

The Emergence of European Political Foundations: Political Entrepreneurs and Transnational Transfers

Dorota Dakowska

Senior Lecturer – Centre for European Political Sociology (GSPE)

dorota.dakowska@misha.fr

Abstract:

Recently, the European Commission has made some significant steps towards the recognition of political party foundations at EU level. Firstly, it has agreed to acknowledge the political foundations as actors of European development policies. Secondly, it has launched a proposal leading to the creation of political foundations at EU level, linked to the European political parties. This article analyses the reasons, modalities and potential impact of this process. It focuses on the foundations' network-building activities as a means to attain legitimacy and access to the EU institutions. To understand this evolution, two factors will be emphasised: firstly, the mobilisation of political entrepreneurs in the European Parliament lobbying the Commission and Council representatives; and secondly, the politically opportune context of rethinking EU Communication policy. This article contributes to bridging the gap between the analysis of European politics and policies.

Keywords: European Political Foundations, EU, European Communication policy, European Parliament, European Commission.

Résumé :

Récemment, la Commission européenne a entrepris plusieurs actions en faveur d'une reconnaissance de fondations politiques (ou proches de partis) au niveau communautaire. Tout d'abord, elle a admis que ces fondations pouvaient être des acteurs légitimes des politiques européennes d'aide au développement. Dans un deuxième temps, elle a lancé, en 2007, une proposition, conduisant à l'officialisation de fondations politiques au niveau européen, liées aux partis politiques européens. Cette contribution analyse les logiques et les modalités de ce processus, tout en s'interrogeant sur son impact potentiel. Elle montre que la constitution de réseaux composés de fondations s'avère pour leurs responsables un moyen de renforcer à la fois leur légitimité et leur accès aux institutions européennes. Pour comprendre cette évolution, deux principaux facteurs sont mis en lumière : d'une part, la mobilisation d'entrepreneurs politiques issus – ou proches – du Parlement européen, orientée vers les représentants de la Commission et du Conseil; d'autre part, le contexte politiquement opportun de reformulation de la politique européenne de communication.

Mots-clés : Fondations politiques européennes, UE, Politique de communication européenne, Parlement européen, Commission européenne.

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Dorota Dakowska

Senior Lecturer – Centre for European Political Sociology (GSPE)
dorota.dakowska@misha.fr

Publicly financed foundations affiliated with political parties are a challenging research object. Their links to parties notwithstanding, they usually enjoy large autonomy. They develop policy ideas and contribute to agenda-setting, as well as to the implementation of foreign and development policies, especially in the field of Human Rights promotion and democratisation aid.

Concerning transnational support for democratisation processes, American organisations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and similar institutes have triggered a growing research interest (Quigley 1997; Carothers 1999; Guilhot 2005). In Europe, in contrast, only the Federal Republic of Germany has a longstanding tradition of publicly financed foundations affiliated with political parties, which stems from the Weimar Republic, and developed especially after 1945.

The idea of creating political, party-connected foundations has gained new ground in many European countries in the aftermath of the Cold War, however. During the past several years, national

political foundations have increased their co-operation with the goal to gain official recognition by the European Commission (Commission). In the meantime, the role of political foundations has been formally recognised at the European Union (EU) level in a Regulation dating from 2007. These recent developments have not triggered any research yet, although they provide evidence of the changing relations between EU institutions and networks, including non-state, political party-related organisations.

This article will address the link between the growing transnational party and foundation co-operation, and European policy-making. Until now both fields have been considered separately. Transnational political party networks are treated as an increasingly important (Hix 1995; Hix and Lord 1997) but still largely autonomous field of European policy-making (Johansson 1997; Delwit, Kùlahci and Van de Walle 2001). European public policies, and their impact on the domestic level, have been analysed mainly through their technical and regulatory aspects. Studies investigating the dynamics of lobbying in European governance have underlined the crucial role played by the traditional sectors of interest representation, i.e. industrial, professional and agricultural groups (Mazey and Richardson 1993; Green Cowles 1996; Saurugger 2001; Bouwen 2002; Coen 2007; Eising 2007; Hamada 2007), sometimes adopting a critical perspective (Michel 2005; 2007). While the contribution of public interest groups to European policy-making has grown, especially in agenda-setting, the influence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is limited by their lack of resources (Dür and De Bièvre 2007). The position of political party-affiliated foundations at EU level is distinctive, as they do not fit into any category of what has been termed the 'European civil society' (Weisbein 2003). The eagerness of the Commission to

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interact with organised interests was initially limited in the case of these foundations, as they were considered too politicised to be recognised as legitimate partners.

Studies of European governance have highlighted the role of networks as a main feature of non-hierarchical steering between state and non-state actors at different levels (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999). A minimalist definition describes networks as a 'set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors' (Börzel 1998: 254), who share common interests and exchange resources to pursue them. A policy network has been defined as an entity composed of both formal and informal institutional linkages between public and private actors, acknowledged by other actors and sharing interest in a policy-making field (Rhodes 1997; 2007; Pappi and Henning 1998). By stressing the 'power of flows', most of International Relations (IR) studies take for granted the fact that networks necessarily empower non-governmental organisations (True and Mintrom 2001). By looking at the impact of transnational (policy) networks, public policy analyses focus on the study of policy outcome (Pappi and Henning 1998). They are mainly interested in the 'bargaining' and 'problem-solving' of particular policy issues (Mayntz 1993; Le Galès and Thatcher 1995).

