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TOWARDS POLICY-SEEKING EUROPARTIES?
THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract

Political parties at the European level – Europarties – do not only seek to be represented in the institutions of the EU (office-seeking) and to strengthen their role in the European Parliament elections (vote-seeking). Also, they try to colour the politics and policies of the Union, through the dissemination of ideas and the promotion of values linked to their political ideologies. In contrast to political groups in the European Parliament, until recently, Europarties were lacking resources enabling them to follow closely the substance of the EU policy process. However, the recent creation and funding of European political foundations affiliated to Europarties has been seen as a chance to provide them with the tools to become more policy-oriented. Currently, no less than eleven European political foundations are active in Brussels and beyond, and the total EU grant available to them for 2011 amounts to more than 11 million EURO.

This paper investigates, for the first time, these European political foundations. It does so empirically and comparatively, based on the study of primary resources and a number of semi-structured interviews, alongside existing research. The topic is addressed through a focus on the establishment of European political foundations, their organisation and their ‘transnational’ character (as networks of national political foundations). The central questions are: What are the key features of European political foundations? What purposes do they serve? And how should their relationship with Europarties be understood? Answers to these questions will shed light on one of the most recent innovations in the development of Europarties, and thus contribute to a new research agenda on EU party politics.

Keywords

Political parties, European Union, political foundations

Introduction*

Political foundations have become an established institution in several Member States of the European Union (EU). Probably the most well-known example (although certainly not the only one) are the German political foundations, with a very large staff, huge financial resources and wide-ranging domestic and international activities. However, political foundations (or political academies as they are sometimes called) are also present in other Member States, although their status and level of resources differ quite significantly. Notwithstanding this variety, in all cases their role is concentrated on such activities as encouraging citizens to participate in the political process, providing policy expertise to political parties affiliated with them, organising seminars, studies and research for party member and would-be members, or building a network of experts, academics and other social actors. While politically related, foundations are nevertheless independent from political parties, particularly in legal terms, although usually officials of political parties supervise the activities of the foundations, for example, by being a member of the foundation's board.

Should there be political foundations at the European level? The EU has long since passed the boundaries of a typical international organisation, with the first transnational party federations having been established more than 35 years ago. If, then, there are EU political parties, and if since 2004 they have been financed from the general budget of the EU, then perhaps there should also be political foundations affiliated to EU political parties and complementing their work? This question was answered positively by EU decision-makers, and as a result the year 2008 saw the first European political foundations being established. This development opens a new field of study in the research agenda on EU party politics, with a number of important questions: What are the key features of European political foundations? What purposes do they serve? And how should their relationship with Europarties be understood? This paper aims to analyse and discuss these three questions by examining the record thus far of the European political foundations. Our primary research question concerns the nature of relationship between political parties and political foundations, in particular, regarding the extent to which these foundations can complement the activities of parties and provide them with policy expertise so that European political parties can become real policy-seeking actors.

Similar to previous attempts (Ladrech, 2000; Lightfoot, 2003), in order to reach a conclusion that one of the Europarties can be seen as policy-seeking, we need to examine two parallel processes: the ways in which a Europarty tries to influence its own national member parties, and the ways in which a Europarty tries to influence the EU political agenda. In this paper, we will limit our analysis only to analysing the role of political foundations as a tool for organising policy discussion in the EU. In order to find out the answer to this question, we need to analyse, first, what kind of arguments were brought forward in favour of creating European political foundations. In this aim, we will analyse the debates in the European Parliament (EP) that took place immediately prior to the adoption of regulation governing European political foundations. This analysis will help us to create a catalogue of functions that political foundations are expected to play. Secondly, we will analyse the existing record of the foundations, in particular covering their fields of action, priorities, goals and the nature of their activities. In this part we will try to see the extent to which foundations are framed into Europarties' activities and the role that they play in building a programmatic discussion within a Europarty. Data collection processes have included the analysis of primary documents, such as legislative acts and debates in the EP, together with a set of semi-structured interviews carried out with the representatives

* This paper has been presented during the workshop 'Where now for Europarties? Reflections post-Lisbon' (20-21 June 2011, Maastricht University) and during the 6th ECPR General Conference in Reykjavik (25-27 August 2011, University of Iceland). The authors would like to thank the organisers and the participants for their comments and suggestions. The authors would also like to thank the representatives of political foundations and of European political parties for their willingness to be interviewed and for their comments. The responsibility of the data presented in this paper lies with the authors.

of the major political foundations and of the European political parties. The first task that we need to deal with, however, is to frame the question of political foundations in a wider discussion on transnational party politics in the EU.

Theoretical Framework

Since the beginning of the study on Europarties, there has been a lively debate about how to define them in conventional terms of party politics, and if this is possible, what models could best describe their overall characteristics and functions? These two sets of issues had a more general background: do transnational political parties matter, and how do we measure their partisan influence? (for a thorough review see Van Hecke, 2010). In this context, one of the most important questions to emerge was whether Europarties could be described by referring to the vote-seeking, office-seeking, and policy-seeking models of party behaviour (for explanation and discussion of these models, see Strøm, 1990; Wolinetz, 2002). In short, a vote-seeking party primarily focuses on maximising the vote and winning the election, a policy-seeking party is primarily interested in the pursuit of policy goals, and the primary goal of an office-seeking party is to get secure access to various levels of political office. One of the key questions is whether a political party is able to follow the three aims at the same time, and if it decides to prioritise one of the three goals, what considerations does it take into account when making such choices? In the literature on Europarties, the so-called ‘pessimists’ argue that since the Europarties are lacking the constituent characteristics of political parties, namely that they do not run in elections (vote-seeking) and cannot control the EU political office (office-seeking), they are not real political parties and therefore any comparisons with the standard models and categorisations of political parties is questionable (Bardi, 1994; Smith, 1989). The other camp that emerged prominently in 1990s (and was sometimes referred as the ‘transnationalists’) sought to find parallels with party behaviour in any type of institutional environment. Hix and Lord (1997) argued that the fact that the Europarties do not run in elections and do not strive for the control of EU political office results from the nature of the EU political system, and not from their (strategic) choice. If, by definition, Europarties cannot run in the EP elections, then one cannot criticise them for not doing it.

