Branding for Business? Hungary and the Sustainable Development Goals[1]

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Abstract

Negotiations leading to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have dominated the diplomacy of global development in the past years. The paper looks at the actions and motivations of a relatively new development actor, Hungary, which co-chaired the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on SDGs, and thus had a highly visible position during the talks. Hungary had a key priority of having an SDG on water related issues, driven mainly by its perceived comparative advantage in the sector. Using the insights of the literature on small state influence in multilateral negotiations, the paper argues that Hungarian diplomats used alliance building as well as reputational and framing strategies to counter the structural disadvantages of the country's small state status, and were successful in shaping the final outcome. However, the Hungarian government did not act out of a strong commitment to sustainable global development, but rather used the forum to brand itself as an expert on water issues, with the hope of future business benefits.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Post-2015, Hungary, small state influence, United Nations; foreign aid.

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1. Introduction

In September 2015, members of the United Nations (UN) agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of targets to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had served as the main point of reference for the international development system between 2000 and 2015. The SDGs are more ambitious and broader than their predecessors, with a total of 17 goals and 169 targets. As opposed to the MDGs, which had a clear overarching message of poverty reduction, the SDGs are much more fragmented, and critics have pointed out that this is likely to have an impact on their ability to generate political will for development (Easterly 2015). While the MDGs grew out of a set of goals formulated by technocrats at the OECD (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme 2011), the process of creating the SDGs was much more politicized and inclusive to begin with, with the diplomats of UN member states being in charge of the process, but societal voices also being channelled in through various multi-stakeholder forums and UN-led consultation mechanisms (such as the World We Want 2015 campaign). Following the decision to focus the new development system on sustainability at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, and a report by a High Level Panel of Eminent Persons in March 2013, the negotiations on the SDGs began in March 2013, with the first session of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG). This process allowed for a large variety of voices and interests, and a clear need emerged to accommodate as many of these as possible in order to ensure wide ranging support for the new goals.[2]

Studying the negotiations leading to the SDGs, and the actions and interests of various UN member states during the process can reveal important insights into the diplomacy of global development, as shown by the topic's emerging research agenda (Kim and Kang 2015; Dodds *et al.* 2017). This paper contributes to this agenda by looking at the actions and motivations of one state, Hungary, focusing on the OWG process. Hungary, although a small country, is relevant for three reasons. First, it is a relatively new development partner and donor, and as such can be seen as representative of other small new development actors, both in Europe and beyond.[3] Second, the Hungarian government has been making conscious efforts to 'open to the world' and become a more assertive international player, which includes strengthening trade and development relations with developing countries, and, more generally, asserting 'Hungarian national interests' in international negotiations. Third, Hungary's UN ambassador acted as co-chair of the OWG, and as such had a highly visible position throughout the process.

This context suggests that Hungary could have played an important role in the OWG process, potentially even punching above its weight. The goal of this paper is to critically evaluate the interests and actions of Hungary in this process, and examine the strategies used by the government to influence the outcome. The paper builds on the theoretical insights of the literature on the influence and strategies of small states in international negotiations. For the

[2] For an overview of the OWG process see Bhattacharya *et al.* (2014) and Dodds *et al.* (2017).
[3] For research on the strong similarities (and also differences) between emerging European donors, see Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot (2015).

purposes of this paper, influence is defined as the correlation between the preferences of the small state and the final policy outcome (Nasra 2011: 165). Small states face severe structural limitations due to their size and resources in influencing international negotiations, and need to rely on various counter-balancing strategies to make up for these deficiencies. Many different strategies have been put forward in the literature, but they can generally be grouped into three main types: (1) bargaining and alliance building, (2) normative suasion, and (3) reputation building, with small states often using a mix of these (Thorhallson 2006; Nasra 2011; Panke 2012).

Based on the analysis of government and OWG documents, official statements, ten qualitative interviews with Hungarian diplomats and representatives of civil society organizations,[4] as well as participant observation on a government consultation event in September 2013, the paper reveals that Hungary formulated a clear, yet relatively narrow goal for the SDGs: the inclusion of water-related issues as an individual goal. The diplomats involved in the process mainly used a combination of alliance building and reputational strategies, by presenting Hungary as an authoritative expert on water, taking the lead in other UN forums on the issue, getting other countries on board, and also acting as a neutral and effective mediator as the co-chair of the OWG. This combination proved to be successful, despite the fact that the wider Hungarian government remained generally uninterested in the SDG process, and did not increase capacities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide support. In fact, the wider government seems to have been less concerned about the contents of the SDGs overall, and more interested in using the OWG as a means to improve the country's image among emerging economies, where it sought business opportunities. More precisely, taking a leading role in the OWG process can thus be seen as a branding exercise, with the goal of framing Hungary as an expert in water issues, with the hope of future business benefits.