In the process, these studies often fail to explain the dynamics of political configurations, resources and opportunities, which enable the network members to impose their view. Rarely is the question asked as to how a given network was formed. In his critical reassessment of policy network analysis, Rhodes (2003) called for a more empirically-grounded, qualitative approach to networks, which would 'put people back in'. More recently, he developed a 'decentred, actor-focused analysis of the games people play in the network' (Rhodes

2007: 1249). In order to take into account the networks' contingency and differentiation, this approach centres on beliefs and practices of agents. These beliefs and practices, shaped by traditions, may change when actors face dilemmas (Rhodes 2007).

Without engaging in an ethnographic 'thick description', as suggested by Rhodes, this article adopts a sociological-constructivist approach insofar as it acknowledges that networks are made up of individuals embedded in specific social, institutional and historical contexts. Some of these agents share beliefs and worldviews derived from their socialisation. Focusing on strategic uses of competing visions and preferences, the article emphasises the power relations that may exist within a configuration of agents, which resembles a network. It claims that non-hierarchical and horizontal relationships do not exclude contest and domination. Thus, networks are usually embedded in broader fields in which agents struggle for the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world (Bourdieu 1981).

The informal networks studied in this article do not systematically resemble a narrow definition of a policy network; they come closer to an issue network (Rhodes 1990). My contribution to network analysis is twofold: firstly, the article fills an empirical gap by reconstructing the existing foundation networks at EU level. Secondly, it goes beyond the approach of networks as problem-solving devices, arguing that a network may be analysed both as an expression of power relations between agents and as an organisational resource in tune with the current expectations of European institutions. Thus, building networks appears to be a way for the political foundations to overcome the structural resource inequalities between the different national political foundations – even if it does not prevent conflict among them. In dealing

with the Commission, the foundations used the existence and operation of their network as a demonstration of their representative character and political legitimacy.

The article will be divided into four sections. First of all, the introductory section presents the objectives and the principal hypothesis. Furthermore, it explains how the analysis of the foundation networks helps us understand the changing relationship between politics and policies at EU level. The second section synthesises the involvement of national political foundations and their networks in the enlargement of European party families in the 1990s, and highlights the specificities of the German case. To solve the puzzle of the formation of networks of political party-affiliated foundations and their eventual recognition by the Commission, the third section investigates the logic of access and the progressive legitimisation of these organisations, as well as the role of conflict within and between competing foundation networks. The fourth section analyses the actors' configurations in the European Parliament (EP), the Commission and the Council, which led to the creation of European political foundations. Finally, the conclusion offers a critical assessment of the recognition of political party think tanks for European governance.

The article shows that the creation of European political foundations was possible due to three main factors: the mobilisation of key leaders within the EP, the lobbying of political foundations' networks and the Commission's priorities in renewing its political communication strategy. This is based on recent empirical data, mainly qualitative, semi-structured interviews and documents produced by the European institutions, the political foundations and their networks.¹

¹ In 2007-8, 25 individuals were interviewed in Brussels, Paris, Amsterdam and The Hague, representing the political foundations and think

Ultimately, the analysis of the developing roles and activities of foundation networks at EU level has great potential for further investigation of the nexus between the political party and regulatory dimensions, where European politics and policies interact (Smith 2004).

Party Foundations in the EU Political System

Political party foundations have recently undergone some important developments. First of all, they have developed more intense co-ordination among themselves. In the early 1990s, the bulk of the newly created political foundations experienced only limited networking activities, acting mainly on a bilateral scale. Yet with the political transformation in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) and with the launch of the widest enlargement in the EU's history, coordinated action within growing European foundation networks has become a rule. Most of these politically affiliated networks were linked to the emerging European political parties (previously also known as transnational party federations) and the political groups in the EP.

Despite these links with the EP party families, the perception of political foundations has been fraught with ambiguity at EU level. While vying for support and recognition, political foundations have long faced strong scepticism from Commission officials. However, owing to their mobilisation of the past several years, these organisations

tanks at the national and European levels, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Europarties. Previously, during my PhD research on the German political foundations, I interviewed more than 100 representatives in Germany, Brussels, Warsaw and Budapest, from the political foundations and their partners abroad, the German and Polish parties and parliamentary groups, as well as the federal ministries. To guarantee the anonymity of the interviewees, these interviews will not be cited.

managed to be included in the implementation of the EU's external and development policies. On 18 December 2007, European political foundations were officially recognised by Regulation 1524/2007 revising the 2004 statute of European political parties. Regulation 2004/2003 institutionalised 'political parties at European level', providing them with a statute and EU funding. The 2007 Regulation was meant to re-evaluate the funding of European political parties, allowing them a more flexible use of EU grants and the possibility of financing transnational electoral campaigns. However, the main innovation of Regulation 1524/2007 was the provision on the establishment of 'political foundations at European level' and their financial support. Previously, in a Commission proposal issued in June 2007, European political foundations were defined as 'catalysers of new ideas' and as a means of strengthening 'informed debate on current and future European issues' (European Commission, 27 June 2007 b). Faced with the challenge of communicating increasingly complex common policies to the public, the Commission officials perceived political foundations as a solution with the potential to involve citizens in the process of European integration. Moreover, the Commission expressed sustained hope that these foundations could increase voter turnout in the 2009 EP elections. The empirical demonstration further investigates the contribution of leading members of the EP (MEP) and European federalists to strengthening the role of Europarties and of their environment (Johansson and Raunio 2005).

