

Marianne Sieker

The Role of the German Political Foundations in International Relations

Transnational Actors in Public Diplomacy



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“Penser ne suffit pas, il faut penser à quelque chose.”

(Jules Renard)

“So steht es denn da, unser Werk, so steinern und fremd, so eigenmächtig, so ein für allemal. Es sieht dich an, ohne zu nicken, ohne zu lächeln, so, als hätte man sich nie gekannt; ohne zu danken und ohne zu verzeihen. Nachdem man es lange betrachtet und auch die ersten Schrecken überwunden hat, sagt man sogar: Es ist nicht schlecht, man kann nicht sagen, es ist schlecht! Es erinnert an dieses und jenes, was uns im Entwerfen, da es noch ein Einfall war, erfreut und beglückt hat.”

(Max Frisch, Bin oder Die Reise nach Peking)

Abstract

The six German political foundations, backed by substantial public funds, have several hundreds of foreign offices around the globe and more than 2000 staff members. As specific manifestations of the German political landscape, the *Stiftungen* are affiliated to the German political parties at the German *Bundestag*.

This study researches the international activity of the German political foundations and their position within international relations theory. It juxtaposes the rationalist and constructivist approaches on the state and non-state relationship and the possible impact of transnational actors. After having identified the German political foundations as transnational actors, a model of public diplomacy is used to systematically study the foundations' transnational interaction processes. The model integrates different public diplomacy approaches and is based on the assumption of public diplomacy as a diplomatic process in a network environment, where transnational actors and states are equally important and where values and ideas are emphasised. At the same time, it considers propaganda activity, a criticism sometimes voiced by foreign governments with regard to the foundations' undertakings. The foundations' democracy assistance as well as their conflict management ambitions are explored, as collaborative or catalytic public diplomacy forms. In two case studies, one on the Rule of law program of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Southeast Europe and another on the activities of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Southern Thailand, the strategies of ideational diffusion processes and networking, the soft power resources and social relationship building of the political foundations are investigated.

This theoretically informed empirical study aims at first contributing to the object of the German political foundations' international undertakings which has been subject to little research so far. Second, it connects IR theory on transnational actors as well as the literature on public diplomacy to these activities. Finally, the study identifies the *Stiftungen* as reproducers of the German civilian power identity by implementing abroad major parts of German policy.

This study was submitted as thesis to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 2015. The degree was awarded without conditions in February 2016.

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List of abbreviations

AA	Federal Foreign Office
AAPA	Federal Foreign Office, Political Archive
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AKBP	German foreign culture and education policy
APEC	Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BINGO	Business-oriented non-governmental organisation
BMF	Federal Ministry of Finance
BMJV	Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection
BMU	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety
BMVg	Federal Ministry of Defence
BMWi	Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Develop- ment
BT	Deutscher Bundestag
BVerfG	Federal Constitutional Court
BVerwG	Federal Administrative Court
B90/DIE GRÜNEN	Alliance 90/The Greens
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CIMIC	Civil-military co-operation
CSFP	EU's Common and Foreign Security Policy
CSU	Christian Social Union
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DIE LINKE	The Left
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
F.D.P.	Free Democratic Party
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FNS	Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung
FZ	Financial assistance in German development policy
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
GONGO	Governmental-non-governmental organisation
GPPN	Global public policy network
HBS	Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung
HSS	Hans-Seidel-Stiftung
ICC	International Criminal Court
IGO	Intergovernmental organisation

List of abbreviations

IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IO	International organisation
IR	International relations
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
KNET	Knowledge network
MNC	Multinational companies
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCIA	Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment
PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism
PINGO	Public-interest-oriented non-governmental organisation
PR	Public relations
QUANGO	Quasi-non-governmental organisation
RLP	Rule of law Program of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
RLS	Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung
R2P	Responsibility to protect
SEECF	Southeast European Cooperation Process
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
SSR	Security sector reforms
TAN	Transnational advocacy network
TNC	Transnational company
TZ	Technical assistance in German development policy

Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 2012, German political foundations received state subsidies totalling of 434 million Euros, a web of 340 foreign offices spanned around the globe and they had around 2000 staff members. Affiliated to the political parties at the German *Bundestag* they offered considerable educational, advisory and exchange programs in Germany and abroad. They were provided with substantial public funds and situated in a grey area between public and private, offering freedom and room for manoeuvre. Abroad they were assumed to accompany and relieve German foreign policy.¹ Their distinctive political and legal organisation had even been imitated by other countries, such as France, India and Turkey as well as on European level.² However, research on German political foundations has been astonishingly limited.

1.1. Research object

The research project aims at analysing the German political foundations' role in international relations. In investigating the practice of their international activity, the foundations' uniqueness as players of global presence and their influential character can be understood. The term "German political foundations" (*Politische Stiftungen* or *Parteistiftungen*) is drawn up of six German organisations:

- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES);
- Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS);
- Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung (FNS);
- Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung (HSS);
- Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (HBS) and
- Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS).³

The choice of name indicates their political party affiliation at a Federal level. The FES is closely linked to the Social Democratic Party (SPD) but also affiliated with the German trade union confederation (*Deutscher Ge-*

1 Pogorelskaja (2009a) p. 7.

2 Woyke (2011) p. 431; Baddenhausen/Grey (2007).

3 For their internet representation (in English, if available) see:

FES at: <http://www.fes.de/de/>; KAS at: <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/>; FNS at: <https://www.freiheit.org/content/stiftung>; HSS at: <http://www.hss.de/english.html>; HBS at: <https://www.boell.de/en>; RLS at: <http://www.rosalux.de/english/foundation.html>.

werkschaftsbund).⁴ The KAS was formed as a close associate of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The smaller FNS is close to the liberal Free Democratic Party (F.D.P.). The Bavarian HSS is linked to the right-wing Christian Social Union (CSU). The HBS is affiliated to the Green Party (*Bündnis90/Die Grünen*), while the RLS is connected to the left-wing *DieLinke*, formerly the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) which succeeded the German Democratic Republic (GDR).⁵

In 2015, the political aims and objectives of the German political foundations circled around the strengthening of democracy, the support of civil political commitment, dialogue and cooperation among different socio-political stakeholders as well as research and knowledge transfer.⁶ Despite the democratic consensus, each foundation was committed to a certain normative background that determined activities in Germany and abroad. The FES was engaged in social democracy, freedom, justice and solidarity. It promoted political participation, social cohesion and a fair social and economic order and furthered political dialogue with trade unions.⁷ The KAS took as a basis a Christian conception of human being created by God in its equality, diversity and imperfection. It promoted liberal democracy, social market economics and strengthening of the value consensus. It committed itself to liberty, justice and solidarity.⁸ The FNS was committed to liberalism and wanted to encourage the principle of freedom in human dignity in all aspects of society.⁹ The HBS felt bound to ecology, sustainability, democracy, human rights, self-determination and justice. It had a special focus on gender equality, minority rights and active peace policy.¹⁰ The RLS considered itself as part of democratic socialism focused on critical thinking and political alternatives.¹¹ The HSS more broadly felt bound to democracy, peace and development emphasising Christianity and historical roots.¹²

In 2015, the scope of the foundations' domestic and international activities was enormous. Originally, the German political foundations' activities