The relevance of these findings goes beyond Hungary. First, it shows how diplomats of relatively small states can influence international negotiations using creative strategies, even if their government provides little additional resources. Second, it contributes to our understanding of how states negotiate to create norms in the international development system, and how they can use these forums for their own branding purposes. Third, it questions some findings of the literature on the international development policies of the new EU members (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015), which generally tend to argue that the new members have little capacities, and even little desire to influence European and other multilateral development policies, not to mention the evolution of global development norms.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section two briefly reviews the literature on small state influence in international negotiations. This is followed in section three by a discussion of Hungary's foreign and development policy, with the aim of providing context.

[4] Unless otherwise noted, interviews were conducted in person. To ensure that interviewees were not influenced by their superiors or colleagues, questions were not made available beforehand. In order to cross-check statements of government officials, a number of representatives from civil society organisations were also interviewed. For reasons of confidentiality, all interviewees remain anonymous.

Section four presents evidence on Hungarian's actions during the OWG process and how these relate to the insights from small state theory. Section five concludes the paper.

2. Small states and the diplomacy of international development

The study of the role and influence of small states in international negotiations has a long tradition in the international relations literature, going back at least to the 1960s (see the classic paper by Keohane 1969). The overwhelming majority of the more recent literature focuses on the influence of small states in the European Union (Archer and Nugent 2006; Panke 2010; Nasra 2011), but many insights from these studies are applicable to other contexts, such as the UN or the WTO as well (Kassimeris 2009; Lee and Smith 2010; Panke 2014; Nasra and Debaere 2016). The role of small states in forming the international development system has received relatively little attention. While there is a sizeable literature looking at small states as donors (Hoadley 1980; Pospisil and Khittel 2010; Lundsgaarde 2013; Crandall and Varov 2016), it generally tends to focus on critical analyses of the bilateral development policies of these states, with little if any mention of their actions in multilateral development settings. The literature seems to give the impression that the international development system is formed mainly by large states, or going beyond a strictly realist perspective, international organizations (like the EU or the OECD DAC), norm entrepreneurs and ideas. Small states seem to hardly play any role.

Many definitions abound in the literature on small states (see Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006; Maass 2009; Steinmetz and Wivel 2010: 4), but one key feature is that these states have disadvantages when it comes to international negotiations as compared to large states. Traditional realist approaches have conceptualised these disadvantages in terms of power and capacities and the material resources underpinning these (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010). Recent debates have focused on the usefulness of the concept of size. A useful working definition is offered by Steinmetz and Wivel (2010, 7), who see size as 'defined through the relation between the state and its external environment'. Based on a study of Russia's relationships with the Baltic states, Lamoreaux (2014) argued that size is not a variable that is useful when trying to understand and explain state behaviour. He found that big states could be argued to act like small states and vice versa. This prompted Crandall and Varov (2016) to update the definition of small states by adding psychological factors. They argue that a small state is one that perceives itself to be on the weaker side in an asymmetric relationship (see also Hey 2003).

These different approaches to defining small states are all useful when thinking specifically of a small donor like Hungary. Hungary clearly fits most of the traditional definitions of a small state (see Tulmets 2014). As a small donor, Hungarian can be characterised by (1) a low amounts of aid, (2) limited history of colonialism/developmentalism, (3) self-perception as, at the very least, a 'premature donor', and (4) lack of domestic interest in the topic of development aid (Szent-Iványi 2012).

Within a UN context, the importance of raw power decreases as all countries are formally equal and have a single vote each, which in turn strengthens small states (Neumann and

Gstöhl 2004). Small states none the less have lower capacities to take part in negotiations in these contexts than large states do. They have lower staff numbers, lower abilities to retain talent in government, and have fewer contacts with experts and epistemic communities (Panke 2010: 801). They provide relatively lower amounts of foreign aid and are less important trading partners for developing countries than large states are, which decreases their ability for leverage and bargaining (Panke 2012). With lower capacities and resources, small states are often unable to cover all policy areas, and need to prioritize. In low priority policy areas, small states may even find it difficult to clearly formulate and articulate their interests.

While more recent arguments in the literature do not deny the importance of material resources, they are more positive in assessing the potential small states have for influence by pointing towards the knowledge and expertise these states can bring, and their ability to shape policy outcomes through framing and discursive strategies (Nasra 2011). Perceptions on how states are seen by others and how they see themselves are also important, as they can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies on influence (Lee and Smith 2010). Archer and Nugent (2006) thus argue that size should not be understood as a deterministic factor, and rather it should be seen as one of the variables affecting the influence of a state in international negotiations.