The provisions enabling the creation of European political foundations can be re-analysed in light of the role of political think tanks, which act as sources of ideas and policy options to bolster and complete the work of political parties at EU level. Initially developed in an Anglo-American

political context, think tanks have spread throughout the world in the last few decades, shaping public debate, defining problems, and acting as policy entrepreneurs (Stone and Denham 2004). They may become agents of policy transfer as they enable elite networking and information sharing – through regular interaction during the agenda-setting and policy formulation stages – and provide scholarly discourse to legitimise certain policy options (Stone 2000).

The idea of stimulating public debate and to link party politicians and experts to a wider public illustrates the willingness of European leaders to better explain and legitimise European policy-making through political party channels. This principle is prevalent in the German political system, where political party foundations act in at least three ways: firstly, as think tanks that deliberate on general values and specific policy concepts; secondly, as educators *inter alia* providing scholarships and training future elites; and, finally, as agents of external and development policies. The decision to recognise and foster political foundations at European level is a new development, however. While EU-oriented policy think tanks have existed both in Brussels and in the member states, for the first time, European institutions have now decided to finance party affiliated foundations, perceived as important elements of European debates on policy and political issues.

Consequently, I ask whether the creation of political foundations at the European level may be considered as a case of lesson-drawing (Rose 1991, 1993) or policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000) from the national level, the German model being the main reference. According to Radaelli (2000), the EU's institutional context facilitates policy transfer, in the form of mimetic isomorphism. This article focuses on the agents of transfer, the rationale of the

process and its content, as well as its limits (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), policy transfer may be conceptualised as a continuum between lesson-drawing and direct imposition, and cannot be reduced to a complete adoption of a policy model. Highlighting the political context and actor configuration at the origin of European political foundations leads to the conclusion that policy transfer has taken place, albeit one constrained by the existing institutional and legislative framework.

Foundation Networking in the Context of the EU Enlargement

The term 'network' has become a buzzword in the European public sphere. Recently, the political foundations have joined in this trend insisting on 'networks' as a basic form of their organisation. However, while investigating the relationship between different foundations, one may ask whether there is evidence of a stabilised and 'ever closer' co-operation between them. To what extent can we find evidence of the foundations' collective action at the European level? Can we distinguish any strong or weak links between the different partners? Or is the image of a network instead a rhetorical tool, a necessary argument in the foundations' strategy aimed at obtaining legitimacy at EU level?

Most of the European party foundations, left and right, were set up after the fall of the communist regimes in the CEEC (cf. Dakowska 2009). The Jean Jaurès Foundation (FJJ), created in 1992, acknowledges the German paternity of its organisational form: 'The system of political foundations stems, in Europe, from the year 1925 with the creation, by the German SPD, of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung' (FES) (FJJ, 2007). Created in 1991, the French Robert Schuman Foundation was entrusted with the

objectives of promoting democracy and European integration in the member, candidate and neighbouring states of the EU (Schuman Foundation, 2008). In 1992, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) was created in the United Kingdom.

The networking activities of these political foundations were enhanced in the context of the EU's Eastern enlargement. The first initiatives of pooling resources were attempted in the 1990s, mainly under the auspices of the European transnational party federations. By analysing the networks of foundations, one should acknowledge their strong heterogeneity. The rationale of the political foundations is that properly functioning political parties, media and political institutions are key to an effective pluralist democracy. However, there are different ways to implement this strategy. A major difference between the political foundations is the distance from party structures, both at home and abroad. Some foundations acknowledge their close ties with political parties, even if they underline their autonomy. Others deny being linked with a political party, although the ideological profiles of their founders or their administrative board may reveal political party connections.

The German political foundations are interesting case studies for the analysis of transnational networks and informal politics in Europe. Their involvement in the transnational promotion of democracy and their resources are unparalleled in most other European foundations. They occupy a strategic position between the political party and administrative fields in Germany, and have long been involved with the federal foreign and development policies (Ortuño Anaya 2002; Pinto-Duschinsky 1996; Wagner 1994). Furthermore, in the CEEC, the foundations have accumulated and developed considerable political contacts abroad, notably during the transition and reform process (Bartsch 1998; Dakowska 2005a,

b; Phillips 1999). In particular, the transnational party networks around the EP are familiar territory for the political foundations (Dakowska 2005b).

The dissolution of the Soviet Bloc led European political parties to search for potential partners among the emerging political families of the CEEC (De Waele and Delwit 1998). In the first half of the 1990s, both the Socialist and Christian Democrat International, as well as the European party federations and the national parties, undertook a number of initiatives, including visits, electoral campaign training, material aid and invitations to party congresses. After the formal launch of the enlargement process, EU party federations switched from informal dialogue to a closer co-operation with potential partners and started to affiliate them. During this process the European party federations delegated a number of tasks to the political foundations. Because of their personal contacts in European party federations, in which the German political parties have a strong position, the field representatives of the German foundations were able to influence the admission process in an informal way. On the one hand, they helped western European parties to identify their partners and assessed their readiness to be admitted as an observer or associate member of a transnational party federation. On the other hand, the German political foundations were able to offer a range of 'European political resources' to their partners from the CEEC due to their knowledge of European issues, access to information and personal relationships with top EU decision-makers (see Kauppi 2005).

