Day took place on 17 September 2005 and attracted attention from the community as well as the media. 16 September 2006 witnessed the second World Day, which focused on introducing the MDGs and had around 10 000 visitors. As for side-activities, a special newspaper supplement was published in one of the main Estonian dailies and a film programme was organised, which did not attract too many viewers due to a lack of publicity. On 15 September 2007, the third World Day took place focusing this time on introducing Estonia as a donor and its priority countries (the official target countries as well as Belarus). This year there were fewer visitors to the World Day than in previous years (not least due to the rain) and next year the World Day format is expected to change.

³⁸ <http://www.terveilm.net>

³⁹ <http://www.glen-europe.org>

⁴⁰ The inspiration came from Helsinki's World Village Festivals that several AKÜ activists had participated in. See also: <http://www.maailmakylassa.fi>

In early 2006, four DE/AR projects co-financed from the EU 21-02-03 budget line were launched in Estonia: the FEST project (see next paragraph), the Fair Trade project (see section 2.3) and two projects with the Johannes Mihkelson Centre (JMK) as the Estonian partner. The 2-year project '*Transnational Learning for Civil Society Organisations from New Member States on Development Issues Relating to International Labour Rights*'⁴¹ aims to improve the capacity of NGOs and trade unions from Estonia, Malta, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Cyprus to mobilise public support as well as political awareness on the labour conditions in developing countries and their interdependence with European development policies. The project is led by the Italian organisation ISCOS-Cisl.⁴² During the first project year JMK participated with all project partners in elaborating curricula and educational materials on international labour rights in the context of the global economy and subsequently, between March-June 2007, JMK organised training courses for trade union and NGO leaders in Estonia based on the materials. Parts of those training sessions focused on providing tools for further training to enable participants to disseminate the gained knowledge further and two such peer training sessions have been planned for this autumn. In the framework of the SOLIDAR⁴³ initiated 3-year project '*Decent Work for Development (Jobs Jobs Jobs)*' JMK organises yearly conferences for NGOs, university students and opinion formers on how the creation of decent work is key to poverty eradication in developing countries. These conferences make use of eight case studies that were carried out in different developing countries.

In March 2006, seven Finnish, Swedish and Estonian NGOs started a three-year project – the FEST project⁴⁴ – to raise public awareness about EU development policy and North-South relations. The specific objective is to strengthen Finnish, Swedish and Estonian development NGOs' capacity to disseminate information on EU development policy and to participate in relevant policy debates. Each year the project focuses on a certain theme: the first year on EU development policy in general, the second year on EU policy coherence and the third year on participation of NGOs and southern partners in EU development policy. As for activities with an Estonian dimension, various seminars, training programmes, lectures, and informal talks are being organised for NGOs and other interested participants over the three years and in summer 2008 a larger-scale summer school will be held in Estonia. NGO activists are also given the opportunity to participate together with their Finnish and Swedish colleagues in international seminars and in annual study visits to Brussels. Through those activities, Estonian NGOs learn about development cooperation and at the same time also create stronger links with Finnish and Swedish NGOs. Furthermore, seven TV broadcasts on international development issues are being produced (as of autumn 2007, four of them are ready) to be shown on national TV as well as distributed among schools etc. From the Estonian side the project was planned by AKÜ activists but as AKÜ was not a legal body at the time of applying for funding, the Estonian project partners became the Fund for Nature (consortium member) and EME (partner). The Estonian project coordinator is employed by EME but has been cooperating as closely with AKÜ as possible.

⁴¹ <http://www.transnational-learning.eu>

⁴² Trade Union Institute for Development Cooperation, <http://www.iscos.cisl.it>

⁴³ www.solidar.org

⁴⁴ <http://www.fest-project.org>

Regarding DE/AR it is also worth mentioning People to People Estonia that works mostly with the Russian-speaking population in Estonia. People to People Estonia is the Estonian representative to the Council of Europe Global Education Network (GENE) and is responsible for organising the Global Education Week in Estonia – an initiative for schools conceived by the Council of Europe's North-South Centre. People to People Estonia has organised teenagers' summer camps that were partly dedicated to development cooperation topics.

