

EUROPEAN  
NETWORK  
OF POLITICAL  
FOUNDATIONS

E N O P



INDEPENDENT ACTORS IN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

# Political Foundations: Development Cooperation between State and Society

A Profile Paper from  
the European Network of  
Political Foundations  
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**Luis Fernando Blanco**, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)

**Alba Çako**, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit (FNF)

**Maltida Copic**, Zaklada Hrvatskog Državnog Zavjeta (ZHDZ)

**Suzan Cornelissen**, Foundation Max van der Stoep (FMS)

**Raymond Debono**, Fondazzjoni IDEAT

**Alina Garkova**, Policy Officer ENoP

**Roberto Morea**, Transform! Italia (TI!)

**Bronne Pot**, Eduardo Frei Stichting (EFS)

**Johannes Steiner**, Politische Akademie der ÖVP (PolAk)

**Franziska Telschow**, Policy Officer ENoP

**Rebecca Wagner**, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (hbs)

**Sidonie Wetzig**, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)

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## 1. Executive Summary

Development cooperation today, and in the post-2015 period, faces different challenges compared to those in the past. The developing world is more diversified - from powerful emerging economies, to those heavily dependent on non-renewable resources, through to least developed countries dependent on aid and fragile states lacking governmental structures or basic security. These diverse processes of development take place in a world ever more integrated by global markets and instantaneous communication. Development cooperation tries to promote human development<sup>1</sup> but faces significant obstacles and conflicting interests in recipient and donor countries, whose policies towards the developing world lack coherence or overwhelming public support. This paper will argue that in a rapidly changing world with often threatened, weak or non-existing democracies, Political Foundations fill a gap between public policies, globalized markets and civil society efforts by offering services which transcend the borders between states and between public and private actors. Political Foundations have access to parties, communities and institutions that can raise awareness on development issues, articulate human needs and build sustainable advocacy for socio-economic and ecological development. They provide transnational networks linking societal and political groups with different values and identities, thus enabling dialogue that is indispensable for finding common approaches and resolving conflicts of interest. They can enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation by improving coherence and giving a voice to people whose security, welfare and dignity development cooperation wants to improve.

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<sup>1</sup> Human development in this context is understood as a reference for both social and economic development, as for example reflected in the approach to the Human Development Index <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi>

## 2. Introduction

Political Foundations have longstanding experience in the field of development cooperation – some of them launched their first programmes and activities in partner countries more than 50 years ago. Political Foundations are at the nexus of political decision makers and civil society. The ideological affiliation of political foundations to specific party families allows them to build networks based on trust and common values. Through the creation in 2006 of a transnational cross-party European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP), the Foundations gained a platform that has enabled them to enter into dialogue with the EU institutions, contribute to policy-making and strengthen their overall position as development actors at the European level. On the basis of their strong expertise and experience in supporting democracy, the rule of law, conflict resolution and the safeguarding of human rights, Political Foundations have proved their added value in supporting EU development cooperation efforts.

## 3. Coping with the challenges of diverging development

Thanks to economic globalization and increasingly accessible and immediate international communication, the world is becoming more integrated and interdependent. This is a process involving more and more individual citizens, through the internet and social networks, among others. Meanwhile, government structures do not seem to be keeping pace with this development, remaining limited to operating at national level. Supranational or global governance does work, but it is slow and weak in the face of global challenges such as climate change, economic crises, continuing poverty, terrorism and war.

What was until 1989 called the “Third World” has meanwhile evolved into a highly diversified set of countries, societies and polities, ranging

from emerging economies to lesser developed countries and politically from young democracies or authoritarian regimes to failed states.

- Emerging economies: The period of relatively strong growth of the world economy until the crisis of 2008 has accelerated the divergence and disparity of global income and wealth. Countries such as China and Brazil, for example, have succeeded in lifting substantial sections of their population out of poverty, although structural questions of inequality and distribution still remain.
- Resource-based economies: Many “developing” countries depend to a large extent on exports of natural, non-renewable resources, without successful diversification of their economies. Economically this can cause Dutch disease, while in political terms it can lead to patronage systems financed by royalties rather than taxes, thereby reversing the direction of dependency (benefits from the government, but no tax revenues from the citizens).
- The least developed countries tend to depend strongly on foreign aid. Thus some (over aided) recipients have hardly made any progress as aid funds were invested poorly and/or reduced national efforts by the recipients.
- Many countries have suffered civil war, collapse of central government or the rule of local warlords. Foreign interventions aimed at protecting civilians or threatened minorities and restore peace and security have not always been successful and/or led to prolonged periods of foreign control (protectorates).