4 Mair (2000) p. 129 fn. 5.

5 Party affiliated political foundations existed also in the *Land* level.

6 Cf. FES/KAS/FNS/HSS/HBS (1998).

7 FES at: <https://www.fes.de/de/?id=232>.

8 KAS at: <http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.4972/>.

9 FNS at: <https://www.freiheit.org/content/50-jahre-stiftung>.

10 HBS at: <https://www.boell.de/de/navigation/ueber-uns-519.html>.

11 RLS at: <http://www.rosalux.de/stiftung.html>.

12 HSS at: <http://www.hss.de/stiftung.html>.

concerned political or civic education in Germany.¹³ In the first study of the German political foundations in 1976 *Watson* gave a short introduction to the German political foundations in a report published by the Anglo-American Foundation. He described the original intention of the establishment of the *Stiftungen* to encourage democratic structures in post-war Germany against the background of the National Socialist era.¹⁴ In 2015, political education was still the core of the *Stiftungen's* domestic activity. It included the maintenance of educational institutions offering seminars, workshops and discussions. The KAS, for instance, had an educational institution (*Bildungsforum*) in every Federal country.¹⁵ Its activities addressed citizens interested in politics, and subjects range from fundamental issues concerning democracy, to international-relations and day-to-day politics.¹⁶ Other domestic activities concerned the award of prizes, mainly dedicated to writers and journalists, the organisation of exhibitions to further art and culture, as well as dialogue forums on emerging policy issues between political and economic stakeholders and those from civil society.¹⁷ Moreover, the foundations gave educational grants to gifted German and foreign students. Graduate and post-graduate programs supported all fields of studies. They contained financial support but also regular seminars and advice services.¹⁸ The KAS, for example, annually gave around 3500 grants to students.¹⁹ In 2014, the FES supported around 2.800 young people with scholarships (of which 320 abroad).²⁰ Scholars were not necessarily political adherents of the donor body.²¹ However, the list was long of prominent German politicians having been supported by a political foundation in former times.²² Moreover, every political foundation did research in the fields of

13 For studies on the foundations' civic education see *Hellwig* (1998); *Langguth* (1993) and *Vieregge* (1977b). *Leuthold* (2000) dealt with the civic education of the HBS. *Pechtl* (1996) analysed the foundations' educational opportunities in the *Länder* of Brandenburg and Bavaria.

14 The report also considered the establishment of British political foundations according to the German model (*Watson* [1976] p. 18).

15 KAS annual report 2013 p. 99.

16 FES/KAS/FNS/HSS/HBS (1998).

17 FES/KAS/FNS/HSS/HBS (1998); KAS annual report 2014 p. 85.

18 Interview 18.

19 KAS annual report 2014 p. 87.

20 FES annual report 2014 p. 62.

21 Interview 18; differently *Pinto-Duschnisky* (1991a) p. 204.

22 KAS former scholarship holders are, for instance, *Uwe Barschel* (Prime Minister for Hesse, 1982-1987), *Thomas de Maizière* (Federal Interior Minister) and *Christian Wulff* (Federal President, 2010-2012).

politics and social science. The research activity was often carried out in collaboration with external research institutes. In addition, the foundations organised specialists' conferences and discussion groups as well as lectures, and constantly published books, articles and reports. Historical research was done with the help of the foundations' own archives, libraries and documentation facilities.²³ The FES, for example, maintained a specialised library with 1.000.000 volumes on labour movement.²⁴

In 2014, nearly three quarters of the expenditure of the German political foundations was devoted to projects in foreign countries.²⁵ The international activities started in the 1960s. They have continuously adapted to the international political developments and geo-political focal points. The two major cornerstones of the foundations' international activities were the work in the development and transition countries and their dialogue-based undertakings in the EU countries and in North America. The first activities aimed at "implementing humanitarian projects and programs and assisting the establishment of free democratic and constitutional-based structures in being committed to human and civil rights".²⁶ They were mainly part of the German bilateral development policy. According to the Ministry of Development and Cooperation (BMZ), it "involves strengthening the key institutions in a democratic social order, such as parliaments, political parties and an independent judiciary, as well as promoting good governance and opportunities for civil society participation".²⁷ Projects and activities were generally implemented together with partner organisations on site. In Europe the foundations focused specifically on "the European unification process and international understanding through information and international meetings".²⁸ In the industrialised countries, the *Stiftungen* were mainly active with the interlinking of transatlantic and European elites.²⁹ In 2013, the *Stiftungen* had offices all over the world. The KAS maintained 69 offices abroad, the FES had 107 offices, the FNS 33, the HBS 30, the HSS 57 and the RLS had 16 international offices.³⁰ Recent works on the *Stiftungen* assumed that their activities circled around pro-