That is why Hix and Lord focused on these areas in which Europarties were most active, ascribing the main driving force of party competition and the most important forum of Europarties’ activities to be the summits of the party and government leaders, which were convened to exchange views and to try to adopt a common strategy on the eve of subsequent European Council meetings. Accordingly, the real value of Europarties and a point for comparison with national parties is when first, they are able to create common policies for the EU and second, they are able to help influence the agenda and outcome of the Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC). This latter activity is accomplished by coordinating the positions of their heads of state and government, as was done during the Maastricht IGC (Johansson, 2002), for instance. Hence, using the example of the Party of European Socialists (PES), the policy-seeking description fits best Europarties’ real area of influence and activities. In contrast, in early 2000s, Lightfoot criticised Hix and Lord’s approach by emphasising the ‘demand’ side, namely the extent to which PES member parties were able to influence the PES final position (Lightfoot, 2003). He argued that due to the numerical majority of Social Democratic governments, but also through the activities of the PES – both at the level of common programme formation and then coordination of common attempts during the IGC - the PES should have influenced the outcome of the Amsterdam IGC, but it failed to do so due to the domestic policy imperatives and ideological differences between the member parties, which in turn hindered the development of a true policy-seeking party.

In our opinion, a number of both institutional and political developments that took place since the time of the above debates (see Van Hecke, 2010) re-open the question regarding the extent to which the Europarties can be described as vote-, office-, and policy seeking. First, at the moment of writing, the perspective of pan-European elections for a portion of seats in the EP is not totally unlikely to be realised somewhere in the future. What is more, even prior to the entry into force of this possible innovation, on the occasion of the 2009 EP election campaign, the biggest Europarties made quite a

large effort toward improving their campaign abilities and thus increasing their profile (Gagatek, 2009). While this change has not been shadowed by growing popular interests coming from Brussels' circles, and indeed cannot be described as vote-seeking but rather as profile-building, it must nevertheless be pointed out. With respect to the office-seeking aspect, transnational party federations increasingly matter. Since 2004, the idea has been accepted that the nomination of a candidate for President of the European Commission should be decided after taking into account of the result of the EP elections, now enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. This in practice means that the candidate should be proposed by the political family that has the largest group in the EP. This mechanism, indeed, took place on the occasion of the EPP nomination of Jose Manuel Barroso in 2009, and the fight in the EP over his candidacy showed that the post of European Commission President is no longer treated as a pure independent, technocratic power-broker, but as one over which parties should strongly compete. The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon added two further posts of political significance: President of the European Council and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. While the two politicians currently holding these posts hardly ever mention their partisan links, nevertheless there was an informal agreement to divide these two positions between an EPP candidate (Van Rompuy) and that of the PES (Ashton).

In this paper, however, we would like to focus on the changing nature of the Europarties as policy-seeking parties with regard to one particular aspect: the development of European political foundations. In contrast to political groups in the EP, until recently Europarties were lacking resources enabling them to follow closely the substance of the EU policy process. Also for this reason, there was an informal division of labour in which the political groups followed the short- and medium-term policy developments related to the legislative agenda in the EP, and the Europarties focused more on the long-term developments. This division of labour resulted out of necessity: Europarties did not have enough personal resources to follow even the key policy areas of the Union. That is why they preferred to operate on long-term programmatic work, primarily by developing electoral manifestos. The relevance of these documents, however, is practically insignificant in nationally-oriented elections to the EP, but they do form a basis for policy agenda of EP political groups. The adoption of the financing scheme for Europarties (in operation since 2004) marked the beginning of a new period, in which they became stronger organisations. And when the European political foundations were created in 2008, they added an important potential source of policy expertise to the Europarties, which in the long run could help shape the policy stances of their member parties. That is why we believe that in order to re-examine the policy-seeking capabilities of Europarties, we need to start from analysing their potential for policy building by looking at the development of their own political foundations. Contrary to Dakowska (2009), we do not primarily see foundations as “a means to attain legitimacy and access to EU institutions”, or as a part of European civil society, but rather as agents of European political parties and a possible factor that can help them develop as real policy-seeking parties. The reason for this becomes clear when we study the origins and legal status of political foundations, to which we will move now.

The rationale for European political foundations

The adoption of a legal framework for European political foundations took place on the occasion of a revision of Regulation 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and the Council governing political parties at the EU level. This regulation provided for the direct financing of European political parties from the general budget of the EU (Johansson & Raunio, 2005; Lightfoot, 2006). Soon after it was adopted, the advocates of a further strengthening of the partisan elements in the EU came up with the idea of creating political foundations at the EU level, thus shadowing the tradition present in a number of EU Member States. The initiative was warmly welcomed by the European Commission, and in particular by the then-Commissioner For Inter-institutional Relations and Communication Strategy, Margot Wallström. In a draft legislative proposal, the Commission saw the role of foundations in underpinning and complementing “the activities of the political parties by undertaking a range of

activities that contribute to the debate on European public policy issues and European integration, including by acting as catalysts for new ideas, analysis and policy options” (European Commission, 2007). Another reason why the EU needs foundations is because they “undertake different and more long-term activities from political parties at the European level, who for obvious reasons place more emphasis on responding to the day-to-day politics of the Union”. In a debate in the EP, Wallström explained the need for the foundations:

The activities of European political parties, together with the creation of European political foundations, is part and parcel of building this real European public sphere, where different opinions can challenge each other and the citizens can better understand the challenges at stake and make informed choices. Political debate and political controversy are part of democracy and we hope that this will also help to increase the turnout for the European Parliament elections (European Parliament, 2007).