Facing the development of the foundations' international activities and the budgetary restrictions at the domestic level, a growing number of foundations vied to be recognised by the Commission. The German foundations took the lead in this mobilisation, insisting on their

expertise and experience of development co-operation. However, the task proved to be a difficult one. The Commission officials were reluctant to recognise the political foundations as legitimate partners because of their party affiliation and their national profile. Marked by a 'political culture of compromise' (Abélès and Bellier 1996), the Commission seeks to be perceived as an institution independent from national and political influences (Joana and Smith 2002; Smith 2004). The Commission officials were reluctant to allow the foundations to benefit from European funds, considering that they were sufficiently financed by the German state. The traditional development NGOs were also unwilling to share their funds with German foundations.

Consequently, in an attempt to change their image, the German foundations lobbied the cabinets of the Commissioners in charge of external relations. Aiming to counter the criticism of partisanship, they resorted to an argument of the pluralism of their action and created a politically diversified steering committee in 1998. In order to overcome being labelled as purely national structures, foundations co-opted partners from other EU countries. This strategy has yielded some results, as the foundations have progressively benefited from the PHARE programme and from specific instruments of the EU development policy. However, in addition to the material advantages, symbolic recognition was the greatest concern for the foundations. This strategy of seeking access to the Commission has led to the strengthening of formal links between foundations active in the democracy assistance field.

Towards a European profile of democracy assistance? Competing networks

Knocking at the Commission's door, the political foundations have adopted the

strategy of other interest groups seeking access and recognition at EU level (Coen 2007). As the Commission favours dialogue with strong and representative Eurogroups (Greenwood 2007), the foundations sought to build a transnational structure that would fulfil this requirement and demonstrate their independence from political parties. This was an ambitious task for political foundations since they were anchored in a specific national context. The collective action undertaken by the foundations' incipient networks shows that behind the apparently converging strategies, different ideas and worldviews compete with each other. One of the main tensions among the European foundations, socialised in different institutional contexts, was the distinction between a 'pluralist' and a 'multi-party' approach.

The co-operation of national political foundations at the European level stems from an informal international co-ordination of foundations active in the field of democracy promotion. The issue of reinforcing the European dimension of democracy assistance gained ground after the attacks of 11 September 2001. The debate was launched in Paris in 2003 during a meeting of the emerging, but still informal, network of European foundations for democracy. The fact that the date of the meeting coincided with the US invasion of Iraq reinforced the shared feeling that a common European strategy was necessary to offer an alternative to the military forms of imposing democracy. However, beyond the general consensus on the need to enhance a European dimension of democracy assistance, the issue became highly contested as soon as practical solutions were discussed.

This first network of European foundations and institutes active in the development co-operation was created in July 2004, at a conference on the European profile of democracy assistance, held in the Hague and organised by the Netherlands

Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) during the Dutch presidency of the EU. The conference ended with a joint statement from the participating organisations (Hague statement 2004, van Doorn and von Meijenfeldt 2007). However, beyond a general consent on the need to develop European best practices in democracy promotion, the network members' visions diverged. In the EP, the network initiated by the NIMD cooperated with the European Democracy Caucus, an informal all-party group of MEPs set up in 2005 to promote democracy and human rights in the EU's neighbouring countries and chaired by Edward McMillan-Scott (Conservative UK, EPP-ED). At the request of the Democracy Caucus, David French, the director of the British WFD, and Roel von Meijenfeldt, the director of the NIMD, drafted a proposal to create a European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership (French, von Meijenfeldt and Youngs 2007). In the spring of 2006, when the NIMD published the proposal, the network split. The German political foundations were the main secessionists. They created an alternative European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) in October 2006, inviting their partners to join.

This split unveils two divergent perceptions of democracy promotion. The apparently common objective concealed competing formal structures and normative beliefs linked with different institutional traditions. According to the 'multi-party' vision – of the British and the Dutch experts – there is a single best way to promote democracy, based on a certain amount of procedural solutions, mainly electoral and constitutional engineering. The international programmes promoted by the NIMD and the WFD insist on ensuring that elections are held in a transparent and non-violent manner. They further encourage inter-party co-operation by opening centres for multiparty democracy, in which the inter-party

dialogue becomes a condition for further assistance. These formal structures and informal beliefs influenced the strategy pursued by the NIMD network at EU level. The objective was to set up one EU-wide foundation, which would federate and coordinate the activities of different national political foundations in the field of democracy assistance and provide flexible funding.

This objective was perceived as a threat by the German political foundations and their close partners. Linked to one particular party, these organisations considered that the idea of a single, all-encompassing foundation called into question their institutional rationale. Based on different normative beliefs, the German foundations prefer a sister-party approach. The main idea is that the prerequisite for establishing democracy is the existence of a robust political party system and party competition. This belief stems from the constitutional role of political parties in the Federal Republic of Germany. The importance of the pluralism of political ideas was stressed in the post-war democratisation process. The strategy encouraging heterogeneous political foundations to promote similar political movements abroad has been qualified as a 'pluralist' approach by the German foundations, as opposed to the 'multi-party' approach. But this divergence is not only an ideological one. It also reflects a power relationship between several national political foundations in Europe, struggling for the official recognition of their model and for an access to new resources. Consequently the ENoP was joined by French, Dutch, Austrian, Swedish, Greek, Spanish, and other single party foundations.