2.3 Fair Trade

The presence of Fair Trade has increased significantly in Estonia over the past few years thanks to an initial impetus provided by AKÜ: already the very first AKÜ meetings in 2003 witnessed discussions on how to approach Fair Trade, where to source Fair Trade products to be used in awareness raising, and what to do with and learn from Finnish partners etc. Environmental organisations (The Fund for Nature and Estonian Green Movement-FoE) took the lead within AKÜ in this area. In early 2003, they developed and submitted a project for funding to the MFA to introduce the idea of Fair Trade in major public events through distributing Fair Trade coffee, tea and chocolate and holding discussion forums on the impact of consumer behaviour on coffee and tea growing communities in developing countries. As the project did not receive funding from the MFA, those activities were eventually carried out on a small scale in 2003.

Awareness raising activities on Fair Trade received a larger boost in 2004 when a project submitted to the MFA by the Estonian Green Movement-FoE⁴⁵ in cooperation with AKÜ received financial support until autumn 2005. Consequently, a Fair Trade seminar was organised for AKÜ members and the project activists themselves received additional training abroad (Finland, Malta, Germany); materials to introduce Fair Trade in Estonian were printed; Fair Trade products were distributed and publicised in some major public events as planned earlier for 2003. The project leader was also active in encouraging NGOs to start using Fair Trade products in the coffee breaks of their events. Fair Trade was introduced to sales managers of both small specialist shops and big supermarkets in order to increase the availability of Fair Trade goods in Estonian stores. As a separate initiative, a few activists joined a Finnish delegation in autumn 2005 to visit Fair Trade cooperatives in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. With financial support from the MFA, four 7-minute documentary clips using material from the visit were prepared and aired on TV, along with some coverage in the printed media.

In 2006, the Estonian Green Movement-FoE and the Association for Promoting Fairtrade in Finland⁴⁶ launched a 3-year project '*Creating Commitment towards Fair Trade among Supermarket Staff and Fair Trade Volunteers in Finland and Launching Fair Trade in Estonia*' co-financed by the EC under the 21-02-03 budget line. The Estonian part of the project aims to increase awareness of Fair Trade in Estonia, bringing the Fairtrade Certification Mark to Estonia and increasing the availability of Fair Trade products in Estonian stores.

⁴⁵ <http://www.roheline.ee>

⁴⁶ <http://www.reilukauppa.fi>

The Fairtrade Certification Mark was consequently officially launched in Estonia on 8 May 2007, making Estonia the first Baltic country to offer Fairtrade Certified Products. Relatedly, during the 2nd week of May 2007 the project team organised an intensive programme of educational and promotional activities on Fair Trade with additional funds from the Dutch embassy, the OEF and the State Chancellery. Seminars were organised for the general public as well as specifically for retailers and importers, promotion sessions were held at department stores, screenings of documentaries (e.g. the movie *'Black Gold'* that exposes the inequalities of the coffee industry) were arranged, and a media campaign was organised. A special tram coloured with Fair Trade advertisements started circulating in the streets of Tallinn and will continue to do so until the end of 2007. A particular concept that was developed for introducing Fair Trade goods during the Fairtrade Certification Mark launch campaign (and for further awareness raising activities) emphasises Fair Trade products being as good as local Estonian products, with the only difference being that these goods can not be grown in Estonia (coffee, tea, bananas, etc).

As for other Fair Trade awareness raising activities, for continuous information sharing the project team has set up a website⁴⁷ and a mailing list. One of the TV broadcasts produced in the framework of the FEST project covers Fair Trade issues, and it has been aired on national TV as well as in several events. In summer 2007, the Finnish Fair Trade Ship Estelle⁴⁸ visited Tallinn, receiving extensive media coverage. In September, Fair Trade was introduced in the World Day. Estonia's first Fairtrade week was planned for 12-18 November 2007: during that week, among other things, several special guests (e.g. a coffee farmer from Tanzania) participated in several events in Estonia, a seminar for retail, catering and other interested companies was organised, and the title of *'Friend of Fair Trade'* was awarded to the Open Estonia Foundation. As for awareness raising activities in 2008, the plan is to coordinate more strongly with other DE/AR activities in Estonia.