Indeed, small states can employ a wide range of strategies to counterbalance the structural disadvantages that their size places on them. The small state literature has traditionally pointed out that small states have a strong preference for international law, regimes and institutions (Neumann and Gstöhl 2004). As mentioned, contexts with well-established rules place constraints on large states, and thus relatively increase the influence of smaller states. These rule-based contexts provide states several opportunities to engage in various strategies to gain influence. Many different typologies of these strategies have been put forward. Realists, like Knudsen (1996), argue that small states can take advantage of tensions between large powers or develop good relations with the nearest large power. More recent approaches, focusing on institutionalized settings, are more relevant however. Nasra (2011) discusses strategies used by small states within the EU, which include taking a leading role during negotiations, building informal networks and alliances, bringing knowledge and expertise, and the ability to explain their position and persuade others. Panke (2012) emphasizes the importance of shaping strategies. Technical, scientific, or legal knowledge and expertise are key in using such strategies, as is the ability to frame or reframe negotiations.

The paper adopts the typology of Panke (2010), as it includes the elements found in most other typologies, and is seen as the most suitable for understanding the actions of Hungary during the SDG process. This approach identifies three strategies: (1) bargaining and alliance building, (2) normative suasion using high quality arguments, and (3) reputation building.

Bargaining and alliance building. Small states are generally seen to be in a weak position for bargaining, due to their inability to make credible threats. They can however counterbalance this by creating networks and alliances. Small states can group together on a regional basis, such as the Nordic states, the Visegrad states, or the ‘like-minded’ group of donors, or form a strategic partnership with a larger state. These forms of collective bargaining allow small

states to increase their leverage, but only if interests within the group are relatively homogenous.

Normative suasion. Convincing other states through normative suasion requires the small state to put forward convincing, well-prepared positions and ideas, which require considerable attention and investment from the government. Indeed, Smith *et al.* (2005) argue that influencing discourses and generating ideas and solutions are one of the most important tools small states have to influence the international order, especially if these contribute to reframing the given debate. States however need to have the necessary technical, scientific, economic, legal etc. capacities to be able to formulate high quality arguments, or need to tap into expert networks and NGOs outside of the government.

Reputation building. States can also build a reputation for themselves and their diplomats of being fair, neutral and interested in the common good. As argued by Panke (2010: 804) "[i]f small states have the reputation of being neutral, they can act as 'impartial mediators' between different bigger states or seemingly defend common interests and, thereby, systematically promote their own policy preferences […] through the backdoor." States can also build their reputation by presenting themselves or their specific experts as being highly knowledgeable on a topic and having an excellent track record in it. Being perceived as neutral experts allows them to make use of institutional opportunity structures, such as serving as the chair of negotiations, which gives them the power to set the agenda, distribute position papers and frame arguments (Panke 2012: 396). Within international development, small states, typically with no colonial past, may actually be better suited to succeed in certain institutional settings as they can play the role of honest brokers.

In practice, states may choose a combination of these strategies to maximise influence, although clearly not all variants are compatible with each other (see Arter 2000, Jakobsen 2009, Grøn and Wivel 2011). Although all these article focus on the EU, given that there are many similarities between how the EU works in relation to foreign and defence policy (see Weiss 2017) and the nature of the UN system, it is argued their conclusions are relevant. These works have highlighted the need for small states to use different strategies in different stages of the negotiation process. In particular, the ability to shape an agenda in its early incarnations can be important for small states (see Farrell 2017 for a discussion of how the OWG shaped the subsequent SDG agenda).

Which strategy a state chooses, and how actively it pursues it will in turn depend on a number of factors. All strategies require some degree of resources and capacities, and as mentioned above this is exactly what small states lack. Thus, an issue must be salient for a government for it to make a decision to prioritize it and devote resources to it. Salience may come from several domestic sources (Doeser 2011; Panke 2013). There may be strong public support for the topic, specific influential interest groups may be pushing for it, the government may want to project power and avoid looking ineffective, or it may want to use the issue for domestic reputational purposes (cf. Chandler 2007).

Even if the government sees the issue as salient, the public administration of the country must be able to actually formulate a quality position and select the appropriate strategy. Indeed,

capacities and expertise on technical issues do not develop overnight after a government decision is made, and there is clearly a learning element involved (Panke 2010). Building alliances requires highly skilled diplomats who are familiar with a given multilateral setting. As mentioned, normative suasion requires a strong government commitment of capacities. Reputation building also has a time dimension, meaning that states need to be engaged in international negotiations on the topic in a consistent and high quality manner for some time for their reputational capital to build up.

This brief overview of the literature shows that small states can have influence in international negotiations, and provides some theoretical insights on the strategies that a state like Hungary can employ to shape multilateral negotiations. The paper uses these insights to examine the strategies employed by Hungary in the OWG process in section 4, but first a brief overview of the domestic political context of Hungary's foreign and international development policy is presented.