This case shows the importance of what Rhodes has called 'traditions', which inform diverse sets of beliefs about the public sphere, authority and power (Rhodes 2007). However, I argue that a dilemma linked to a political contest on the

right way to reform governance does not necessarily 'push' the actors to reconsider their beliefs and traditions. In the short-term, rival positions may lead to a certain degree of compromise. But if actors consider their core beliefs (Sabatier 1998) and preferences to be threatened, they may choose the 'exit' option and leave the network. The network initially launched by the NIMD was a loose 'issue network' (Rhodes 1990), which did not manage to overcome the internal dilemmas, as they were related to competing core beliefs.

The ENoP is a structural answer to the criticism originally formulated by the Commission. It is a technical network composed, in 2008, of 48 political foundations from 21 European countries acting in the fields of democracy promotion and development co-operation, with ideological ties to the five major party groups represented in the EP. The ENoP aims to lobby the European institutions, especially the Commission, to promote the integration of the political foundations in the EU programmes (ENoP, April 2008). It is also conceived as a platform for dialogue and communication with the network members and other stakeholders of democracy promotion.

From the beginning, the ENoP organised meetings with EC officials to discuss new instruments and thematic programmes of the EU democracy promotion and development policy. Some of these instruments have been formally opened to the political foundations, especially the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). However, the members of the network's steering committee issued suggestions to the Commission officials calling for more flexibility in the allocation of funds.² The

² See, for example, the ENoP recommendation on EIDHR Annual Action Plan 2008:

<http://www.european-network-of-political-foundations.eu/enop/index.php?id=133&module=news-01-content&pid=0&mid=6> (accessed 1 November 2008).

ENoP's ambition is to act as a knowledge-hub in two ways: by informing its members about the key EU instruments in the field of democracy promotion; and also by incorporating the foundations' experience, gained from their international work, into the EU's policies and programmes.

The ENoP is portrayed as a representative and politically pluralist body. It is clearly geared towards members that are 'close to but independent of a political party' (ENoP 2008), and are represented either in a national parliament or in the EP. Its transnational character notwithstanding, the composition of the ENoP's leading bodies shows the instrumental role initially played by the German foundations. Five out of nine representatives of major EP political groups in the first steering committee were German (4 out of 9 during the second term). During the first year of its existence, the network was coordinated by a representative of the Christian democratic Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) and located in its office in Brussels. In 2007, the director of the liberal Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS) office in Brussels was entrusted with the co-ordination of the network.

The ENoP appears as a means to balance out the structural inequalities between the foundations. None of them enjoy the same resources as the German ones and many members of the network, especially those from the EU's new member states, have very limited resources. In the first years, the German foundations have entirely financed the network to enable the smaller foundations to participate in its activities. The network aims to ensure a transfer of expertise in order to empower its weaker members and assist them in accessing EU funds. However, it is clearly not a one-way relationship. To prove that they were not the only ones to push in favour of their recognition at EU level, the German

political foundations needed to have other similar organisations joining them.

In the meantime, the NIMD network engaged in a vigorous campaign promoting the creation of a European multi-party foundation for democracy and mobilising the support of prominent politicians, such as Václav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic. The European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership was officially launched on 15 April 2008 in the presence of European Commission president, José Manuel Barroso. Renamed as the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), a network of 15 European democracy assistance organisations, the foundation aims to complement existing EU democracy assistance instruments. Both the ENoP and the EPD networks are in tune with the Commission's expectations of transnational policy networks. Both have been pushed by specific actors, who express partly divergent views on democracy assistance. Both resemble an epistemic community, i.e. a knowledge-based network of individuals, which claims its authority on policy-relevant knowledge and professional standards (Haas 1990). Whether these networks are likely to be accommodating, cooperate or compete requires further investigation.

The European Political Foundations: a constrained policy transfer

The creation of European political foundations is another initiative meant to reinforce the structures of political parties at EU level and their contribution to the public debate on European issues. This case could be analysed as an example of policy transfer between the national and the supranational level. Policy transfer has been defined as a 'process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in development of policies, administrative

arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system' (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 5). The European institutional system stimulates policy transfer as it is confronted with a deficit of legitimacy. To ensure this legitimacy, the Commission tends to copy existing organisational structures (Radaelli 2000).

Formally, the advent of European political foundations is the result of the classical co-decision procedure following the proposal of the Commission to revise the existing regulation on European political parties in 2007. However, a closer analysis of the decision-making process leading to this new regulation provides evidence of the key role played by political entrepreneurs in the EP and the political foundations present in Brussels. This case is significant not so much for its financial impact, which remains limited in the first stage,³ but to see how the Commission tackles a politically sensitive and unprecedented issue. It contributes to the analysis of the Commission's role as network broker (Borrás 2007).