Political Foundations contribute to shaping political responses to economic, social, ecological and

technological changes. Managing these changes requires the trust and cooperation of the respective communities in order to find new balances and open corridors of development by consensus. Political Foundations are well placed to contribute to successful transitions: they are natural partners of the evolving civil society organisations in emerging democracies and also have access to political processes in the countries they work in. They share political values concerning democratic principles and the role of political parties in democratic processes. The political pluralism of ENoP members allows them to support democratization without a bias in favour of one single party. A broad range of ideological orientations within the party spectrum is covered, allowing one Foundation to work intensely and in a relationship of trust with partners in their value communities, while their peers do the same with their natural partners.

Particularly in wealthier societies, addressing poverty is less a question of foreign aid than of appropriate economic and social policies at home, which are to be shaped in a participatory way. Political Foundations can advise the parties involved and provide a platform for societal discourse as larger parts of society become urban and educated and ask for greater influence and voice. Political Foundations can contribute to resolving distributive conflicts in order to get out of the “middle income trap”<sup>2</sup>.

In resource-based economies, Political Foundations can strengthen civil society and engage the elite in a reform discourse, with a view to designing new forms of shaping sustainable economic models. These can include transparency as regards export revenues, setting up democratically controlled sovereign wealth funds, and involving citizens in spending decisions.

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<sup>2</sup> The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung for example facilitates the dialogue on implementing the ILO recommendations on Social Protection Floors (SPF). The aim of SPFs is to provide social protection for all citizens, especially the most vulnerable members of societies.

In fragile states, Political Foundations have contacts within the conflicting parties via local partners or diaspora outside the country. They have been involved in peace-making processes thanks to their previous connections with conflict parties; in the post-conflict period, Political Foundations have set up offices in countries such as Kosovo or Afghanistan in order to support reconstruction and reconciliation, including activities of restorative justice

## 4. Key activities of Political Foundations in development cooperation

The profiles and fields of work of Political Foundations around Europe are very diverse. Foundations from Finland, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Spain and Sweden are greatly involved in international networks or have their own offices in different regions of the world, from where they implement their projects. Through long-term established trusted contacts they gain access to key decision-makers and tailor-made activities are implemented according to local realities. Many Foundations have identified priority regions and countries in which they operate, in accordance with the demands of their partner organisations.

The general idea underlying the development assistance carried out by Political Foundations is to develop and consolidate democratic political systems, strengthen political parties and promote parliamentary work and civil society organisations, so as to form a basis for pluralist democratic cultures and human development. They support developing the skills of social and political actors through, for example, media training or public relations courses. Thus, they complement official development assistance, which primarily addresses the supply side of public governance in partner countries by improving state capacity through technical

cooperation and budgetary support. Political Foundations address the demand side by strengthening civil society, media, and local authorities, asking for accountability and transparency. They enable partners to participate and raise their voices in order to make public policies more responsive to the human needs of the population.

The activities of Political Foundations therefore contribute to achieving official development and foreign policy objectives and are elaborated according to the priorities and the values shared within the political party family. Focal areas of Political Foundations' activities include local government and decentralisation, economic development, human rights, ecological and gender issues, support for youth associations and media support. The main activities of Political Foundations encompass:

- Organising seminars, conferences and workshops;
- Organising exchange programmes and orientation visits;
- Providing technical assistance and advice<sup>3</sup>;
- Carrying out research and publications;
- Scholarship programmes.

In 2013 the Political Academy of the Austrian People's Party (PolAk) organised in cooperation with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Arab Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) a seminar as part of the "Austrian Campaign and Election Study Tour".