3. The politics of foreign and development policy in Hungary

In order to fully understand Hungary's involvement in the SDG process, one must first look at how the priorities of Hungarian foreign relations changed after 2010, when the right-wing conservative Fidesz party won a landslide parliamentary majority and formed government, a feat which it repeated in 2014. The party, running on a nationalist-populist platform of economic self-rule, constructed an identity for itself as the protector of Hungarian interests, and successfully cast the previous socialist government as a servant of the interests of multinational capital and 'Brussels' (Johnson and Barnes 2014; Bozóki 2015). With a two-thirds majority in Parliament, allowing it to modify the constitution, the Fidesz government enacted a number of fundamental changes and legislation. Many of these have attracted considerable international criticism from sources like the European Commission, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, and a number of other governments and civil society organizations. These criticisms relate to measures seen as limiting the freedom of speech and the media, curtailing the independence of the judiciary, increasing political corruption, as well as violations of other basic democratic principles, underlining the authoritarian tendencies of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (see Kornai 2015; Ágh 2016; Buzogány 2017). These tendencies have been exaggerated by the undermining of dissident voices in Hungary and by the creation of a 'new, loyal business elite' (Enyedi 2016: 15). This business elite and the governing elite identify that their interests align in the economic and foreign policies of Hungary.

The discourse of Hungarian economic interests figures strongly in the Fidesz government's foreign and development policies as well. The government's official foreign policy strategy, adopted in 2011, is also placed in this context, and revolves around the theme of 'Global Opening' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011; see also Tarrósy and Morenth 2013; Tarrósy and Vörös 2014; Jacoby and Korkut 2016). One of the main goals set out in this strategy is that Hungary needs to broaden and diversify its heavily EU-centric foreign relations, including its

external trade, with, among others, developing countries. As explained by a senior foreign ministry official:

> The purpose of Hungary's foreign policy shift following 2010 was to awaken relationships with previously neglected countries, such as Mexico, Argentina and Turkey, etc., to expand foreign trade in such emerging economies, and to strengthen Hungary's position around the world (Field 2015).

The strategy states that '[a]n important tool of our global opening is the strengthening of our activities within the UN, and our cooperation with other states within the framework of the UN' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011).

There is also an explicit emphasis on business and exports in the Global Opening policy (Törő 2013), which was made especially clear in mid-2014 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was rebranded as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). The Orbán government has tended to view Europe's ongoing economic crisis as a fundamental economic decline of the West in the face of strengthening new powers. In this view, even if growth recovered in the West, it would not provide enough resources and markets for Hungary to catch up economically. Therefore, to be able to develop, Hungary needs investment from other sources and needs to gain access to new markets to diversify its dependency (Jacoby and Korkut 2016; INT#02).

Hungary's international development policy has undoubtedly benefitted from the Global Opening, with some hailing the new strategic direction as a 'new beginning' for Hungary's relations with the developing world (Tarrósy and Morenth 2013). Hungary started its international development policy in the run-up to the country's EU accession in 2004 (Paragi 2010), but following an initial stage of growth, the resources allocated for the policy were heavily cut back already after 2006 due to austerity measures and continued to remain low due to a prolonged budgetary crisis following the global economic crisis (Benczes 2011). The MFA's budget for international development was slashed from HUF 1.4 billion (about 7 million US dollars) in 2004 to 102 million (about half a million dollars) by 2011.[5]

The withdrawal of funds was not the only problem the policy was facing. There was little political attention towards international development, and indeed by 2012 Hungary was the only country among the Central and Eastern European emerging donors which did not have a written strategy or legislation on international development. While many of the countries in the region enacted strong reforms in the area, successive Hungarian governments seemed unwilling to tackle the persistent organizational and effectiveness problems of the policy (INT#07; Szent-Iványi 2012).

While international development policy receives only small explicit mentions in the government's 2011 foreign policy strategy, emphasis on the need to re-invigorate relations with the developing world implicitly gave a big role to the policy area. Indeed, increased political attention towards development is clearly visible after the acceptance of the strategy.

[5] These numbers refer only to the MFA's foreign assistance budget. Due to the increase in compulsory multilateral commitments, the total decrease in Hungary's official development assistance figures was much less drastic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014: 38).

