

HESITANT BEDFELLOWS:
THE GERMAN *STIFTUNGEN* AND PARTY AID IN
AFRICA. AN ATTEMPT AT AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract: Contrary to international perception party assistance of German political foundations is not confined to the ‘partisan approach’, but displays a high variety of approaches; in particular they combine political party with civil society assistance. In fact, only about 20% of their efforts are devoted to party aid. Despite the foundation’s high degree of versatility in party aid they reveal a crucial weakness: none has a strategic concept to address the particular challenges of African political parties. However, this weakness is neither a problem of the German foundations nor is it confined to Africa; it rather seems to be a general one of party promoters and probably found in other continents as well.

Key words: German political foundations, promotion of democracy, political party assistance, party aid in Africa, political parties.

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1. Introduction

While it is true that political parties 'have been neglected by those working in the developing world',² this observation certainly does not apply to the German political *Stiftungen* (foundations). This general misjudgement is not difficult to explain. First, there is very little research about the German political foundations available in English³ – not to mention that it is equally scant in German.⁴ Second, even though the foundations belong to the German political parties, their international activities are not well understood by either politicians or the general public. Third, the foundations themselves have only recently started to make an effort to inform the public about their activities, which is partly due to the fact that their activities have been, and continue to be, a sensitive issue in German politics.⁵

The lack of knowledge about the work of the German political foundation became very evident in a recent attempt to evaluate international approaches to the promotion of political parties. This evaluation did not address the work of the foundations.⁶ While it might be argued that the German foundations play only a minor role in the international promotion of democracy, this overlooks the fact that they have been extensively involved in some very important political transitions: Portugal, Spain, Chile, South Africa, and Namibia. Likewise it should not be overlooked that the foundations have a real presence in the form of offices and personnel in at least half of the African countries so that some observers rank them among the major

² David French, 'Foreword', in Peter Burnell, *Building Better Democracies. Why political parties matter* (London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy), November 2004.

³ I know of only two works: Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, 'Foreign Political Aid: The German Political Foundations and their US Counterparts', *International Affairs*, 67, 1 (1991), pp.33-63; Stefan Mair, 'Germany's Stiftungen and Democracy Assistance: Comparative Advantages, New Challenges', in Peter Burnell (ed.) *Democracy Assistance. International Co-operation for Democratization* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp.128-149.

⁴ It was only in the early 1990s, linked to the discovery of democracy promotion, that a series of articles written by representatives of the foundations was published in a development journal (E&Z, *Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit* 34, 4) which tried to inform about the work of the foundations. Some critical information about the foundations in Africa was published in a paragraph of an article on Bonn's Africa policy by Rainer Tetzlaff, 'Grundzüge und Hintergründe Bonner Afrika-Politik: Eine Einführung', in Helmut Bley and Rainer Tetzlaff (eds), *Afrika und Bonn. Versäumnisse und Zwänge deutscher Afrika-Politik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1979), pp.60-64.

⁵ For the critical statement see Mair, 'Germany's Stiftungen', p.128; 148. An example of the change is the internet presence of the foundations; in addition, the FES-homepage (www.fes.de/international/afrika) supplies a critical evaluation of their assistance to parliaments in Africa: Stefan Mair, *Parlamentskooperation der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Afrika. Vergleichende Studie Ghana, Namibia, Simbabwe, Südafrika* (München, Dezember 2000), p.31.

⁶ Krishna Kumar, *International Political Party Assistance. An Overview and Analysis*. Working Paper 33 (The Hague: Netherlands Institute for International Relations Clingendael, 2004).

providers of political party aid;⁷ and among the European foundations that provide democracy assistance they possess the largest annual overall and programme budgets.⁸

In all due respects, however, the foundations should not be perceived as party promoters in the usual sense. The aim of this study is first, and foremost, to try to correct the main misunderstandings about the nature and purpose of the work of the German political foundations and put this work into a legal and organisational context. Secondly, I will analyse the challenges that the foundations face in Africa (south of Sahara) as well as describing their activities that are related to political parties in Africa. Finally, I will attempt to assess whether the foundations actually address the African challenge adequately.