This quote makes clear that the goal of European political foundations is to help to create a European public sphere. However, a public sphere is understood as one in which citizens are aware that there are different political views presented by competing political parties, and based on this knowledge, can make informed choices. Accordingly, the citizens should become aware that there are different political parties in the EU, and that these parties have different views on a number of issues regarding EU politics. A similar line of thinking has been advocated by the PES when in 2004 Poul Nyrup Rasmussen became the President and Philip Cordery the Secretary General. In the opinion of Cordery (2011), citizens should understand that choices between the left and the right are of the same nature both at the European and at the domestic level. Also for this reason, the PES tried to spice up the level of political debate by strongly criticising not only its main competitor, the European People’s Party (EPP), but also national politicians such as French President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Commission President José Manuel Barroso, all associated with the EPP (Gagatek, 2009). From this point of view, the creation of European political foundations is part of a larger trend toward politicising EU politics. The primary role of foundations is not to go on a didactic mission by explaining what the competences of different EU institutions are, or why the citizens should vote in the EP elections, but rather to look at these institutions and other problems of EU politics from a clear ideological perspective, be it a socialist, a liberal or a Christian democratic one.

The legal status

The Commission’s draft legislative proposal of 27 June 2007 amending the Regulation 2004/2003 and providing a legal basis for the establishment of European political foundations was quite smoothly adopted by the EP and the Council of the European Union. On the issue of political foundations, the lines of discussions in the EP clearly shadowed those that took place a few years earlier regarding the financing of European political parties (see European Parliament, 2007). Accordingly, the opposition originated mainly from Eurosceptic and independent members (such as British conservative Roger Helmer or Finnish member of the Group of European United Left – Nordic Green Left Esko Seppänen), who argued that that foundations will be yet another tool of EU “propaganda” financed from citizens’ purses. Nevertheless, the vast majority of MEPs representing the largest political groups was clearly in favour. German social democrat Jo Leinen, who drafted an EP report on the issue, argued that foundations proved their role in many countries, and are quite likely to have an important role also at the EU level, particularly by enhancing debate on EU politics. While foundations should be treated as yet another instrument to strengthen Europarties, Leinen portrayed them as “vehicles for deeper analyses of social trends and are also a forum for debate which extends beyond the party membership”. His report fully supported the Commission’s proposal, tabling only a few amendments “primarily for clarification”. However, it added that foundations should have a separate legal basis from Europarties, shall not promote profit goals, that they should have “a governing body with a geographically-balanced composition”, and that they cannot finance electoral or referendum campaigns (Leinen, 2007). The Commission accepted the Parliament’s amendments, and the entire set

of proposals amending Regulation 2004/2003, as well as creating a basis for European political foundation, received the support of 538 MEPs, with 74 against and 10 abstaining.

The Council was generally in favour of creating European political foundations. However, it objected to the Commission proposal to create a separate budget line for the financing of political foundations. That is why in the finally-adopted Regulation, the foundations were subject to the same budget line as the Europarties, and could only apply for funding via European political parties to which they are affiliated. The finally-adopted Regulation 1546/2007, amending Regulation 2004/2003, entered into force on 28 December 2007.

Art. 2 (4) of the Regulation 2004/2003 defines a political foundation at the European level as “an entity or network of entities” which has legal personality in a Member State of its choice, is affiliated with a political party at the European level, and which complements the objectives of the political party at the European level. It achieves its aims by observing, analysing and contributing to the debate on European public policy issues, organising and supporting seminars, training, conferences and studies, developing cooperation with entities of the same kind in order to promote democracy, and last but not least, by serving as a framework for national political foundations, academics, and other relevant actors to work together at the European level.

The regulation further sets out criteria for recognition which shadows those regulating Europarties. Apart from the conditions mentioned above, foundations must observe “the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law” (Art. 3 (2) of Regulation 2004/2003). As far as the financing is concerned, foundations apply for funding “only through the political party at the European level with which it is affiliated”. This provision is very important, because if the political party at the EU level loses its status (e.g. by dissolving itself), then accordingly the political foundation attached to this party is excluded from funding. As per political parties, the regulation emphasises the need for transparency in reporting on financing, including transparency in the rules regulating donations. Finally, like the political parties, the budget for foundations is distributed two-fold: 15 per cent in equal shares between all recognised foundations, and 85 per cent proportionate to the number of elected MEPs (art. 10 of Regulation 2004/2003). The result is that political foundations attached to the largest parties receive the largest sum of subsidies from the general budget of the EU. Table 1 lists 11 European political foundations as of 2011 and the amount of grants awarded to them for the years 2010-2011. The maximum grant awarded by the EP might be lower than the final grant if, for example, the foundation has spent less funds than it originally appropriated. In order to know what the total budget of the foundations and the parties is, one has to raise the figures by at least 15 per cent, which members of the foundations or the Europarties pay as membership fees (or any other kind of revenues).