In March 2013, the Parliament called on the government to formulate a strategy for international development for 2014-2020. The MFA presented this document in mid-2013 and the government approved it in early 2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014). The strategy emphasized the importance of contributing to the Millennium Development Goals, 'or any UN framework that would succeed it', as the main goal of Hungarian international development policy. The strategy also included a commitment from the government to gradually increase funding for international development, although it did not specify any targets. It also mentioned three priority sectors for Hungarian development assistance: institutional development, the green economy, and developing human resources. Business interests also figured strongly in the strategy in terms of 'gaining markets for Hungarian firms and certain parts of the state sector (e.g. education and health), as well as supporting the development of Hungarian knowledge and technology' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014: 15). Hungary had never previously published any strategic document for international development, thus the fact that such a document now exists is clear indication of stronger political attention towards the policy area (INT#01). The acceptance of the new strategy was soon followed up with the enactment of a long awaited law on international development (Act XC of 2014), which mainly codified the key principles and administrative procedures.

There are other elements of evidence of the Global Opening strategy impacting development relations. The MFAT has opened or has announced plans to open several new embassies in developing countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Angola, Ethiopia, Columbia and Peru. These were justified by the minister of foreign affairs and trade Péter Szijjártó as 'allowing Hungary to benefit from the rapid economic growth in Africa and Latin America', and follow 'common sense to locate new markets besides [its] existing ones' (MNO 2015).

There is therefore clear evidence of increased attention towards the developing world and international development policy, justified mainly by business interests. Hungary's engagement with the SDGs and work in the OWG can be seen as a direct consequence of this 'more global' foreign policy, as well as the explicit strategic emphasis on becoming more active in the UN. The following section reviews Hungary's activities in the OWG, and examines the strategies it used to counter its structural disadvantages.

4. Hungary and the SDGs

4.1. Hungary's priority: water issues

On the first session of the OWG on 14 March 2013, Hungary was elected co-chair of the OWG with acclamation alongside Kenya, and the two countries co-led the remaining 13 sessions until the end of 2014, resulting in an outcome document with a proposal for 17 sustainable development goals (Open Working Group 2015). The election of the two co-chairs was driven by the principle that representatives of one developed and one developing country should share the responsibility. Originally, the aim was to have 30 members in the OWG (Future We Want 2012: 37), but in the end it turned out to be a highly unprecedented format of negotiations, including diplomats from almost all UN members in some form and a wide range of civil society and scientific actors (INT#05; INT#10).

Hungary formulated a relatively clear, if somewhat narrow goal related to what it would like to see in the final version of the SDGs well before the OWG began: the inclusion of water-related issues, including water management and sanitation, as a standalone SDG, and to create an institutional process to implement, monitor and assess progress on this goal (Budapest Water Summit 2013a). Due to its experience in managing river flooding and an abundance of underground thermal waters, Hungary has long seen itself to have special expertise in water issues, which was perceived to constitute a comparative advantage for the country compared to other development partners (INT#02). The sector of water management has been a priority area of Hungary's foreign and international development policies since 2003 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006), and the emphasis on it was further strengthened in the 2014 international development strategy as part of the 'green economy' priority area (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2014).

Emphasizing Hungary's comparative advantage in water management issues, giving the sector such a strong position in the country's international development policy and making it a goal in the SDG negotiations is at least partly driven by business motivations. This is summed up well by an interviewee (INT#04):

> When we identify a goal [relating to the] full hydrological cycle in the world, with good intention, then we've already defined the market segments where investments will occur. […] When I define the Hungarian list of priorities as such, that means that we can make a prognosis in which of these segments Hungarian market actors will have a niche. If there is none, then Hungary cannot be present as a trend setter in the world, as an owner of a technology, a supplier. It could only be present as a consumer, probably on a lower level of the global chain.

This statement also provides some insight into the motivations of Hungary for focusing on water issues. Beyond a certain degree of path dependency caused by previous commitments to water issues, the statement shows the importance of business interests. Defining an international development framework which provides Hungarian businesses opportunities in certain niche sectors was therefore important, and the SDG negotiations could be used to build Hungary's image as a country with significant expertise in these sectors (OBS#01). This motivation also clearly links to the Global Opening strategy and its explicit emphasis on reinvigorating economic ties with the developing world.

While the importance of water for sustainable development was hardly a controversial issue, giving the topic ample visibility through a dedicated SDG was by no means given. Water was after all only one part of Goal 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability) during the MDGs, and there have been a number of proposals which would have given water issues a less visible role (see e.g. Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2012). Indeed, a technical summary prepared for the OWG reviewed several proposals for integrating water issues into the SDGs, and found that they could be placed into two broad categories: either integrating all 'social, economic and environmental dimensions of the water challenge in one single SDG on water', or having different water-related issues included in different goals (TST Issue Brief 2013: 5-6). The third session of the OWG in May 2013 was the first time when the issue of water was discussed, and countries seemed divided on which option they preferred. The EU for example stated on this session that it and its member states 'remain open on the option of having one goal on water and sanitation with several targets' (European Union

2013), however a previous Commission communication (European Commission 2013; TST Issue Brief 2013: 6) seemed to endorse the option of mainstreaming water issues into several different goals.