One of the key players in the creation of European political foundations was the EP Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) with its German Chairman Jo Leinen (PES), who was the rapporteur on the Commission's proposal (EP 2007). As an established figure of European institutional affairs, Leinen had supported

³ On the basis of the 2007 Regulation, European political parties received €10.6 million from the EU budget in 2008 (€10.2 million in 2007, €10.8 million expected in 2009). European political foundations received €5 million (September-December 2008). Before, the European foundations received €1 million from the pilot project launched by the Commission (September 2007-August 2008). They are expected to get €7 million in EU grants in 2009. These grants are comparable to the budgets of the small national political foundations but are insignificant compared to the German foundations' budgets, of which the smallest, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS), alone received more than €17 million from federal grants in 2007. EU grants make up 85% of European parties' and foundations' total budgets (see table 1).

the Regulation on European political parties, which was adopted in 2003. He was also a strong proponent of establishing political foundations at the European level. The Leinen report on the European political parties and a subsequent EP resolution issued in March 2006 have called on the Commission to find a way of financing European political foundations which could complete the activities of Europarties in the field of information and education. After a long period of reluctance from the Commission, a window of opportunity opened at this moment.

The official recognition of political foundations at EU level cannot be explained without taking into account the current preoccupation of the Commission to strengthen the communication on European affairs. In the aftermath of the negative outcomes of the French and Dutch constitutional referenda in 2005, the Commission launched a 'Plan D' to promote democracy, dialogue and debate with European citizens. This initiative emerged at a time when an efficient communication policy had become a major priority of the Community institutions, aimed at generating '(mass) support, (citizen) consent and (electoral) participation' (Aldrin, Utard, 2008: 3). The decision to enable the European political parties to organise transnational electoral campaigns and to create European political foundations appeared as an opportunity to stimulate public debate and citizen involvement.

Technically, the establishment of direct contacts and constant dialogue between Leinen's office, the cabinet of the Commissioner Margot Wallström and the General Secretary of the Commission helped the project develop smoothly. As Vice President of the Commission in charge of Institutional Relations and Communication, Wallström strongly supported the project of creating European political foundations. Faced with renewed

questioning of their legitimacy, Commission officials were open to innovative solutions which could help them to answer the public demand of more dialogue with the citizens.

Before the formulation of the Commission's proposal, a series of meetings was organised between Commission and EP representatives to deliberate on this issue. Concurrently, the relevant rapporteurs in the EP committees (AFCO, Budget) and the leaders of the main Europarties met with representatives of the national political foundations, who strongly lobbied on this issue. Due to their presence in Brussels, the German political foundations were those who spoke on behalf of their partners from other countries. The directors of the main foundations' Brussels offices – the KAS, the FES, the FNS and the Green Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBS) – played a key role in bringing information, organisational templates and arranging contacts with other foundation representatives. These directors were senior officials with experience of democracy promotion abroad and easy access to the European institutions, and thus they were considered as experts. The fact that the national foundations had already been assembled into a network was a helpful argument in favour of the universality of the foundations' model. The Leinen report explicitly cited the ENoP, stressing that 'political foundations linked to parties are a feature of many Member States, and cross-border co-operation between political foundations can already be seen in a number of forms' (EP 2007: 11).

In its June 2007 proposal published after consultations with different stakeholders (the European political parties, but also the ENoP network), the Commission defined the 'political foundations at European level' as 'an entity or network of entities which has legal personality in a Member State, is affiliated with a political party at European

level and which through its activities underpins and complements the objectives of the European political party by performing, in particular, the following tasks'. First, the European foundations were meant to analyse and contribute to the debate on the European integration process; secondly to organise conferences, training and studies on European issues; lastly, to serve as a framework for national political foundations, academics, and other relevant actors to work together at European level (European Commission 2007a). This definition is based on the recognition of the fact that 'political foundations already play an important role in national political systems' due to their capacity 'to undertake different and more long-term activities from political parties at European level' (European Commission 2007 a: 4-5). This argumentation shows that referring to successful solutions at the national level is a way to justify transfer. Domestic institutions provide a type of 'anchor' for the mimetic isomorphism at EU level (Radaelli 2000).

The question here is whether the project to establish European political foundations can be considered as an uncontested issue in the EP. As it enabled the strengthening of resources and widening of the scope of action of the European political parties, most of the groups and parties supported the idea. However, there was a certain amount of debate and hesitation, especially in the European People's (EPP). The EPP already had several affiliated think tank networks and foundations, and there were divergences about how to accommodate these existing structures within the new foundation. Finally, the leaders of the major European parties – the EPP, the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR), and the European Green Party (EGP) – promoted the issue during discussions with national political parties. Once the co-decision procedure was

launched, these leaders also engaged in convincing members of the national governments to approve the proposal in the Council.

After relatively smooth communication between the Commission and the political level of EP, resistance came from the side of the Council. Despite concerns about the added value of the European political foundations, the main criticism did not address the provisions on the foundations, but the European political parties. It addressed the possible derogations of the financial regulations, especially from the non-profit rule, i.e. the possibility for the political parties to set aside reserves and to postpone the execution of their programme for three months of the following year. This criticism came mainly from the British, Dutch, German, Danish and Austrian representatives, but Finland, Sweden and Latvia also expressed some concerns. They were backed by the Council's legal service, which strongly criticised the proposal.⁴ Additionally, Ireland opposed the provisions on financing European election campaigns because of its national legislation. The Commission's secretary general tried to accommodate these arguments. Searching for a consensus, the EPP President, the Belgian Wilfried Martens, played a similar role as during the first regulation on Europarties by attempting to win the support of the national executives (Johansson and Raunio 2005). The opposition, which had to be overcome in the Council, confirms the fact that 'lesson-drawing is part of a contested political process' (Rose 1993: 6).