23 FES/KAS/FNS/HSS/HBS (1998).

24 FES annual report 2014 p. 64.

25 See Ch. 1.7.3.

26 FES/KAS/FNS/HSS/HBS (1998).

27 BMZ at: http://www.bmz.de/en/what_we_do/approaches/bilateral_development_cooperation/players/political_foundations/index.html.

28 FES/KAS/FNS/HSS/HBS (1998).

29 *Bartsch* (2007) p. 280; see *Renvert* (2014) on the transatlantic activities.

30 See fn. 915 on the sources.

moting approximation ambition in the Southeast European countries to the EU, the management of crises, and dealing with the danger of states' fragility and terrorism.³¹ Systematic analysis of most of these aspects is missing, however. Moreover, considerations which take into account the respective foreign and development political concepts of the German government are almost non-existent.³² This is necessary, however, in order to understand the relationship between the foundations and the state as well as their extensive public funding.

The research project concentrates on the activities of the German political foundations in developing and transition countries where the major part of their international activity takes place. It will connect transnational and constructivist-inspired international relations' (IR) theory to these undertakings by looking at the process of public diplomacy which includes democracy assistance and the newer conflict management. This will help to position the *Stiftungen* in international relations as either independent political actors or instruments of state power. It will also offer some explanation on what the foundations change and why they are supported by massive funds. Finally, this research project is neither financially supported by one of the German political foundations nor has it been suggested by them.

1.2. Theory

The research is informed by several theoretical assumptions which will be outlined and systematised in detail in the following chapters.

International relations can no longer be defined as only covering relations between states. The dominant rationalist approaches of neorealism and neoliberalism discuss, whether transnational actors matter. Both see the state at the centre of their analysis, though. Constructivist theory, however, best explains the importance of transnational actors in international relations, as it concentrates on transnational interaction processes among different actors. Rather than debating whether transnational actors matter, constructivism does not assume that one type of actor is more important than the other.³³ In looking at social interaction, ideational diffusion processes and perceptions, constructivist thinking can help uncover important

31 *Bartsch* (2007) p. 289.

32 Exceptionally see *Pogorelskaja* (1997).

33 *Chandler* (2005) p. 154; *Hartmann* (2001) p. 68; *Risse* (2002) p. 259.

issue neglected by neorealism and neoliberalism. It focuses more directly on the question of the international role of political foundations maintaining links with the German government, the political party landscape as well as politicians and civil societies abroad. However, the German political foundations cannot be easily identified among the transnational actors, since due to their public funding the organisational characteristics of private and public are blurred. There have also been attempts to describe the activity of German political foundations as “movement on the threshold between governments and civil society”.³⁴ Although we expect that the German political foundations can operate as transnational actors, it will finally depend on whether the foundations are state-controlled or active on behalf of the German government.

With the help of an integrated model on public diplomacy, transnational activities can be studied systematically. The model includes constructivist-led considerations on transnational interactions in the international sphere which are not guided by state-centrism. The diplomatic process can be conceived without bias as taking place in a network environment, comprising various actors and different resources. In this way, we regard public diplomacy as an important - if not as the main - transnational interaction process. We do not assume that diplomacy is a formalised negotiation process only. Rather, transnational interactions take place in a less structured environment. The foundations' international activities are incidentally perceived as diplomatic undertakings. Systematic analysis is missing, however. We expect that most of what the *Stiftungen* do internationally can in fact be understood as public diplomacy. We also expect that the German political foundations as important parts of the domestic political culture in Germany³⁵ mainly diffuse those values which correspond to the narratives of official policy. This correspondence, still, might not keep the *Stiftungen* from being transnational actors with independent power resources, including access to foreign figures, information channels and knowledge resources.