Hungarian diplomats clearly needed to come up with a strategy on how to secure water issues as an independent SDG. The paper proceeds by examining how Hungary made use of the three small state strategies, bargaining and alliance building, normative suasion, and reputation building to ensure this.

4.2. Bargaining and alliance building

Hungary engaged in little explicit individual bargaining during the OWG process, which corresponds to the predictions of the literature on small states. However, there seems to have been a clear strategy of building alliances behind the scenes, especially during the preparatory work, well before the OWG actually began. In 2010, the Hungarian government appointed an experienced career diplomat for the position of Permanent Representative of Hungary to the UN in New York, Csaba Kőrösi (United Nations 2010), with a clear mandate of raising Hungary's profile at the organization, in line with the Global Opening policy (OBS#01). The ambassador saw through a bid, initiated by the previous government, for one of the non-permanent seats in the UN Security Council for the year 2012 in the Eastern Europe Group. While this ultimately failed in the October 2011 vote, Hungary remained active in other, less visible UN forums (INT#03).

The most important such forum in terms of gathering support for a water SDG was the Friends of Water group, established in 2010 by the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan.[6] The group, an informal voluntary association of likeminded countries in promotion of the UN water agenda, initially had 15 members with little visible activities, and in fact an interviewee argued that until 2012 it existed only on paper (INT#04). Hungary joined this group in the run-up to the Rio+20 conference in 2012, and together with Finland, Tajikistan and Thailand became a member of its steering committee, with the aim of developing a clear push for the discussion of water-related issues at the conference. The group had five thematic discussions in 2012, two of them organized by the Hungarian Permanent Representation.[7] These workshops culminated in a non-paper and a set of recommendations for the Rio+20 conference (Friends of Water 2012a). As a result of its more visible activities, the membership of the group quickly began to grow, and by the start of the OWG negotiations in March 2013 there were more than 100 countries involved.

There is evidence that Hungary used its leading role in this group to build an alliance for the support of its own priority of water issues during the OWG, which became especially clear in 2013: Hungary put strong diplomatic efforts into organizing the Budapest Water Summit in

[6] Other groups which Hungary joined included the Sustainable Energy for All Group, the Accessible and Sustainable Financing for Everyone Group and the Culture in Sustainable Development Group.
[7] 'Water related risk management – the impact of human intervention on water' in February 2012, and 'Water in MDG's' in April 2012.

October 2013 to further cement the alliance. While this was not officially a UN-event, it did include UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon among its keynote speakers, as well as several high level representatives of UN agencies and member states, making it a high profile conference. The conference issued a lengthy statement, mainly emphasizing the importance of water, and also included specific recommendations for an SDG on water and its contents (Budapest Water Summit 2013a). According to an interviewee, these recommendations fit very well with the interests of Hungary, and they were deliberately formulated in a way that would make their subsequent transfer to the ongoing OWG negotiations relatively easy, even though the statement was not an official UN document (INT#04).

Hungary therefore joined, and played a key role in revitalizing the Friends of Water group through actively organizing and hosting its meetings, and later a high profile summit to build a broad alliance for an SDG on water. With more than 100 countries joining the group and high profile attendance at the Budapest Water Summit, the country was able to present the recommendations from the summit as a consensus of all participating countries. These recommendations could then be channelled directly into the OWG negotiations.

4.3. Normative suasion

As outlined in section 2, normative suasion only works if the country is able to put forward well formulated, technically sound proposals. It was striking how silent the Hungarian government was in terms of presenting arguments directly to the OWG on how it would like the SDGs to evolve more specifically, and why this would be desirable from a sustainable development perspective. Representatives of the Hungarian government did not submit any statements to the OWG, and no negotiation documents presenting Hungarian interests were ever published, aside from a questionnaire which all participating members needed to fill out and was made available on the UN website (Mission of Hungary 2013). In this, Hungary emphasized the familiar need of including 'water and integrated water management' among the goals, as well as a number of highly general principles and some red lines, but hardly any other specific priorities (INT#05). As a comparison, other relatively new donors submitted several statements to the OWG: South Korea submitted 17, and Poland 25.

There are two possible explanations as to why the Hungarian government was silent in putting well-developed proposals forward which would aim at convincing others on the merits of including water issues as a separate goal.

First, lack of capacities within the MFA and the wider Hungarian government can be mentioned. The literature argues that the Hungarian development department in the MFA had low staff numbers and a relative lack of detailed knowledge about development issues due to high staff turnover (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015). This weakened the ability of the Hungarian government to influence issues in the EU's development policy making. While an experienced diplomat and former ambassador was charged within the MFA with coordinating the SDG process between the line ministries and liaising with Kőrösi in New York, he was given little administrative support (INT#07; INT#08). NGOs also had little capacities to

engage in the process and support the MFA, as most of their work during the time was focused on the new international development strategy (INT#07; INT#09).