Some institutional arrangements which preceded and influenced the 2007

⁴ Finally, the proposal led to the adoption of two separate regulations: Regulation 1524/2007 revising the 2003 Regulation on European political parties and Regulation 1525/2007 revising the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the EU, softening the non-profit rule of European party financing.

Regulation should be mentioned. After some unsuccessful attempts, the political entrepreneurs promoting the idea of European political foundations in the EP convinced the Commission to launch a 'pilot project' to support the development of these foundations. The idea was to ensure a permanent funding mechanism for European political foundations, as the existing Regulation was under revision. After the EP had introduced a budget line to the 2007 EU budget, the execution of the pilot project was entrusted to the DG Education and Culture (DG EAC). Previously, personal contacts between Leinen's office and high-ranking representatives of the Commission (the Secretary General and Wallström's cabinet, but also the Cabinet of the Commission's President Barroso) had been crucial in the process.

This unprecedented project confronted the Commission's services with some dilemmas. The call for proposals of the DG EAC created a *de facto* monopoly situation, as the definition of applicants was very narrow, i.e. it was only addressed to the European political parties, explicitly named. The Commission's civil servants faced a politically sensitive problem, which was followed at the highest level of the Commission, and subject to the strong lobbying of the EP and of the national foundations. As evaluating the political content of Europarties' proposals concerning their new foundations appeared as a 'mission impossible' to the Commission's officials, they decided to share the available funding according to the rules established by the 2003 Regulation on European political parties.⁵ Consultations and meetings with the representatives of the European parties and of the national foundations were organised. As a result, the Commission agreed to guarantee a maximum of flexibility,

⁵ This means that 15% is distributed in equal shares and 85% is divided proportionally in accordance with the number of elected MEPs.

allocating up to 90% of the total financing to the new foundations and accepting contributions in kind. The pilot project reached the goal of stimulating the creation of 10 European political foundations able to fit the rules set by the 2007 Regulation. The eagerness in implementing these legal provisions was linked to the perspective of the 2009 European elections, to which the European political parties and foundations are expected to contribute.

As of 2008, all Europarties have set up their foundations (see table 1). While the degree of proximity to the respective party seems to be variable, most of these foundations include representatives of the party, the political group in the EP and the national political foundations. While the co-ordination of their activities takes place in Brussels, most of their activities should be decentralised at EU member state level. The Regulation states that the foundations' governing bodies shall have a geographically balanced composition.

However, the German expertise and resources were definitely instrumental in setting up these new structures. In most cases, the first secretary general or executive director of the main newly established European foundations is a German foundation representative. The President of the Liberal foundation, MEP Alexander Lambsdorff, is the son of the President of the German FNS, Count Otto Lambsdorff. The general secretary of the PES foundation is the director of the FES Brussels office, Ernst Stetter. The same logic operates for the Green Foundation. On the far left, the Transform! Network of Marxist, communist and socialist foundations launched by the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS) was recognised by the European Left Party (EL) during the Prague Congress in November 2007 as its political foundation.

Due to the strong involvement of German MEPs and foundation representatives, is it possible to speak of a

transfer of the German model of political foundations to the European level? The answer has to be nuanced. Clearly, the intellectual background of this initiative and a large part of the mobilisation during the inter-institutional process leading to the 2007 Regulation has to do with the promotion of the German model. In no other European country do the political foundations have such a strong position in the political system. Without the lobbying of the political foundations backed by the mobilisation in the EP, this new proposal would not have come into being. However, by wishing to export this successful model to the supranational level, the entrepreneurs analysed had to accommodate the legal and procedural constraints. The fact that the EC Treaty recognises – in Article 191 – the crucial role played by political parties at the European level provided the legal basis for the 2003 Regulation on European political parties. Thus, the unique way to fit in the idea of developing European political foundations was to adhere to the existing Regulation while closely affiliating these foundations with the Europarties. As a result the European foundations have to submit their applications for funding through the political party at the European level they are linked with, even if a separate budget line is created.

This close relationship between foundations and political parties is a major difference in comparison with the German case, where a formal separation is the rule. This is why the creation of European foundations may be qualified as a constrained policy transfer.

Conclusion

Considering networks as more than a metaphor, this article empirically reconsiders the changing relationship between the EU institutions and the political foundations networks. The recent reorientation of the EU's external

instruments and the Commission's efforts to improve communication on EU public policies have opened new perspectives for the structuring of the foundations' field. The experience of party affiliated foundations, gained in the context of democratisation and during EU enlargement, has allowed them to act as experts during consultations with Commission officials. Nevertheless, knowledge alone was not sufficient to counter the Commission's criticism of partisanship. This is why political foundations engaged in building networks like other interest groups before them. After the first foundations' network split, other structures emerged around more consensual institutional traditions. However, in both cases, horizontal co-operation does not exclude competition and power relations. The ability to speak in the name of other members of the network or to deliberate directly with the EP and Commission officials is a privilege available to a network's key players. Compared to other organisations, the German political foundations combine material and political resources and expertise, which optimise their access and leverage capacities in spreading the model of political foundations. However, the observed transfer is one that is incomplete and may lead to hybridisation.