The event supported the efforts of Arab women to increase their participation in public life and political processes throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

It provided women from Tunisia, Lebanon and

<sup>3</sup> One example of a very easy to access programme for capacity building and technical assistance would be this project from the Swedish Olof-Palme-Center: <http://howtorunaparty.org/>



Libya with the skills they need to advance in democratic governance as elected or appointed officials, within civil society, or as community leaders. The study tour included toolkits focused on campaign strategy, campaign organization, coalition building, message development, get-out-the-vote tactics, opposition research, campaign budgeting and finance, domestic poll monitoring, best practices and international standards for election.



In this context, one of the strengths of Political Foundations is their close contact with a variety of partners on the ground. Their projects target actors from both the state and the non-state sectors. Traditionally they work with governmental bodies, local authorities, trade unions, local NGOs, political parties, parliamentarians, grass-roots associations, the media, business associations, youth groups, political movements, religious societies, human rights groups, research institutes, training institutes, universities and others. Each foundation partners with different actors according to their political values - for example the Social Democratic Foundations have established strong ties to international trade unions, whereas the Green Foundations cooperate with environmental movements.

Many Foundations cooperate with international and regional organisations and networks such as the United Nations, the African Union, ASEAN, the World Social Forum, and the International Umbrella Organisations of Political Parties.

Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für Freiheit (FNF) has been supporting its partner - the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism - since 1996. The Working Group is a coalition of national working groups from ASEAN states, composed of representatives of governmental institutions, parliamentary human rights committees, academics and civil society actors. The Working Group collaborates with governments and other stakeholders to build a comprehensive human rights mechanism in the ASEAN. FNF has supported the regional working group through workshops, seminars and visiting programmes on several issues related to the establishment of regional human rights mechanisms. It has provided a platform for discussion on the topic and ensured knowledge transfer, for example regarding the European model of human rights protection through study tours and visits to the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe. The efforts of the Working Group also contributed to setting up an ASEAN “intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights” (2009) as well as the finalisation of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012). Currently the Working Group is the only human rights organisation that the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) has engaged with, and the only human rights organisation that is listed in the ASEAN charter.



Following the independence of South Sudan, the Political Academy of the Austrian People's Party (PolAk) organised events on different topics concerning the relationship between Sudan and South Sudan and international partnership. For example, in cooperation with the Security Higher Academy in Khartoum a workshop on security issues took place in Vienna (June 2012). Representatives of different Sudanese governmental agencies also took a closer look at the system of Austrian bureaucracy. The aim of this training was to exchange fundamental lessons learned in good governance, hopefully thereby having a positive impact on the peace-keeping process.



The Eduardo Frei Foundation from the Netherlands and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung from Germany developed a curriculum on democracy for high schools in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Through a four-day simulation game, children learned about getting involved in society and expressing (local) societal problems to (local) politicians. Sixty schools were involved and the simulation game was played during three consecutive years. The children succeeded in identifying, analyzing and addressing a local societal problem. Three years later, quite a few pupils have now joined local NGOs or political parties in order to stay involved in society.



## 5. The mandate and scope of the work of Political Foundations in development cooperation

Political Foundations have a distinctive approach towards development cooperation; the focus of their international work is on activities in the area of “democracy support”. Their projects aim at enhancing democratic governance, political plurality, political participation, electoral assistance and civic education in third countries. This includes projects to develop and consolidate democratic political systems and strengthen political actors. By strengthening the rule of law, property rights, an independent judiciary and good governance, they improve the efficiency of official assistance and build the basis for self-sustained development. Their main instruments are political dialogue, political cooperation and civic education, pursuing the objective of building bridges between decision makers and civil society.

Each Political Foundation is affiliated to a respective political family in terms of values. However, the Foundations are neither financed directly via party funds nor permitted to transfer money to their respective party, and as such they are independent: in other words, they are ‘close to but independent’ from parties. Usually they receive public funds for approved projects; they set their own priorities in their project work - independent of the parties and



the governments - ensuring their professionalism, accountability and the quality of their work. Political Foundations have the credibility and trust necessary for maintaining long-term cooperation with like-minded groups and individuals. They have contacts with key actors from the political field, trade unions, associations, NGOs, businesses and the media. They are able to bring controversial figures and experts together for discussions and establish a critical dialogue that reaches beyond the limits of their respective parties. Political Foundations can therefore deal with highly sensitive issues of power distribution and changes of power. Compared to state-run development projects, Political Foundations have the advantage of being able to establish long-term dialogue to ensure continuous presence in their partner countries, independent of government changes in their own country.