With only limited guidance from Budapest and limited substantial input from domestic actors such as NGOs, the role of the co-chair might have been intentionally neutralized. Ambassador Kőrösi argued publicly that in his role as co-chair he was required to act as a neutral arbiter and not as a promoter of Hungarian interests (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2014). This role conception makes engaging in normative suasion strategies difficult, but it is questionable whether it is the correct way of understanding the role of the co-chair. There is no such specification in the document describing the methods of work of the OWG (General Assembly 2013), or the procedures and rules of the General Assembly. Emphasizing the neutrality of the co-chair role may be seen as a tactic which enabled a visible position for Hungary while also masking the fact that the country was potentially unable to be active in the negotiations and engage in normative suasion due to a lack of capacities.

The second explanation however would argue that while Hungary did not individually engage in normative suasion during the OWG, it engaged in normative suasion collectively through the Friends of Water group and the Budapest Water Summit. The Summit's closing statement (2013a) is a scientifically and technically sound account on the importance of water and why giving the issue of water a large emphasis is essential for any sustainable development strategy. The statement can clearly be seen as a document aimed to persuade the reader, and it is possible that Hungary saw it as sufficient and perhaps more effective to convince the members of the OWG (INT#04). Engaging in such collective normative suasion might have also been seen by Hungarian diplomats as a way to make up for limited domestic capacities.

The two explanations on the lack of individual normative suasion strategies are not contradictory, and can indeed complement each other. The following section turns to discussing the usage of the third small state strategy, reputation building.

4.4. Reputation building

Reputation building seems to have been the strategy the Hungarian government relied on most extensively to achieve influence in the OWG, and these strategies also link strongly to the motivations of Hungary for selecting the topic of water. This strategy had two components: (1) the co-chair role, with Hungary acting as an impartial mediator who is able to present solutions, consolidate different national perspectives and channel the voices of technical experts and global civil society into the process; and (2) branding itself as a technical expert on water issues who cannot be ignored in negotiations on the topic.

Considering its low involvement in UN matters previously, Hungary's election as a co-chair can be seen as somewhat unexpected. Interviewees argued however that it was the culmination of a long, behind the scenes process, as well as a number of chance elements (INT#01; INT#05; INT#06). An important element in this process was the country's activity in the Friends of Water group, which had contributed not only to creating an alliance in support of an SDG on water, but also to building the country's reputation among its fellow UN members, and mainly among developing countries (INT#04).

The strategy for leading the negotiations of the two co-chairs relied on framing the talks as technical as long as possible, and avoiding politicized positions and political clashes along the North–South divide familiar in the UN (Rohonyi 2015). Independent think tanks and scientists were involved in the process to give credibility to the negotiation summaries made by the co-chairs, and counter political interests of member states masked as technical positions. Countries were explicitly asked to focus on facts and not repeat political mandates. The structure of the negotiations, which got countries to work together in small and often diverse groups of twos and threes, and to find a compromise among themselves before presenting that to the OWG also allowed a greater scope for channelling technical expertise into the negotiations. This strategy, focusing on avoiding politics and harnessing technical expertise seemed to work, as political 'horse-trading' was delayed to the last month of the OWG, but by then the participants had a strong basis to work on which reflected the technical and scientific state of the art (INT#04; INT#10).

The two co-chairs thus followed a strategy of focusing on technical aspects of sustainable development, delaying politics, and forcing countries to compromise along the technical aspects. The activity of the co-chairs has received a significant degree of international acclaim both from governments and civil society (INT#10), with some voices noting that they have had an especially difficult task in creating a consensus outcome document, and the fact that they have achieved it is an 'amazing' accomplishment (Global Landscapes Community 2014).

In terms of establishing itself as an expert on water-related issues, Hungary already clearly expressed its affiliation with the topic about a decade ago with its first concept note on international development cooperation in 2003, and has attempted to raise this profile during its EU Presidency in the first half of 2011, when it declared water management and sanitation as priority topics. The activities in the Friends of Water Group, and the Budapest Water Summit can also be seen as reputation building exercises. In an interview, ambassador Kőrösi talked about the country's participation in the OWG process as a *branding* exercise, with the goal of portraying Hungary as a proponent of sustainable development and an expert on water issues (Rohonyi 2015: 24).