2. German Political Foundations in Context

Before delving into the work of the foundations it is vital to address a number of misconceptions about their operations.⁹ The German political foundations are usually identified with the ‘partisan approach’ (or ‘fraternal’ or ‘sister’ party work) meaning that they collaborate only with parties of kindred ideological direction: liberal, social democratic, or Christian.¹⁰ This, however, is only partly true. Although the foundations insist that they are ideologically partisan in practice their approach is far wider and ‘multi-partisan’. Actually, the very idea of a ‘partisan approach’ to party aid could cause legal problems for the foundations. In the 1998 ‘Joint Declaration ... to the Funding of Political Foundations’, no mention is made at all of assistance to political parties; the Declaration only says that ‘programmes and projects of development assistance will contribute to the built-up of free and democratic society based on the rule of law and human rights’.¹¹

⁷ Thomas Carothers, *Political Party Aid*, Paper prepared for the Swedish International Development Agency (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, October 2004), p.5.

⁸ Jos van Wersch, ‘Europe in Democracy Assistance: Facts and figures’. Background research paper, in *A European Profile in Democracy Support* Conference Reader ‘Enhancing the European profile in democracy assistance’, The Hague, July 5-6 2004. Democracy AGENDA: Alliance for Generating a European Network for Democracy Assistance, p.167.

⁹ For a general overview of the foundations mandate and role in foreign policy see Mair, ‘Germany’s Stiftungen’, note 3.

¹⁰ See for example Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad. The Learning Curve* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1999), p. 141; Kumar, p.6.

¹¹ Gemeinsame Erklärung der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V., Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung e.V., Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung e.V. und der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung e.V. zur staatlichen Finanzierung der Politischen Stiftungen, 6. November 1998 (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: www.fes.de), p.2 (my translation).

It would not be amiss to say that the international support of political parties is a legally ill-defined area for the foundations and causes some of their administrative problems. For instance, in Germany itself, where the political foundations operate in the civic education sector, German Party Law in fact proscribes support to any political party. To complicate matters, the legislation is unclear as to whether the law also applies to the operations of the foundations abroad. Instead, the international operations of the foundations appear to be controlled only by the accounting rules laid down by federal parliament and the Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung*, BMZ). According to BMZ rules, foundations are not permitted to directly sponsor political parties and trade unions or electoral contests and labour disputes.¹² Furthermore, it is also stipulated that their activities should not harm German interests, which means that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to scrutinize all foundation projects and programmes. Although the Ministry can call a project into question (which is apparently very rare), it does not have the final say. In a sense the foundations are, on the one hand, an arm of German foreign policy, but on the other are supposed to be ‘autonomous’ with the upshot that they operate (with implicit approval of the Ministry) in an area which the official policy wants to avoid. The foundations are in a sense ‘clandestine diplomats’.

This legal grey-zone provides room for a spectrum of interpretation which the various foundations make good use of. Some foundations interpret the rules quite liberally and therefore cooperate more closely with particular political parties, while others are more ‘conservative’ and keep their partners at arms length. A report commissioned by the liberal Friedrich Naumann Stiftung in 2002 and drawn up by Edzart Schmidt-Jorzig, a former Federal Minister of Justice of the Liberal Party and legal expert, took the opinion that a broad collaboration with political parties is permissible; but this position has not been followed by other foundations for fear that Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) could judge the matter differently.

The political foundations insist, that they are not and by law must not be ‘party foundations’. But their position has to be understood as ‘close’ to one of the political parties. After being represented in the German Federal Parliament (*Deutscher Bundestag*) for two consecutive elections each party is entitled to receive funds from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the

¹² Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, Karl-Heinz Jonas, 02/06/2005 per E-mail.

Ministry of Education for civic education in Germany. For their international work they receive funds from the BMZ and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Naturally, in their activities the foundations are subject to the legal restrictions of each country in which they operate.