The European political foundations are entrusted with carrying out classical think tank activities, such as research, debates and also – similar to the German case – political training. However, as the European foundations are transnational by definition, they may combine different traditions of political counsel and strategic policy analysis. As far as international co-operation and development assistance are concerned, the European foundations' capacities are limited. They can act as advocates of democracy, 'developing co-operation with entities of the same kind' (Regulation (EC) 1524/2007) and bringing together national political foundations and

academics at the European level. By recognising networks linking national foundations, such as the ENoP, the Commission services in charge of external relations have demonstrated a newfound appreciation of their contribution to democracy promotion. If this trend is confirmed, national political foundations and their networks may be invited to engage more actively in political contexts considered as particularly difficult, e.g. in Belarus, Cuba, and elsewhere. While the creation of a transnational network of democracy promotion professionals was an important step leading to their institutional recognition, in the ENoP's case, policy implementation is carried out by organisations that may cooperate but remain bound by their national contexts.

European political foundations are innovative types of transnational bodies, as they are meant to link representatives of political parties, political groups, youth movements and national foundations. The potential policy impact of these organisations is difficult to assess since their definitive form remains to be clarified. The political will expressed at the highest level of the Commission to institutionalise these political think tanks is sometimes perceived as a sign of a new consideration of party-related policy analysis in EU policy-making. For some authors, increasing party competition at the EU level could be a panacea for the 'democratic deficit' (Hix 2008). However, European political foundations are even more eclectic and fragile organisations than European political parties. Therefore, they currently seem unlikely to decisively shape the European polity. Whether the European foundations will engage in a broader public debate, without limiting themselves to 'preaching to the converted' or acting as supplementary socialisation arenas for party youth organisations, remains an open question. As with other EU-level representation and coordination bodies, what is at stake for the European

foundations is to find the right balance between a Brussels-based agenda-setting

activity and a means of communicating with broader domestic constituencies.

Table 1: The European political foundations (2008)

European Foundation	Affiliation to European political party	Decision-making bodies	EU grants September 2007-December 2008 (€)*
Centre for European Studies (CEE)	European People's Party (EPP)	Board members: Wilfried Martens, MEP (president) Joseph Daul (MEP), Antonio López-Istúriz (MEP), Peter Weilemann (director of the KAS Brussels office) Raymond Gradus (Director of the CDA Research Institute), János Martonyi (former Foreign Minister of Hungary), Margaretha af Ugglas (former Foreign Minister of Sweden; Chairman of the Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation), Yannis Valinakis (former Deputy Foreign Minister of Greece) Director: Tomi Huhtanen (EPP) Head of Research: Roland Freudenstein (former director of the KAS Warsaw office)	1.814.028
Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)	Party of European Socialists (PES)	President: to be named Vice-Presidents: Jesus Caldera (PSOE, president of IDEAS Foundation, Spain), Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (PES, Denmark) Karl Duffek, Treasurer (Director of the Dr.-Karl-Renner Institute, Austria) Henri Nallet, President of the Scientific Council (France) Secretary general: Ernst Stetter (Director of the FES Brussels office)	1.494.900
European Liberal Forum (ELF)	European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR)	President: Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, MEP; Vice-President: Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, MEP Treasurer: Thierry Coosemans (Centre Jean Gol, Belgique) Executive Director: Susanne Hartig (former FNS Officer)	341.660
Green European Institute (GEI)	European Green Party (EGP)	Presidents of the board of directors: Heidi Hautala (Finnish MP, former MEP), Pierre Jonckheer (MEP) Secretary general: Claude Weinber (director of the HBS Brussels office)	364.128
Institute of European Democrats (IED)	European Democratic Party (PDE)	Directors: President: Jean-Claude Casanova (Frankreich) CEO: Luca Bader (Margherita)	284.520

		Party, Italy) Directors: Gorka Agirre Arizmendi (Spain) Vytautas Gapsys (Lithuania)	
transform Europe (TE)	European Left Party (ELP)	First legal representative: Michael Brie (RLS). Managing board: Ruurik Holm (Left Forum, Finland), Elisabeth Gauthier (Espaces Marx, France), Haris Golemis (Nikos Poulantzas Institute, Greece). Coordinator: Walter Baier (former leader of the Austrian Communist Party, KPÖ)	196.400
EUROPA – osservatorio sulle politiche dell’unione	Alliance for Europe of the Nations (AEN)	Gianluca Brancadoro, Rosario Cancila et al. (Italy)	281.800
Fondation politique européenne pour la Démocrate (FPED)	Alliance des Démocrates Indépendants en Europe (ADIE)		226.746
Foundation for European Democracy (FEUD)	EU Democrats (EUD)	Board: John Anthony Coughlan (Irish National Platform), President; Jens-Peter Bonde (MEP, Denmark), Vice- President; Pelle Christy Geertsen (Secretary, Denmark); Karoly Lorant (Treasurer, Hungary)	126.060
Centre Maurits Coppieters (CMC)	European Free Alliance (EFA)	President: Frans-Jos Verdoodt	127.888

* EU grants from the pilot project and for 2008.

Source: Author’s information from the Commission and the EP.

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