Since the launch of the EC-funded project, the availability of Fair Trade goods has risen considerably in Estonia. In 2003 when AKÜ first started promoting Fair Trade only very few Fair Trade products were sold in some small organic food stores. By autumn 2007, however, the variety of Fair Trade goods imported to Estonia has increased considerably: apart from coffee, tea and chocolate, customers can purchase Fair Trade cocoa, beer, wine, various fruit, sugar, rice, cotton towels and children's clothes. Furthermore, Fair Trade is not the speciality of a few small shops anymore: all most important retail chains sell Fair Trade goods, the widest range of products being available in two central food stores in Tallinn (*Kaubamaja* and *Stockmann*). The plan is to expand the availability of Fair Trade goods to cafeterias as well as promote the daily use of Fair Trade products in various organisations (government offices, banks and other business, NGOs).

3. AKÜ – Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation

The Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (*Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud – AKÜ*) is the equivalent of a national NGDO platform: it brings together NGOs engaged or interested in development cooperation and/or activities to

⁴⁷ <http://www.fairtrade.ee>

⁴⁸ <http://www.estelle.fi>

raise public awareness on development issues. For an overview it is useful to distinguish between AKÜ as a network and AKÜ as a registered NGO.

3.1 AKÜ – network (2002 - 2006)

AKÜ was convened in October 2002 when the Estonian Refugee Council invited a number of NGOs to a meeting to discuss the draft Principles and present joint comments to the MFA. The NGOs that had come together felt that further coordination of activities would be useful and thus AKÜ emerged as an open forum of NGOs and individuals with the common wish to engage in advocacy, awareness raising and joint development projects. Riina Kuusik became the first coordinator of AKÜ, and through the first meetings AKÜ's membership rose to 17 NGOs.⁴⁹ In reality, however, for most of the time AKÜ activities were the result of a few committed individuals and the number of NGOs actively involved fluctuated to a large extent depending on the priorities of their leaders and change of staff within organisations.

Throughout 2003 AKÜ operated as a loose network of organisations and individuals with no finances, no office space and no paid staff. AKÜ met regularly in the meeting rooms of its members and information was continuously shared through a mailing-list that included interested individuals from various sectors (NGO activists, civil servants, politicians, and students). From the very beginning, AKÜ started planning activities on Fair Trade and exploring other opportunities for joint action. Contacts were created and strengthened with European partners, most notably with TRIALOG⁵⁰, DEEEP⁵¹, CONCORD⁵² and Eurostep⁵³, as well as with the CIDA⁵⁴ - ODACE programme. AKÜ started facilitating Estonian NGOs' participation in TRIALOG-funded training and seminars as well as in other European meetings, and AKÜ representatives got engaged in the CONCORD working group on EU enlargement (convened by TRIALOG) and the Development Education Forum (DEF, one of CONCORD's core working groups).⁵⁵ Towards the end of the year, AKÜ drew the attention of Estonian stakeholders to development cooperation related concerns regarding the EU Constitutional Treaty and in December organised, jointly with the OEF, Eurostep and the MFA, a conference in Tallinn to discuss challenges to EU development cooperation policies and practices. This was the first ever big-scale conference on development cooperation held in Estonia.

⁴⁹ Amnesty International Estonia, Caritas Estonia, Estonian Fund for Nature, E-Governance Academy, Estonian Green Movement-FoE, Estonian Refugee Council, Estonian Society for Nature Conservation, Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre, European Movement Estonia, Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation, Jaan Jõnisson Institute, Johannes Mihkelson Centre, People to People Estonia, Open Estonia Foundation, REC-Estonia, UN Association of Estonia, Women's Training Centre.

⁵⁰ TRIALOG is an EU-funded project to raise awareness of development issues in the enlarged EU. See more at <http://www.trialog.or.at>

⁵¹ DEEEP is a project initiated by the Development Education Forum of CONCORD that aims at strengthening capacities of NGOs to raise awareness, educate and mobilise the European public for world-wide poverty eradication and social inclusion. See more at <http://www.deeep.org>

⁵² CONCORD is the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development. See more at <http://www.concordeurope.org>

⁵³ Eurostep is a network of autonomous European NGOs working towards peace, justice and equality in a world free of poverty. See more at <http://www.eurostep.org>

⁵⁴ <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca>

⁵⁵ As a non-CONCORD member, AKÜ participated (and as of autumn 2007 still does participate) in CONCORD activities through financial support from TRIALOG.