There are currently six political foundations: the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES, founded in 1925), which is close to the Social Democratic Party (SPD); the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS, founded in 1956) which is related to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS, founded in 1996/7)¹³ which is linked to the Greens (Bündnis 90/Grüne); the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung (FNS, founded 1958) which is close to the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP); the Hans Seidel Stiftung (HSS, founded in 1966) which is related to the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian sister party of the CDU; and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), which is close to the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS),¹⁴ the successor to the former state party of the German Democratic Republic.

As stated above, the BMZ is the main source of funds for the foundations' work in Africa. The overall amount available to each foundation is based on the size of the associated parliamentary party and their respective status as an official parliamentary group (*Fraktion*), although the amount that each foundation receives is not exactly proportional to the number of parliamentary seats that the associated party has. At present, the proportions are FES: 35%; KAS: 32%; and 11.3% for each of HBS, FNS and HSS, and RLS. The RLS is also recipient of additional funds.¹⁵ The foundations do not receive a lump sum to dispose of at will, but rather have to apply to the Ministry for specific amounts for particular programmes and purposes.

Table 1: Annual BMZ budget for political foundations, 2000-04

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
€millions	148.2	149.8	164.4	177.7	172.0

Source: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, Karl-Heinz Jonas, per E-mail, 02/06/2005.

¹³ The HBS is the successor of Stiftungsverband Regenbogen, founded 1988, a federation of three smaller foundations close to the Green party; the federation comprised the original, development orientated Heinrich Böll Stiftung (1986), the Frauenanstiftung (women's foundation), and Buntstift-Föderation (1988), again a federation of political foundation based in various states (*Länder*) which were in operation since the early 1980s.

¹⁴ This state refers to the time before the elections of 18 September 2005.

¹⁵ After having been in two successive parliaments since 1990, after the elections of 2002 the PDS had now only two MPs and therefore lost the official status of a parliamentary group; see footnote 14.

In all, over the last five years the BMZ provided on average €162.4m per year to all the foundations operations (see Table 1).¹⁶ Each foundation, however, has its own regional distribution of funds. FES is by far the most active foundation in Africa followed by HBS and HSS together with KAS, and finally FNS (see Table 2).

The amounts given here only cover BMZ financing; it does not include financing for the foundation's activities in Germany. It is important to observe that these amounts are not to be equated with assistance to political parties. Nor should it be thought that assistance is only provided to political parties that are ideological kin of the foundations. In fact, it is the promotion of democracy that is the main concern, and this includes more than just political parties.¹⁷

Table 2: Regional distribution of foundation's spending, 2001-05, per cent

	FES ¹	KAS	HBS	FNS ¹	HSS ²
Africa (South of Sahara)	25	14	17	13	15
Asia	19	17	19	26	34
Latin America	20	24	19	12	12
Middle & Near East / Northern Africa	12	9	14	13	17
Others ³	24	36	31	36	22

1) 2001-04 only

2) 2004 only

3) Includes Southern, Eastern, Middle Europe, Eurasia, and Brussels different for each foundation

Note: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung did not provide any data.

Source: Figures provided by the foundations to the author (partly my own calculations)

¹⁶ In addition the foundations receive some special funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as from the European Union.

¹⁷ Mair, 'Germany's Stiftungen, p.134; a brief glance on their websites confirms this point: www.fes.de; www.kas.de; www.boell.de; www.fnst.de; www.hss.de; www.rosalux.de.

3. The African Challenge

3.1 'Unknown' Objects: Political Parties in Africa

There is a general agreement among scholars as well as development and political professionals that supporting parties in young democracies is a particularly challenging task.¹⁸ The reason is simple. Political parties in young democracies have certain features that distinguish them from parties in well established democracies: (1) fewer members, (2) weaker organizations, (3) fewer distinct programmes, (4) weaker linkages with (civil) society, and (5) weaker party identification and hence the electoral support will be very volatile.¹⁹ From a functionalist perspective, this means that those parties, most likely, will fail to adequately perform the 'core functions' of political parties in a democracy: (1) providing ideological orientation and political goals (symbols), (2) socialisation and mobilisation, (3) aggregation and articulation of interests, (4) elite recruiting and government formation, (5) organising loyal opposition (and formulating political alternatives).