Hungary therefore built a reputation for itself as a technical expert on water issues, who is not driven by political or other motivations and is thus able to lead the negotiations in an unbiased way. Just how much Hungary really is an expert on water issues is secondary, the important thing is the reputation created through rhetoric and diplomatic actions. Indeed, the amount of resources spent on the sector in Hungary's bilateral development efforts remained almost negligible throughout the past years: in 2012 for example, Hungary funded only 7 water-related development projects abroad with a total value of $370,000 (out of a total bilateral development budget of $21.7 million, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). In 2012, the government closed down the Environmental and Water Management Research Institute, a flagship institute in Hungary on water management issues since 1952, which has been extensively involved in international development cooperation projects and held unparalleled expertise on the topic in Hungary (see Vituki s.a.). These steps clearly do not reflect the government's rhetoric about its commitment to water issues.

The Hungarian government has done much to communicate how successful it has been as the co-chair of the OWG, and how this increased the country's reputation. In a press conference in July 2014, the MFA's spokesperson argued that the proposal by the OWG is a significant diplomatic success for Hungary, showing that the country is capable of leading high profile international negotiations. She also emphasized that once the working group's recommendations were finalized, 'members of the group gave a standing ovation for the Hungarian government, which is a huge achievement for the country' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2014). The more active role Hungary played in the UN was portrayed as evidence of the success of the Global Opening strategy, as it is increasing Hungary's international reputation, which would eventually transform into business opportunities and Hungarian jobs.

5. Conclusions

The paper aimed at examining the role of Hungary in the process of drafting the Sustainable Development Goals, with a particular emphasis on the country's motivations, priorities and actions in the Open Working Group, which it co-chaired together with Kenya. Co-chairing the OWG fit well with the Hungarian government's strategic goal of an economic opening towards developing countries and more active role at the UN. Hungary formulated clear, although relatively narrow interests it sought to achieve with the negotiations, the inclusion of an SDG on water, which was seen as beneficial for Hungarian business interests. In order to achieve this goal and be influential in the negotiations, Hungary needed to compensate for the structural disadvantages it has as a small state through a combination of small state negotiation strategies. It used various forums and initiatives to build an alliance for an SDG on water, and focused on acting as an effective and neutral mediator in the role of the co-chair of the OWG. However, capacities for normative suasion strategies remained low. The final outcome of the OWG process, especially in the field of water, correlated with Hungary's interests, meaning that in the paper's understanding of influence, Hungary was successful. We accept that the definition of influence used in the paper can only account for a correlation between interests and outcomes, and we do not fully trace the actual process of Hungary achieving influence. While it is possible to argue that a similar OWG outcome could have happened without Hungary's active involvement, it is difficult to conceive that the actions of the Hungarian government discussed in this paper did not play at least a catalysing role. Given the limitations small states face in international negotiations, the final OWG outcome should be seen a substantial "win" for Hungary.

The case of Hungary's influence in the SDG process indeed illustrates that small states can be have an impact on multilateral negotiations in the UN. While the framework of Panke (2010) adopted in this paper has originally focused on the EU, the paper has shown that it has strong explanatory power in case of the special UN setting of the OWG. The case shows that much of Hungary's success was achieved despite a lack of significant support from government bodies. While the government saw the SDG negotiations as an important vehicle to build Hungary's image among developing countries, it was striking that it did not really increase capacities in the MFA and even dissolved capacities elsewhere. Thus, a key emerging

theoretical finding is that small state counterbalancing strategies can be successful even without strong capacities, if they invest strongly into 'branding' themselves through bargaining and reputation building – although clearly much depends on the specific issue. Things might have been very different had Hungary chosen more controversial aims than the inclusion of water among the SDGs.

The case also illustrates how the motivations of donors influence the norms of the international development system. Hungary did not champion the cause of water management for altruistic reasons, but because it perceived the creation of an international development framework which featured water issues strongly to lead to potential business benefits for Hungarian companies in the future. In this regard the Hungarian perception as a 'leader' in this field and its perceived ability to bring value added from its experience is important and adds weight to the conclusion that small states can 'increase their status via socially creative means' (Crandall and Varov 2016, 4). This underlines the importance of analyzing the specific, underlying interests of more developed countries when looking at processes of norm creation in international development.

Last but not least, the paper illustrates that new development actors from Central and Eastern Europe are much more active in the international development system than previously thought. The literature has tended to conceptualize these states as rather passive in multilateral development forums, but there might be a need to rethink this approach in light of Hungary's rather active participation in the SDG negotiations. An examination of how the roles played by new donors in international development negotiations have evolved over time may be needed.

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INT#02: Senior official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2, November 2014, Budapest.

INT#03: Hungarian diplomat 1, July 2015, Budapest.

INT#04: Hungarian diplomat 2, July 2015, Budapest.

INT#05: Hungarian diplomat 3, July 2015, Brussels, via phone.

INT#06: Hungarian diplomat 4, October 2015, Budapest.

INT#07: Civil society representative 1, July 2014, Budapest.

INT#08: Civil society representative 2, July 2015, Budapest.

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Participant observation

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