From early 2004, AKÜ searched for more systematic ways of operating: it had become clear that financial resources were needed to boost AKÜ's capacity but external funds would, in turn, demand clearer decision-making procedures and working mechanisms. As those involved were more interested in focusing on the content than the format, it was decided not to establish a new NGO but to continue as an informal network with member organisations being responsible for AKÜ administration on a rotation basis. The OEF became the first organisation to administer AKÜ projects and four priority areas were defined: DE/AR, Fair Trade, EU neighbourhood issues and development policy. The Estonian Fund for Nature, Estonian Green Movement-FoE, EME and the OEF would respectively be responsible for leading these themes and representatives of the four organisations together with the general coordinator would constitute the board of AKÜ.

The plan was also to form working groups around the priority areas but despite several efforts, they did not function in practice. Nevertheless, significant work was done around the four themes thanks to the commitment of the AKÜ coordinator, board members and some activists. Work started on the Terveilm.net portal as well as on planning the Estonian-Finnish-Swedish joint project that would later become the FEST project; AKÜ became involved in GLEN and organised the first larger scale activities on Fair Trade in close cooperation with the Estonian Green Movement-FoE; EME and Peipsi CTC led discussions and shared information on EU neighbourhood; AKÜ improved partner relations with the MFA and contributed to several CONCORD-initiated lobby activities by sending policy-related letters to Estonian decision makers. AKÜ representatives also continued to participate in CONCORD working groups (EU enlargement, DEF, and occasionally others) and as a horizontal activity AKÜ carried on sharing information and facilitating participation of Estonian NGOs in European events. In 2004 AKÜ also gained its first experiences in managing external funds: between spring 2004 and spring 2005 AKÜ benefited from a capacity-building grant from the CIDA-ODACE programme and in autumn 2004 AKÜ received its first Baltic-American Partnership Program (BAPP)⁵⁶ grant for organisational development.

The year 2005 witnessed both the continuation of activities initiated during the first two years and new initiatives such as planning and implementing the first World Day together with the MFA, organising two larger-scale training programmes for members, and providing comments on the Estonia's Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid for 2006-2010. During one of the training sessions AKÜ's coordinator shared the results of a questionnaire that had been sent out to AKÜ members at the beginning of the year. According to those results, NGOs considered weak institutional capacity and the unwillingness of members to put forward resources for common activities as weaknesses of AKÜ but, on the other hand, praised the efforts in four thematic areas, good information flows and opportunities for training as well as AKÜ's work in representing NGOs in the field of development cooperation and its constructive relationship with the MFA.

During 2005, considerable soul-searching was underway in terms of AKÜ's institutional set-up. The necessity to create a legal body became apparent due to the need to secure core financing; there were ongoing discussions about it but concrete decisions were postponed to the second half of the year. In view of a

⁵⁶ <http://www.bapp.ee>

new grant from BAPP, which contained the salary for a part-time coordinator, in July 2005 EME took over the administration of AKÜ and coordination was turned over to a new person. Later in 2005 the decision to register AKÜ as a legal body was taken but no specific steps to implement that decision followed in practice. The autumn of 2005 saw frustrations around AKÜ: cooperation between the new coordinator and the board did not work well, several activities progressed poorly, the enthusiasm of old activists diminished and member organisations distanced themselves from AKÜ.

2006 had a difficult start for the roundtable: in early January the board collectively resigned and as the coordinator had left at the end of 2005, the World Day coordinator who had agreed to stay with AKÜ and the newly hired policy officer found themselves alone within AKÜ. Institutional memory was virtually lost, there was no real action plan and the budget did not correspond to the real needs: AKÜ received a new grant from BAPP but the project had been prepared at the end of 2005 with the view that there would also be institutional support from the MFA, which did not happen due to the fact that AKÜ had not registered itself legally. During the year, the two activists together with a third team member who joined in the spring, worked on ensuring the continuation of previous projects (World Day, GLEN, Terveilm.net) as well as on re-building AKÜ: they arranged meetings to re-connect old members, attract new ones and discuss AKÜ's organisational set-up; they implemented a Presidency Fund⁵⁷ project to increase AKÜ's capacity, and they re-established contacts with the European scene and the MFA as well as launching the FEST project in Estonia. They were also active in policy work: AKÜ followed up on the comments presented to the MFA regarding the Guidelines, attempted to influence the reform process of national curriculum for general education regarding DE and facilitated (at the national level) CONCORD lobby work on the EU new financial instruments as well as EU member states' aid spending. During 2006, AKÜ's overheads were met with a combination of funds from the BAPP and TRIALOG support as well as from the Presidency Fund, FEST and World Day projects.