Table 1
Grants from the European Parliament to political foundations at European level (2010-2011)

Foundation	Affiliated to party	Seat	Year	Maximum grant awarded to foundation (in EUR)	Maximum grant awarded to party (in EUR)
Centre for European Studies	European People's Party	Belgium	2010 2011	3 288 663 4 075 836	4 959 462 6 183 988
Foundation for European Progressive Studies	Party of European Socialists	Belgium	2010 2011	2 150 000 2 714 798	3 395 323 4 117 825
European Liberal Forum	European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party	Belgium	2010 2011	818 438 942 819	1 553 984 1 815 770
Green European Foundation	European Green Party	Belgium	2010 2011	684 419 850 767	1 054 999 1 298 539
New Direction - Foundation for European Reform	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists	Belgium	2010 2011	659 651 747 210	1 016 275 1 140 478
Transform Europe	Party of the European Left	Belgium	2010 2011	475 542 554 889	708 080 846 936
Institute of European Democrats	European Democratic Party	Belgium	2010 2011	337 585 392 156	505 617 598 555
Center Maurits Coppieters	European Free Alliance	Belgium	2010 2011	212 544 252 450	339 965 395 333
European Foundation for Freedom	European Alliance for Freedom	Malta	2011	244 217	372 753
Organization for European Interstate Cooperation	EUDemocrats	Sweden	2011	170 248	259 852
European Christian Political Foundation	European Christian Political Movement	Netherlands	2011	150 000	259 852

Source: adapted from European Parliament (2011)

All registered European political parties established affiliated political foundations. The difference in the amount of grants for political foundations shadows those for European political parties, with the Centre for European Studies (CES) receiving more than a third, whereas the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) about 24 per cent. At the bottom of the list, the European Christian Political Foundation receives 1.35 per cent of the total budget appropriated to European political foundations.

Certainly, compared to some national parties and foundations, these figures are relatively low. The same can be said about the number of staff. For example, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, KAS) has 560 employees in Germany and 80 abroad, and its total budget for 2009 was more than 120 million EUR (KAS 2010). However, we need to keep in mind that the German political foundations are exceptional in the amount of resources they possess, and that in many other countries the political foundations have very low budgets. From that point of view, it is mistaken to expect that the European political foundations will ever receive grants comparable to those of the German foundations. It is also mistaken to expect that, given these comparatively low figures, they can be of no value to the European political parties. If one knows that the largest European political party,

the EPP, employs 24 staff members, and its foundation, the CES, has 10 staff members, we see the reasons explaining how the foundations can become an important source for strengthening the Europarties.

Having analysed the rationale for the establishment of European political foundations as well as their legal status, we can now move to discuss how the main European political foundations carry out their tasks and objectives, and in particular, how they complement the activities of European political parties to which they are attached. Due to space considerations, we will only discuss the five largest political foundations.

European Political Foundations – case-study analyses

Centre for European Studies

The Centre for European Studies (CES), affiliated with the EPP, is the largest European political foundation, at least as far as the budget and number of staff members is concerned. Compared to the other foundations, its links with the party are quite clear. In fact, the EPP and the CES political leaderships are one and the same. EPP President Wilfried Martens is the President of the CES and EPP Secretary General Antonio López-Istúriz White is its Secretary Treasurer. Also, EPP Group Chairman Joseph Daul is a member of the Executive Board. Legally, of course, as is obliged by the 2007 amendment of the 2004/2003 regulation, the CES is separate from the EPP but politically it serves the interests of the EPP. “What we do is to produce content, provide a forum for people and ideas to meet, emphasize certain issues and throw them into the public, reinforce things that are already there, and thereby promote the goals of our political family”, as CES Deputy Director Roland Freudenstein puts it. Obviously, it also has some independence with regard to, for instance, establishing a research agenda.

According to its statutes, the CES serves as “a common European framework of national foundations/think-tanks recognised by EPP member parties” (CES, 2007). Indeed, next to its close relationship with the EPP, the CES has developed itself as the coordinator of a network of national foundations. Moreover, several national foundations founded the CES, together with the EPP leadership. Currently, the CES consists of 19 national foundations as members. Not all EPP member parties have political foundations while some Member States are represented by more than one foundation. Each of the two pillars of the CES, the EPP leadership and the national foundations (Huhtanen, 2011a: 214), occupies half of the seats in the General Assembly and the Executive Board. Although the support and the steering of the KAS has been crucial in the founding and the development of the CES, its representation in the General Assembly is limited to one seat, therefore being on an equal footing with the other national foundations. According to CES Director Tomi Huhtanen, “[t]his model, on the one hand, vested the EPP foundation with expertise and an extensive network of solid national partner foundations, and, on the other, offered political support and high-level national political contact from the EPP and its member parties”(Huhtanen, 2011a: 215).

Unlike the German political foundations, like the KAS, and unlike some of the other European political foundations, the CES has never engaged in civic education, democracy-building or training activities (within Europe and worldwide). This clear division of labour derives from the simple fact that these activities have been the central focus for some of the national foundations affiliated to the CES, especially the KAS, and the EPP Group’s Robert Schuman Institute (particularly in Central and Eastern Europe). The CES’ public does not primarily consist of young politicians or organisations that need help in developing Western style democratic parties. By contrast, the aim (and the according target audience) is three-fold: (1) building bridges between the citizens and the EU, in relation to one particular group: the voters and members of the EPP’s member parties; (2) creating horizontal synergies between the national member foundations affiliated to the CES; and (3) developing political

ideas that take the centre-right in Europe forward (Freudenstein, 2011). The latter means, for instance, that the CES takes a role, albeit advisory, in drafting the manifestos of the EPP. According to Freudenstein, so far “the CES has become a player in the Brussels context, in several national contexts, and certainly vis-à-vis the party and the Group”.

