

IPS Belgium

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THE ORPHAN FATE OF A HYBRID OBJECT: DEVELOPMENT POLICY WITH FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES, THE CASE OF BELGIUM AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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a 15-year long embedded research

The research studies the changes caused to Belgium's development policy by the adoption of an international agenda of Development Assistance in Fragile States.

Between 2000 and 2015, the main objective pursued by Belgium shifted from a development policy substantially oriented towards conflict-prevention, to reach a formal concern for more effectiveness in development policy and its related public expenditures. The said shift is arguably the result of an international consensus that led to the merger of two distinct agendas: on the one hand, the use of development aid as a tool for conflict prevention (OECD, 2001); on the other hand, the process that led to the adoption of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005). The merger of those agendas resulted in a new one: the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States (OECD, 2007).

Belgium integrated the agenda of State Fragility in its development policy, but not by merely implementing, at a national level, an internationally developed framework. Rather, the process is linked to the growing perception of development assistance as an arena of "depoliticised" policy-making, where external expertise challenges processes of democratic control on public decision. Building up on the idea of registers of political- vs. technical legitimation and on the findings of cognitive sociology re. *référentiels* of public policy, we argue that the perception of a Great Divide between technical and political issues by the key actors implied in development policy, results in a depoliticization (Flinders & Wood, 2014) of highly political decisions. It assesses the potential influence of such factors as internationalisation of public policy, public policy instrumentation, instruments-based policing and other issues related to the New Public Management creed.

The conclusions presented here are the result of a 15-year long embedded research within the DG Development of the BE Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the framework of policy supporting research contracts funded by the said Ministry through the channels of the Academic Cooperation Agency of the French-speaking universities of Belgium.

a clear relation with IPS

From a methodological perspective, working on BE development policy as an embedded researcher calls for the adoption of an ethnographic stance and perspective to fieldwork; it follows the same patterns in terms of integrating the studied human group (incl. with initiation rituals, etc.). On the other hands, the said studied group is rather peculiar, since it is generally composed of highly skilled individuals, with a strong self-awareness and an advanced mastering of language, which points to specific challenges.

From an epistemological perspective, development assistance as a research object is much more studied as an object by Economics than it is by Politics. Political Science, especially IR, and in particular in the French-speaking academic sphere, despise both development objects if they are not addressed through the lens of security issues, and embedded research, which is seen as an under category of research, “recherche-action”, too close to the ground from the Ivory Tower of Grand Diplomacy studies. And for Public Policy Analysis, development assistance as an object leads to another challenge, since the targeted groups are aliens, and therefore unable to participate in the Policy Cycle.

It seems therefore relevant and academically stimulating to enter, with that kind of topic, a transdisciplinary discussion such as the approach proposed by the IPS Belgium seminar.

Emmanuel Klimis holds a PhD in Political and Social Sciences from Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles (2020). He is a researcher and a guest lecturer at the same university; he is also a lecturer at Université de Liège, Haute Ecole Bruxelles-Brabant, Université Catholique de Louvain, Université Thomas Sankara – Ouaga 2 (Burkina Faso) and the National Administration School of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His current research looks at depoliticization of development as a public policy, and at the relations between Belgium and Sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on governance, security, justice and human rights issues. In pursuing this agenda, he also takes part, as the lead researcher, in a policy supporting research programme dedicated to Human Rights Based Approach to Development, in partnership with Université de Liège, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and the DG Development of the BE Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (emmanuel.klimis@usaintlouis.be).