3.2 AKÜ – NGO (since early 2007)

After years of debate on whether or not to formalise the group, concrete steps to register AKÜ as a legal body were taken towards the end of 2006. This was largely due to an increasingly complicated relationship with EME, the hosting organisation at the time: AKÜ often lost visibility as EME publicized AKÜ activities as their own. Consequently, the team felt that an independent organisation would be more effective for implementing focused activities and acting as a partner for the MFA and on the European arena. On 20 December 2006, 10 organisations⁵⁸ came together to sign the statutes and AKÜ was officially registered as an umbrella NGO under Estonian law on 5 February 2007. The newly-created NGO adopted the mission that had been agreed for AKÜ in a strategy seminar in June 2005: *'to promote and develop the Estonian State and Society's active participation and involvement in international development cooperation.'* AKÜ's main objectives

⁵⁷ The Presidency Fund was created in 2005 to promote the engagement of NGOs and other civil society actors from EU new member states in EU Development Policy debates. The fund was established with the support of Irish and Dutch governments, both of which held EU's Presidency in 2004 when ten new member states acceded to the EU. See more at <http://www.presidencyfund.org>

⁵⁸ See the list of AKÜ member organisations in the page 24 of the report.

include strengthening development policy, practical development cooperation and the implementation of DE/AR projects.

AKÜ action plan for 2007 includes activity areas such as building more integrated relations between the secretariat and members, elaborating an AKÜ strategy for 2008-2010, endeavouring to reach financial sustainability, increasing the capacity of the secretariat, strengthening cooperation with Latvian and Lithuanian NGDO platforms as well as with other European partners, enhancing both internal and external communication, implementing DE/AR activities, and mapping the activities of Estonian NGOs in international development. Since settling the formal issues, the AKÜ team has focused on internal consolidation as an organisation, including moving out from the premises of EME and setting up its own office as well as finding funding (additionally to TRIALOG support) to cover for the MFA financial support that was promised but did not materialise due to legal reasons. Currently work is ongoing to prepare a longer-term strategic framework for AKÜ activities. Throughout the year, AKÜ has been active with DE/AR: apart from implementing the GLEN and World Day projects, continuous efforts are being made to re-launch the Terveilm.net portal; in April, AKÜ organised a seminar for young Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Austrians who have worked or lived in a developing country and are interested in utilising this experience in DE/AR activities, and in October AKÜ arranged, together with Praxis, an open debate in the Estonian Parliament on the MDGs in the framework of a larger UNDP initiative.⁵⁹ Several other seminars and events, such as a workshop on aid effectiveness, a conference on the EU neighbourhood policy, and monthly discussion evenings (*World Talks*) have been organised in cooperation with the FEST project and other partners. In spring 2007, AKÜ hosted the TRIALOG Central Training in Tallinn as well as prepared the analysis of Estonia's ODA spending for the CONCORD Aid Watch working group.⁶⁰ AKÜ continues to engage itself in CONCORD activities but becoming a member is not on the immediate agenda, as AKÜ aims to increase its capacity to contribute to CONCORD's activities before joining it formally.

The AKÜ board consists of five people: three representatives of member organisations (currently: EGA, EME, and the Estonian Society for Nature Conservation) and two individual experts. AKÜ has a full-time coordinator and also employs coordinators for GLEN and the World Day projects. It is looking for opportunities to employ an information officer and also a policy officer in the long run. As for funds, AKÜ presently (October 2007) combines resources from BAPP and TRIALOG as well as partial funding from the GLEN and World Day projects.

3.3 Challenges

AKÜ as a network played a crucial role in raising the profile of development cooperation in Estonia: it boosted DE/AR activities towards both the general public and NGOs, initiated projects on its own and inspired several other NGOs to do so as well. At the same time, AKÜ suffered continuously from the lack of institutional framework: obtaining core funding for an informal network was virtually impossible and specific projects had to be 'outsourced' to other NGOs for administering. This complicated using funds from those projects for AKÜ's own

⁵⁹ See more at <http://europeandcis.undp.org/mdgdebates/>

⁶⁰ See the Estonian page (p.34) in CONCORD (2007) *Hold the Applause! EU Governments risk breaking aid promises*, <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=3042>

overheads and created problems with ownership of activities. Furthermore, as a loose network of NGOs for whom development cooperation was not a priority, AKÜ was entirely dependent on the enthusiasm of individuals and extremely vulnerable to a change of staff within the NGOs. Consequently, at times some organisations did not even know they were AKÜ members and this led to legitimacy concerns, among other things, related to AKÜ's policy work, and raised questions regarding who AKÜ actually represented.