The CES clearly leaves the follow-up of the day-to-day politics to the party and the Group, the latter having its own think tank, European Ideas Network (EIN). By organising events (conferences, seminars and lectures) and preparing publications (strategy papers, research papers, policy briefs and also books), it tries to influence the European policy-making process within a mid-term and long-term perspective. The ultimate objective is to promote the goals of the political family to which the CES belongs, at the European as well as the national level. This also means helping to set up foundations in several Member States, discussing certain issues with partners with which the EPP cannot directly get in contact with (like the British Conservatives, for instance), and spelling out contentious issues like migration, linking the existing expertise within the EPP member parties and its foundations with the EU level. Unlike other political foundations, the CES is able to capitalise on high profile politicians affiliated to the EPP, including prime ministers, and it has also worked explicitly towards business stakeholders, for instance through its International Visitors Programme (in Warsaw and Bonn, coinciding with the 2009 EPP congresses) and its Economic Ideas Forum (Huhtanen, 2011b).

Referring to its motto ‘Thinking Europe’, the CES also invests in its presence on the internet. Next to its website and using social media, it has run a blog and was relatively successful with the ‘Tell Barroso’ initiative in the run-up to the 2009 EP elections. On behalf of Commission President Barroso, the CES invited European citizens to express their opinions about the issues that the EU, and President Barroso in particular, should concentrate on. In fact, the CES has two people dealing with communication, the other eight employees dealing with research, projects and administration. The number of people involved in the activities of the CES is even larger if one includes its interns, research associates and senior fellows. The overall budget amounts to more than 4 million EUR.

Foundation for European Progressive Studies

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the political foundation affiliated to the PES. This link manifests itself firstly by the fact that many distinguishing features of the PES statutes have been copied to the FEPS statutes. Most importantly, like the PES, FEPS works to strengthen “the socialist, social democratic, labour and democratic progressive ideas” while uniting political forces representing these four strands of leftist thinking. Typically for the PES, FEPS statutes indicate that in the composition of FEPS organs “neither gender should make up less than 40%”(FEPS 2010b). Regarding the membership policy, the FEPS statutes indicate that “full members of the PES, the PES and the national political foundations and think tanks close to the PES or PES member parties may become full members of the FEPS”. The result is that apart from 41 progressive national foundations and think tanks, all 39 PES national member parties became FEPS members.

The General Assembly, the Bureau and the Scientific Council are the three organs of the FEPS. The precise distribution of voting rights in the General Assembly (tasked with, inter alia, electing the President and deciding on membership issues) is not for public use. However, as far as the Bureau is concerned (an intermediate organ deciding, inter alia, on research programmes and the political strategy in between General assemblies), it is composed of 20 members, such as the FEPS President (currently former Prime Minister of Italy Massimo D’Alema) and the Secretary General (currently Ernst Stetter), 7 ex-officio members representing the PES, political groups in the EP and the Committee of the Regions, and PES youth (ECOSY) and women's organisation (PES Women) as well as 6 representatives of national political foundations and think tanks (FEPS 2011a).

The latter is very important because in a way it describes the nature of relationship between the PES and the FEPS. Philip Cordery, PES Secretary General, who was in charge of setting up the FEPS, recalls that the intention of the PES was to create FEPS on a compromise model; in other words,

neither is it totally independent from, nor is it an integrated part of, the PES (Cordery, 2011). That is why the founding members decided that the partisan and the think-tank element in the FEPS must be represented in about equal shares. Cordery states that if the FEPS was limited only to political foundations, then the risk would be that these national foundations could have their own agenda, one that is completely disconnected from the parties. The role of ex-officio members representing the partisan elements is then to indicate the political priorities, so that the activities of FEPS are complementary to these of the PES.

The formally stated goals of the FEPS are basically copied from the text of Regulation 2004/2003. All the activities and goal of the FEPS have one common feature: they all aim to develop and present the progressive ideas, proposals and solutions to the problems of EU politics. In practice, this function is primarily related to bringing in new and fresh ideas for the PES and other socialist party organisations, whereas through seminars, conferences and other activities FEPS aims to present these clearly ideologically-motivated proposals to the EU citizens and bring a new impetus to the EU public debate. According to both Cordery and Stetter (2011), one of the reasons why the EU failed to communicate effectively with its citizens in the past was that this clearly-defined ideological element was missing, that the citizens were not aware of the existence and of the programme of different European-level political forces. The role of the FEPS is then to fill this communication deficit by offering the citizens unequivocally socialist and progressive ideas and proposals as a part of the building of European demos that Commissioner Wallström had in mind when she described the functions of European political foundations.