Democracy assistance and conflict management have been identified as different modes of how public diplomacy can be practiced. Increasingly, there are fields where transnational actors find their niche. Although some literature on the German political foundations considers their support of democracy, it has never been connected to a diplomatic activity nor to the literature on transnational actors. As regards conflict management, the lite-

34 Bartsch (1998); Czempiel (1993).

35 Bartsch (2007) p. 280.

rature has almost completely ignored the undertakings of the German political foundations. We assume that the *Stiftungen* are predominantly active as transnational actors in democracy assistance as well as in conflict management.

1.3. Research questions

I am mainly interested in the following central questions:

What role do the German political foundations have in international relations? Are rationalists correct in saying that states are the key international actors, or can it be demonstrated, as constructivists argue, that through the interaction with many different actors, the German political foundations as transnational actors have a significant impact? If the latter is the case, what is the reason for their substantial public funding?

Several sub-questions are necessary to address the central questions. They can be grouped into three areas:

(1) Public diplomats?

To what extent can German political foundations be considered as public diplomats? Are they independent generators of public diplomacy or do they work on behalf of the German government? Does their work substitute, supplement or conflict with traditional diplomacy? Who benefits and who loses from these activities? Do the foundations have advantages (e.g. resources) in comparison to other diplomatic actors? Are transnational networks established? If yes, who controls them?

(2) Democracy assistants?

What makes the German political foundations democracy assistants? Do they follow a developmental or a political conception of democracy assistance? What ideas are diffused and are they different from those of official German policy? What do the foundations change? Are prerequisites established by the foundations for German companies?

(3) Conflict management?

Is conflict management implemented by the *Stiftungen*? If yes, what ideas are diffused and are they different from those of official German policy? What do the foundations change? Are prerequisites established by the foundations for German companies?

This study does not include recommendations for action for the German political foundations. Their activities were analysed and assessed to the established systematisations.

1.4. State of research

The academic focal points of the few existing pieces of literature on the German political foundations changed over the decades and adjusted to political realities. While in the first publications 40 years ago, academic authors concentrated more on the organisation of the *Stiftungen* in itself, subsequently researchers and also the *Stiftungen* in their publications gave further attention to the foundations' activities and their effects abroad. The literary process can therefore be described as from the inside out. Literature published from the 1970s to the 1980s discussed organisational matters of the *Stiftungen* concerning the foundations' party affiliation and financial matters, while the foundations' international activity remained in the background.³⁶ The literature written in the 1980s and 1990s showed increased interest in the foundations' international activities. Authors agreed that the German foundations were highly political organisations.³⁷ From the 1990s onwards, literature became more complex and less descriptive. We can identify four major themes treated in the literature: Firstly, the publications considered development policy governed by the literature on democracy assistance. Case studies happened to be carried out in the transforming countries of the Eastern bloc whereas before they had focused more on Latin America and Africa.³⁸ Secondly, literature treated foreign policy on a national and European level.³⁹ A third body of literature con-

36 See Vieregge (1977a), (1977c), (1980); Papst (1982).

37 See Werner (1982); Krieger (1983); Forrester (1985); Kress (1985); Schürmann (1989); Pinto-Duschinsky (1991a); Wagner (1994).

38 Mehler (1996); Mair (1997), (2000); Philipps (1999); Hearn/Robinson (2000); Pinto-Duschinsky (2002); Erdmann (2006a), (2006b); Egger (2007); Mohr (2010).

39 See Nuscheler (1993); Progorelskaja (1997); Eynla (1999); Weilemann (2000); Dakowska (2002), (2005a), (2005b), (2005c); Thunert (2004); Pratsch-Hucko (2004);