Registering AKÜ as a legal body has eased these challenges towards reaching financial sustainability and acting as an umbrella organisation of NGOs, but has not solved them entirely. Regarding finances, there is a realistic chance that AKÜ, as a registered NGO, will obtain institutional support from the MFA and the roundtable can now apply for funding for projects on its own. However, even after the institutional support from the MFA materialises, a lot of work lies ahead for AKÜ in reaching financial sustainability: AKÜ needs to diversify its sources of funding in order to avoid being dependent on one funder and to be able to retain a healthy distance to the government and voice public criticism on the government's international development related activities when needed. Furthermore, AKÜ needs to avoid applying for project funding in competition with its members.

Upon registering AKÜ as an NGO under Estonian law, AKÜ's members have made formal commitments at organisational levels, which has increased stability in terms of membership and clarity regarding who AKÜ represents. However, achieving true ownership by members and working effectively as an umbrella organisation of NGOs rather than as an organisation of a few activists engaged in DE/AR remains a central challenge. As members are often overloaded with their core tasks that are mostly not international development cooperation related, they find it difficult to actively participate in AKÜ activities, both in events that are aimed at increasing the members' capacity in development themes and in more demanding activities such as contributing to advocacy initiatives or elaborating AKÜ strategic plans. AKÜ needs to find a way of effectively serving its members and at the same time being able to utilise members' expertise in AKÜ's activities.

Other challenges include making AKÜ's work more strategy-driven rather than implementing a portfolio of loosely related projects; increasing its analytical capacity in order to be able to pursue well-informed and continuous policy work; widening AKÜ's membership to represent the 'whole sector' and reach a greater number of people with its activities. AKÜ secretariat and the board are well aware of these challenges and are working actively to meet them.

Useful materials*

Publications, articles, presentations (online and in English)

- Anton, A. & Tack, S. (2006) 'Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation', handout for the TRIALOG Central Training 2006, 9-10 March 2006 in Budapest, http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/estonia_presentation.doc
- Bucar, M., Marques, M., Mesic, A., Plibersek, E. (2007) 'Estonia' in *Towards a Division of Labour in European Development Co-operation: Case Studies*, Deutsches Institut for Entwicklungspolitik, discussion paper, pp. 9-13 [http://www.die-gdi.de/die_homepage.nsf/6f3fa777ba64bd9ec12569cb00547f1b/be803da30ea92b8c12572670041d831/\\$FILE/DiscPaper%2011.2007%20Interneffassung.pdf](http://www.die-gdi.de/die_homepage.nsf/6f3fa777ba64bd9ec12569cb00547f1b/be803da30ea92b8c12572670041d831/$FILE/DiscPaper%2011.2007%20Interneffassung.pdf)
- CONCORD (2007) 'Estonia' in *Hold the Applause! EU governments risk breaking aid promises*, p.34, <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=3042>
- Eslas, A. (2007) 'Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (AKÜ)', presentation at the TRIALOG Central Training 2007, 26-27 March 2007 in Tallinn, http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/estonia_aky_ct2007.ppt
- German Foundation for World Population (n.d.) 'Estonia' in *The GUIDE to European Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS and Population Assistance*, http://www.euroresources.org/guide_to_population_assistance/estonia.html
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Website of AKÜ

Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation, www.terveilm.net

Websites of AKÜ members

E-Governance Academy (eGA), www.ega.ee
 Estonian Green Movement-FoE, www.roheline.ee
 Estonian Society for Nature Conservation (ELKS), www.elks.ee
 Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre (ENUT), www.enut.ee
 European Movement Estonia (EME), www.euroopalikumine.ee
 Jaan Tõnisson Institute, www.jti.ee
 NGO Fenno-Ugria Foundation, www.fennougria.ee
 Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation (Peipsi CTC), www.ctc.ee
 People to People Estonia, www.ptpe.org
 Women's Training Centre, www.nkk.ee

Other websites (in English)

FEST project, www.fest-project.org

MFA Development Cooperation page, www.mfa.ee/eng/kat_178/

TRIALOG, www.trialog.or.at

**We welcome comments, corrections or amendments to our
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