The FEPS actively participates in developing policy ideas for the PES. According to Stetter, the precondition of being able to do so was FEPS's success in creating a functioning network of progressive think-tanks, foundations, institutes, academics and other individuals. FEPS policy advisor Ania Skrzypek adds that FEPS should be co-responsible for thinking of the position of the political parties in the process of building a new Europe (Skrzypek, 2011). Through the activities of this network, FEPS is able to offer the PES new and fresh policy ideas. Among the most important project was the Next Left project, which was the inspiration behind the PES new program and the declaration of principle that will be adopted in November 2011. Just after the 2009 EP elections, FEPS presented 10 observations on the European elections, some of these calling for the introduction of direct membership in the PES and generally outlining methods of strengthening the PES in its position as a truly European party. In 2011, in cooperation with its member organizations, FEPS organized 12 round tables in different EU member states (Skrzypek 2011). On the other hand, Cordery recognises that the PES does not have time to run all the scientific projects the FEPS has completed, nor does it have the capacity for forward thinking, in the way that the FEPS does. As Skrzypek phrases it, "we are the intellectual avant-garde of the party". For example, FEPS prepared a research paper which serves as the basis for the PES in its discussion on the mode of selecting a top-candidate for the 2014 European Parliament elections. An important difference between the type of research activities of the PES and FEPS lies in their aims. While the PES advisors focus on data collection and on presenting policy documents with a view to finding a room for compromise, mostly in relation to the direct political events or party gatherings, this is not the case with FEPS. Skrzypek argues that, first, FEPS's research style goes much beyond the short-term perspective, and second, they are mainly concerned with preparing documents that will become a basis for discussion, but which do not need to be accepted by everybody. However, in order to have a common platform, FEPS and PES advisors meet regularly in order to inform each other about their current activities and plans. Apart from the already mentioned areas, FEPS has provided key input into the PES discussions on nuclear energy, immigration or the financial transaction tax that helps to transform the scientific analysis into policy positions. In return, D'Alema, as FEPS President, is regularly invited to the PES Leaders' Conferences; in fact, he was one of the keynote speakers during the PES Council in Warsaw in December 2010. In sum, FEPS is close but independent from the PES, which means that it has its own distinct priorities and tasks, but they are closely related to the policy development of the PES.

In the most recent budget available for 2009 (FEPS 2010a), the biggest FEPS expenses are the personnel costs (more than 730,000 EUR), followed by meetings and representation costs (more than 686,000 EUR), and studies and research (more than 336,000 EUR). At this moment FEPS employs 9 members of the staff, including 6 policy advisors. An interesting part of their activities was the set-up of FEPS correspondents in Asia and Africa, who have a clear role in building a relationship between FEPS and progressive foundations and think tanks around the world. Stetter explains that this is also an important function of European political foundations, to which FEPS pays considerable attention. On the other hand, in order to keep FEPS within academic circles, it has recently started establishing links with universities, and has already one formal relationship with Université Libre de Bruxelles (Skrzypek 2011). The FEPS website regularly features opinions and commentaries of various individuals, particularly of D'Alema and Stetter, expressing their views on current EU developments. In fact, the website even voices some of the main tenets of the PES strategy, such as criticising the Barroso Commission (FEPS 2011b).

European Liberal Forum

European Liberal Forum (ELF), affiliated with the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR), has shaped itself slightly differently than the two largest foundations, and not only due to much lower financial resources. Compared to both the CES and FEPS, ELF's independent status is much more pronounced. First, only liberal political foundations and think tanks can become ELF members. ELF Executive Director Susanne Hartig stresses this feature very strongly by pointing out that such provision stems from the very different scope of action of the ELDR (with political parties) and the ELF (with political foundations and think tanks) (Hartig 2011). Second, while the ELF President is a Liberal MEP, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, and the ex-officio ELF Vice President is the ELDR President, Annemie Neyts, three other members of the Board of Directors are the representatives of ELF member organisations. These two factors make ELF, at least from a formal point of view, more independent than other political foundations. Similar to other foundations, some ELF members are closer to the national liberal parties, others less, but ELF is open to all kinds of liberal actors, provided they subscribe to the ideas represented by the European Liberals, including the 1976 ELDR Stuttgart declaration that defined the programmatic grounds of the liberal family. In order to attract as many liberal actors as possible, the ELF statutes allow its member organisations to opt for three different amounts of membership fees (500, 2500 and 5000 EUR) that respectively translate into a number of voting rights in the General Assembly (ELF 2011).

Likewise, the main functions of the ELF are the same as per other foundations: building a network of liberal think tanks, foundations, experts and academics on the one hand, and liberal parliamentarians and decision-makers on the other. Also, it provides the ELDR with the scientific input toward policy development, thus contributing to the European public debate, and it presents liberal proposals and views towards the wider public in EU Member States. Indeed, Hartig has identified the creation of a functioning European liberal network as the biggest achievement of ELF so far. A distinguishing provision of ELF statutes is that they specifically indicate the ELF seeks "a common position, as a transfer of experience gained from the contracting members, on all important matters affecting the European Union". What is most evident from the reports of ELF activities is that the biggest number of events took place in Turkey, Poland and Croatia. This way, the ELF tries to extend its activities to EU candidate countries in a comprehensive manner, by promoting its activities both in cities and in rural areas. In the nearest future, the ELF will try to get involved in the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), such as Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine and the other former Soviet republics. There is also a practical reason for a concentration of activities in the countries other than Western Europe: as Hartig explains, organizing events in Turkey is much cheaper than those in Brussels. For instance, the ELF can organize approximately ten events in Turkey for the cost of one event in Brussels.

As far as the relationship of the ELF to the ELDR is concerned, ELF supports the programmatic work of ELDR by holding events, conferences and other activities, particularly with regard to the yearly themes that the ELDR is working on. However, contrary to both CES and FEPS, the direct link between ELDR and ELF activities is much less visible, although this does not mean that they are totally detached. But it seems at least that ELF concentrates on working with the members and focusing on addressing European citizens and liberal sympathizers. What is more, contrary to FEPS, the ELF website does not contain any comments from either its President or its Executive Director.

The ELF employs three members as its staff: an executive director, one project assistant and one finance and personnel officer. A research unit is therefore not existent. This is one of the reasons why the ELF is – out of necessity – a member-driven organization and an umbrella organization facilitating networking activities. But as Hartig explains, the know-how, the expertise, the resources and the proposals for action in certain fields remain with the member organizations.