Political Foundations can be active in areas where governments cannot reach due to difficult diplomatic relations. The programmes of Political Foundations are designed as long-term activities and are not usually subject to tight deadlines or competitive pressure to succeed in a short-term period. This leads to a high continuity of their work and creates long-term contacts that are based on trust, which can be a significant advantage when taking over a moderating or mediating role in difficult political situations.

## **6. Political Foundations in the context of EU Development Cooperation**

At the European level, Political Foundations are increasingly engaged in debates on EU development issues. They will also contribute to the implementation of the EU “Agenda for Change” by drawing public attention to problems and policies that are deemed detrimental to development, such as tax evasion by elites, arms proliferation and protection-

ist policies. They advocate fair trade, a development-conducive financial system, transparency of raw material export revenues and human working conditions in transnational production networks.

ENoP is advocating for a mainstreaming of democratic governance in EU development cooperation and welcomes the ongoing reflection process within the European Commission on how to improve EU democracy support. ENoP has engaged in constructive dialogue with the European Commission and contributed to several consultations, such as for the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) or the instrument for Non-state Actors and Local Authorities (NSA-LA). One outcome is that there is increasing support at a European level for the idea of involving political actors when aiming to strengthen democracies in target countries. The ENoP working group “democracy support” has recently published a policy paper on the topic of political party support.

ENoP participates in one of the main consultation mechanisms established from the start by the EU in the field of development cooperation: the Policy Forum for Development (PFD, formerly called “Structured Dialogue”) focuses on European development policies as well as global development agendas and is aimed at offering a multi-stakeholder space for dialogue to CSOs and Local Authorities (LAs) from the EU and partner countries, as well as the European institutions. Within the framework of the PFD, ENoP has provided input to recent European Commission communications (e.g. “The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations” (2012) and “Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries” (2013)).

Political Foundations also contribute their expertise on a practical level to European development cooperation; many ENoP members have for years implemented various EU projects on the ground,

for example through the programmes of DCI or EIDHR. Political Foundations can therefore be considered as important implementing agencies for EU development and often correspond to respective national priorities.

## 7. Political foundations in development education

Political Foundations raise their national constituencies' awareness of global issues and organise an exchange of views between them and other relevant groups in partner countries, mostly on the basis of shared values. Thus they prepare the ground for dialogue on and development and assessment of policy options in an evolving transnational society and raise awareness of global development issues within their societies.

In order to deepen public awareness of international development and global interdependence, development education is another field of action of Political Foundations at a national level. The European Union defines Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) as a policy priority in its development assistance. Political Foundations implement activities on global development issues such as migration, climate change, food security, agriculture, energy, sustainable development, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), corruption prevention and gender equality.

For 20 years the Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS) has organised Africaday on an annual basis. This event is *the* place in the Netherlands to discuss and reflect on the latest political, economic and social developments in Africa. Discussions have not been limited to development aid and international cooperation, but also included the cultural power of Africa, music, religion, literature, fashion, the role of the private sector... the options are limitless. Politicians, the public, Ministers, NGOs, academics,

opinion makers, African key note speakers, business people - everyone is involved. About 1500 visitors and more than 40 collaborating organisations participate in over 50 workshops and lively debates that take place during this event. For example, each year a spokesperson on development aid from all the different Dutch political parties will debate their views on development cooperation and the chances for Africa. Visitors have a unique opportunity to interact with politicians about their different policies and views. Today, Africaday is the largest event in the Netherlands of its kind and the place to exchange thoughts and experiences concerning development in Africa.



## 8. Conclusion

- *Political Foundations have over 50 years of experience in development cooperation. They offer transfers of knowledge, lessons learned and best practices to partners in their respective value communities.*
- *Political Foundations not only raise their national constituencies' awareness of global issues and exchange of different views between them and other relevant groups in partner countries - they also lay the groundwork for dialogue on and the development and assessment of policy options in an evolving transnational society.*
- *Through long-term experience in international contexts, Political Foundations manage to adjust their cooperation formats and choices of partners according to the economic and political development of the partner countries. They can advise the parties involved and provide a platform for societal discourse as larger parts of society.*



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