

ENoP: Priorities and Comparative Advantages

The European Network of Political Foundations was established in 2006 as a cooperation structure, serving as a communication tool between European political foundations, civil society actors and the Institutions of the European Union in the fields of democracy support and development cooperation.

At present, the Network brings together fifty-one members from 22 EU member-states, close to the values of six different party families represented in the EP. The political foundations are close to the context of values, but completely independent in their work from political parties.

The cooperation is organised in four thematic working groups (Sustainable Development, Democracy, The Future of Europe and EU Funding) in order to align different viewpoints, identify where a peer-to-peer approach continues to be necessary and jointly formulate common positions towards EU institutions.

Through its joint approach, ENoP becomes a valuable actor in articulating common challenges and recommendations of civil society and the political society in partner countries and the EU member states to both the national constituencies and the EU institutions.

ENoP works in many cross-cutting policy areas such as development cooperation, democracy support, human rights, migration, gender equality, etc. The overall aim of ENoP's work is to add the core aspects of political plurality, democratic participation, political dialogue and democratic elections high on the agenda of the EU and member-states.

In this endeavour, ENoP participates in various consultation processes organised by the EU, but also shows proactive initiatives in addressing pressing issues with the EU and on member-state level.

Furthermore, ENoP possesses a specific advantage compared to other stakeholders in the development field, which makes it a unique actor: ENoP serves as a bridge-builder between CSOs and local authorities in partner countries and EU member states (with which our members work actively on the ground) and political actors (e.g. political parties, parliaments, administrations and other decision-makers). Due to the close access of ENoP foundations to political parties, they are better equipped to articulate and promote the concrete needs of civil society to political actors that formulate and execute political decisions.

In the context of the universal Agenda 2030, SDGs and the Revised European Consensus for Development, ENoP also plays a particular role in promoting the latter not only to development actors in developing countries where ENoP members have their offices (covering app. 100 countries), but also to EU member states through its contact points via local civil society and political actors. Through ENoP, these policies reach out to new and broader audiences than the ones covered by other development stakeholders.

At present, the SDGs and development policy, in its traditional understanding, receive limited attention, despite the crucial role they play in the successful implementation of the Agenda 2030. This is an area where ENoP and its members, experienced in political education and the organization of public debates, can stimulate pro-development views among the wider public, as well as from decision makers, and link the civil society debate with political parties and the political party system.

PFs can also enhance cooperation with local authorities in the development discourse and engage them in mainstreaming development awareness. They can further stimulate and contribute to the development policy debate in Central/Eastern European countries, which have less experience in the development field, but who can offer a lot when it comes to democratic transitional experience.

Having full awareness of its advantage in having the capacity to reach out to the EU member states, in the past couple of years, ENoP has been actively promoting the EU's development agenda across the EU. Starting in 2015 in the context of the European Year for Development (EYD 2015), ENoP has since raised awareness on the EYD, Agenda 2030, SDGs in Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Portugal, Finland, Sweden.

ENoP and its members possess an important hybrid function of being in close contact to both traditional civil society actors and political actors. This allows them to interfere where other actors fail, and to bridge existing gaps between civil society and decision-makers.

Among ENoP's strengths as a unique development actor are:

- Bridge-builder between CSOs and political actors: articulating the needs of Civil society (with which the Foundations work in partner countries and EU member-states) to political actors and decision-makers;
- Proximity of the national foundations to the respective political parties in the EU member states that allows them access to decision-makers. This specific trait that only ENoP possesses allows the Network to bring the EU's messages to EU MS national level, such as the EU priorities in the Agenda 2030, SGDs, the Revised European Consensus for Development;
- Exchange of best practice examples and lessons learned among cross-party foundations that are articulated to the member-state political level;
- Providing better connection and coherence in the understanding of the link between EU development policies and migration in the member states;
- Through access to political actors – promote gender equality and address gender issues in party political structures and thus have long-term impact on national representation level;
- Promoting enabling environment for CSOs in partner countries via links to local CSOs and political actors;
- Through helping the approximation of EU member states' development programmes to the ones of the EU, ENoP also contributes to a better political integration of the EU and a better convergence of civil society (including the enhancement of political and civic education);
- Added value as a bridging actor between local CSOs and the EU Delegations – a role of articulating the concerns and policy insights of grass root organisations to EUDs and political actors in the respective partner countries

Results and outreach:

- Effective contributions of Political Foundations from EU member states and their local and regional partners to democratic transition and consolidation in partner countries;
- Enhanced capacities of Political Foundations from EU member states to be engaged in political dialogue and exchange at local, national, regional and global level. Strengthen visibility of the work of Political Foundations at member states and international level;
- More active participation of European political foundations in the European Union's programmes and projects for development cooperation, democracy support and political dialogue;
- Regular transfer of experience, gained from the international work of political foundations from EU member states and their local/regional partners, contributes to the policies and programmes of the EU;
- Assistance to the EU in shaping instruments and activities which are tailored to the specific situation of each partner country;
- Enhancing the cooperation with political parties as an essential element for democratization in democracy support programs;
- Enhanced political dialogue between different groups in society is at the heart of our democracy and development cooperation work;
- Support to the EU in its efforts to apply existing EU policies more consistently and effectively in order to reach the overall goal of Policy Coherence for Development

In support of its work, ENoP has benefitted from two EU co-financed projects under the budget line for CSO-LAs. The grants have contributed to consolidating the Network and building capacities of its members.

In order to ensure its further financial sustainability, ENoP has introduced membership fees for its member-foundations. Furthermore, ENoP has initiated a round of national discussions in the EU member-states on the legal framework of political foundations (PFs), that could in the long-run ensure more sustainable funding for their work on civic and political education in the EU and abroad.

While this process is a positive development in the Network's sustainability, it requires further time and negotiations on national level. ***In this context, ENoP would still seek to obtain further financial support from the European Commission to maintain its core structure in Brussels running. Such financial support is essential in order to sustain and expand the smooth exchange on development policies among ENoP members with the EU institutions and member states, and thus contribute to the successful implementation of EU development policies within Europe and partner countries.***

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