Green European Foundation

The Green European Foundation (GEF), the political foundation linked with the European Green Party (EGP), calls itself “an independent and distinct organisation with its own priorities”, not “an umbrella organisation for national Green foundations” (GEF, 2011a). Like all the other European political foundations, it has an Executive Board and a General Assembly but, contrary to the CES, for example, the majority of its base is not defined either by the party or the Group in the EP. According to Secretary General Claude Weinber, GEF does not serve as “a retirement home for former top politicians”. It is the national Green foundations that are central to the GEF’s organisation, despite their absence in many EU Member States.

Not surprisingly, one of the main goals of GEF is to assist the establishment and to follow the development of partner institutions everywhere in Europe, even in countries such as France, where one finds a relatively stable and successful Green party. Avoiding duplication of the work that is already done by, for example, the German Heinrich Böll Foundation (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, HBS), the GEF can be of specific value in countries without strong Green parties and Green foundations (Weinber, 2011). Obviously, assisting new foundations is done in conjunction with, and based on, the experience of the HBS and other national foundations. The simple fact of the discrepancy between what the HBS and the GEF can do hampers the potential value of the GEF. However, this is something that cannot easily be solved in the short term; nor is it a problem that only applies to GEF.

The first goal of the GEF is “to help in developing a European demos” (Weinber, 2011). Close to the German model, this involves educating and training people. It also means close collaboration with the party and the Group, for instance in organising workshops during the annual Summer University, as the GEF is addressing the same constituency as the party. Weinber, however, sees GEF operating as rather distant, vis-à-vis the EGP: “The ambition is to say where the Greens should be in 20 or 30 years, not in 5 years.” Formal (through the Executive Board and the Assembly) and informal dialogue with the Green politicians takes place regularly so that the activities of the foundation and the party are complementary.

GEF insists on developing its own agenda and its own priorities, for which the party or the Group has no immediate interest. It serves as a laboratory for new ideas, as a platform to invite people whose beliefs are not shared by everyone within the Green family (for instance, Jackson, 2011). GEF acts as a consultant when the party or the Group is looking for expertise on, for example, renewable energy. But it also outsources certain research projects to other think tanks or academics. These are privileged “partners”, next to the national Green foundations (GEF, 2011b). Giving the limited resources, working together with other institutions seems to be a necessity. The budget, counting 800,000 EUR in 2010, is, according to Weinber, not enough, given the tasks the political foundations are given by the EU law-makers. Currently five people work for GEF, while its Secretary General is employed by the HBS. Practically speaking, GEF shares offices with the HBS in order to save money. The future

strategy, however, does not lack ambition: it includes developing activities even outside the EU (particularly in neighbouring countries) and offer new Green ideas “to everyone, even if nobody likes them” (Weinber, 2011).

New Direction Foundation

‘New Direction. The Foundation for European Reform’, also known as the New Direction Foundation (NDF), is the political foundation affiliated with the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR). The party was only recently founded, in October 2009, after the creation of the much better known European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group in the EP. Although European political foundations are a relatively recent phenomenon, one can easily say that the NDF is the youngest among them. It was formally established in the autumn of 2010 and it started its first activities in early 2011. Compared with the other four foundations, NDF is also the smallest one in terms of budget (about 750,000 EUR) but not in terms of personnel (five employees). Unlike all the other foundations, the NDF opposes public funding. According to the NDF, European political foundations should not be financed by EU taxpayers’ money but by private funding. NDF is therefore in favour of changing the 2004/2003 Regulation in this respect.

NDF promotes “free enterprise, small government, individual freedom and a new direction for Europe” (NDF, 2011). It calls itself “euro-realist”, meaning that it opposes a federal organised Europe. It wants to develop the EU in a ‘new direction’, hence the name of the foundation. The NDF’s ‘Patron’ is former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In addition to Thatcher, it has a Board of Directors, consisting of three MEPs, and an Academic Council. In line with its basic philosophy, the emphasis of the NDF’s mission is on the Member States, not on the Brussels office. According to its Director, Shane Frith, it is neither the research department of the ECR Group, nor does it aspire to any role in the preparation of the 2014 EP elections. As Frith phrases it, the way its work is done is more “objective”, less political. Consequently, at a certain moment in time “NDF might come up with reports that are at odds with the policies of the ECR Group” (Frith, 2011).

The NDF’s main goal is to provide “original and independent analyses” of a variety of political issues. It does so by challenging mainstream ideas, provoke thinking, and shifting the debate in a ‘new direction’. NDF is deliberately forward-thinking; it does not invest in “retrospective work”. Its agenda develops rather organically, through requests of the Board and contacts with partners institutions (that are clearly on both the demand and the supply side). The target audience is not Brussels but the wider public which can only be reached indirectly, through the (national) media. A monthly lecture series, a daily newsletter and, in particular, reports on contentious issues (like the cost of the EP) aim to attract media attention all over Europe. NDF therefore collaborates with its partner think tanks, present in 13 Member States, most of them not affiliated to one of the member parties of the AECR, as well as with like-minded organisations in the U.S. That the NDF tries to establish new partner organisations and work closely with existing free market think tanks in every Member State, is in its own interest.

Discussion and conclusions

In this part of our paper, we would like to return to our main questions regarding the key features of European political foundations, the purposes they serve, and their relationship with Europarties. We also try to answer the underlying question whether the presence of political foundations drives Europarties towards becoming policy-seeking actors.

To start with, the review of the foundations has shown that while the common goals, functions and areas of action are all derived from the 2004/2003 Regulation and its 2007 amendment, all foundations (and Europarties) interpret them in a slightly different way. The fact that they operate in the same environment does not guarantee complete uniformity. The models that those in charge of the political foundations have in mind about how they should develop differ as they depend on the different

national contexts and political visions. Perhaps the most important intervening factor is the problem of asymmetry: on the one hand, not all national political parties have their own national foundation, and, on the other, not all EU Member States are represented. While in some countries, like Poland, political foundations are not established properly within the political scene, in others countries there are not even political partners to deal with. The latter is particularly problematic for the smaller ones, ELF, GEF and NDF, because in at least a few European states liberal, Green or reformist and conservative parties play virtually no role. All these factors strongly influence the goals and purposes of political foundations at European level. Obviously, it also defines the scope of action a European political foundation is able to develop, at least in the short term.

One of the biggest paradoxes is that while one could expect that due to limited resources small foundations would be working much more closely with the Europarty and the research department of the EP Group, they tend to do most things either on their own or with their member think tanks and foundations. In contrast, the two big foundations, FEPS and particularly CES, are much more oriented toward their respective parties. In other words, while this may simply be a coincidence, the bigger a foundation, the more integrated with the party it tends to be. The level of integration might be measured either by analysing the formal division of power within the foundations (i.e. how many votes the representatives of the Europarty have, and how many votes are reserved for the national member foundations and think tanks), and the degree of interconnectedness of goals and aims of the party and the foundation. This way, from a formal point of view, with regard to CES and FEPS, there is a clear balance of power between the party and the national member foundations. CES's role is particularly 'political', given that it takes some of the roles that the EPP is uneasy to do on its own, like maintaining contacts with the British Conservatives or with foundations close to them. In other words, the foundations' role might also be to discuss certain issues with partners with which Europarties cannot or do not want to get in contact with directly. In the near future, the NDF might do something similar. In the case of ELF and GEF, the party's formal importance and power is less significant. Certainly, the practice of real distribution of power might be different, but the formally-stated rules are a good indicator of different visions regarding the relationship between the party and the foundation. On the other hand, the close connection between GEF and the HBS, for instance, speaks volumes about the rather limited capacity of the smaller European political foundations, at least in budgetary terms, but also on the level of supervision national political foundations and EP Groups alike can exercise.

Another important difference relates to the membership policy. Given the size of the EPP family (78 member parties), it is quite surprising that the CES consists of only 19 member organizations. However, this is related to the fact that CES members must be recognized by the EPP member parties. This condition is much less pronounced with regard to other foundations, particularly ELF, to whom the key condition is the liberal character of an organization that applies for membership, rather than a formal connection to a national political party. This might also be related to the already-mentioned fact that smaller political families do not have political partners in every Member State of the EU, so there is no national party to assign a political foundation an official recognition. However, through the activities of political foundations, Europarties can actually build a ground for the emergence or strengthening of such parties and foundations. A similar role can be played by the foundations in maintaining international links. Certainly, we do not mean here that foundations are intermediaries of Europarties, but nevertheless the activities of foundations in these countries can at least create a good atmosphere for their respective political families. After all, they are part of that same family, something for which they cannot be blamed, obviously.

The membership policy is also related to another quite important issue, the issue of different, sometimes even conflicting, expectations of the national member foundations versus the ones of the Europarties. The need to find a balance here was one of the reasons behind the decision that FEPS should consist of both national political foundations and think tanks on the one hand, and all PES member parties on the other. Pleasing the 'principals' is entirely part of the European political

foundations' *raison d'être*, as it stems from the 2004/2003 Regulation itself. Our case studies have provided ample evidence of how the foundations try to strike this balance. Indeed, the dual character of European political foundations makes them truly transnational agents, operating at both the national and European level, similar to the Europarties with which they are affiliated.

The final question, then, is in which way the European political foundations contribute to the Europarties' development. More specifically: is the development of European political foundations able to boost the prospect of building policy-seeking Europarties? So far, at least, while the programmatic work carried out by all the foundations is unquestionable, it seems that Europarties benefit from it in different ways: from directly and deeply incorporating the foundations by, for instance, drafting programmatic documents (in the case of CES), through developing a scientific basis for the Europarty to work on (FEPS), to a much more limited role in the programmatic work of the party (ELF, GEF and NDF). The explanation might be two-fold: one is practical and relates to limited resources available for smaller foundations. Another explanation, as argued above, might be related to different visions of what foundations should really do. The important question is whether they should be mainly geared towards the party, towards national member foundations and think tanks, or towards the general public. Certainly, all political foundations develop activities in all of these areas, but the quantity of the resources they invest in one target group compared to another might differ significantly. The way in which European political foundations make difficult choices will certainly influence the degree to which Europarties develop into policy-seeking parties. The closer they are with their Europarties, the more these Europarties will be able to rely on the policy input from the political foundations. The programmatic preparation of the 2014 EP elections serves as a defining moment in which one can take stock. It should be noted, however, that this 'battle of ideas' and Brussels-oriented model does not entirely exclude a more German-type model and Member State-oriented activities such as civic education and democracy-building, with the establishments of national foundations in different countries somewhere in between or even bridging these two models. Similarly and based on national experiences, this is not to argue that foundations will be the only or even the primary source of policy expertise for the Europarties. In order to become real policy-seeking parties, the 2004/2003 Regulation should explicitly allow foundations to play a more 'political' role – but nothing in this respect is to be expected soon since the Giannakou report that proposes amendments to the 2004/2003 Regulation does not tackle this issue (Giannakou, 2011) – and, more fundamentally, a change of approach of the national political parties with regard to their membership of Europarties is needed. As long as these national political parties do not fully engage in what is at stake at the European level and consequently leave what is European to the Europarties, a sudden breakthrough should not be expected. This is not to say, however, that small steps cannot bring Europarties closer to the aim of becoming policy-seeking political parties. Indeed, this paper has clearly shown the direction in which the latest developments have taken place in that respect.

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