Moreover, the experience of political party promoters and the models upon which party aid is based is that of industrialised countries. But the appropriateness of this experience needs to be examined. For a start, it is a very specific model of the 'mass-party' of western Europe during the first half of the 20th century and which is not even applicable to the United States. Thomas Carothers called this model 'mythicized' and 'old-fashioned'.²⁰ And even in Europe the 'golden age' of the mass-party passed away some time ago and has been replaced by the 'catch-all party', the 'cartel party' or various 'electoralist parties' such as the post-materialist green party. These parties are quite substantially different from the mythical mass party.²¹

As a caveat, it is not only political party promoters who are wrong-footed by the model of the mythical mass party, but a great deal of political science, which is still very much dominated

¹⁸ Peter Burnell, 'Promoting Parties and Party Systems in New Democracies: Is there Anything the "International Community can do?', in Keith Dowding, James Hughes and Helene Margetts (eds.), *Challenges to Democracy. Ideas, Involvement and Institutions*. The PSA Yearbook 2000 (London: Pelgrave), pp.188-204.

¹⁹ Phillip Schmitter, 'Parties Are Not What They Once Were', in Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp.67-89; also Peter Mair quoted in Wolfgang Merkel and Eberhard Sandschneider (eds.), *Systemwechsel 3. Parteien im Transformationsprozess* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1997), p.10; Klaus v. Beyme, *Parteien im Wandel* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher, 2000); Scott Mainwaring, 'Party Systems in the Third Wave', in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1998), pp.67-81.

²⁰ Thomas Carothers, *Political Party Aid*, Paper prepared for the Swedish International Development Agency (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, October 2004), p.9.

²¹ Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond, 'Types and Functions of Parties', in Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp.3-39;

by history and model of political parties in Western Europe. Although the discipline is waking up due to the development of political parties in the young democracies that do not match the well known picture, we still lack an alternative conceptual framework. In a sense, only our awareness of the problem has increased. Research on political parties in Africa is particularly affected.²²

Although systematic research is now emerging, some basic features of political parties in Africa appear to be well known: (a) they have barely distinguishable programmes; (b) they have weak bureaucratic organization, which in many cases is only temporarily in operation; (c) they are characterized by informal relations, partly based on clientelist relations and patronage that dominate the party structures; (d) the formal internal structures are dominated by strong personalism; (e) they have a high degree of factionalism; (f) they are characterized by a lack of internal democracy; (g) membership data, because there is either no formal membership or, very frequently, there are multi-memberships (card-holding of several parties) – thus ‘membership’ is weak apart from a small group of staunch party cadres; (h) they have predominantly regional and/or ethnic-based membership and voters; (i) the funding base is weak and is not based on contributions of a broad membership, but on the purposeful donations of rich individuals; (j) formal linkages to civil society are weak.²³

There are, of course, exceptions to these features. In particular some of the former ‘state parties’ of the one-party regimes still have a comparatively stronger bureaucratic organizational form; and ruling parties often appear to be better organized than the opposition parties. However, here one must still be cautious because ruling parties may not only make use of state finances for their own benefit, but can also make good use of government structures for their operations. But evidence suggests that these parties do not as a rule invest very much in the party organisation. The dormant and even derelict headquarters of ruling parties strongly suggests this – and it is particularly acute once a party loses power.

Cross-country comparisons of Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia give an even clearer picture of the state of political parties in Africa:

Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, ‘Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party Democracy. The Emergence of the Cartel Party’, in: *Party Politics* 1, 1 (1995), 5-28.

²² Gero Erdmann, ‘Party Research: The Western European Bias and the “African Labyrinth”’, in: *Democratization* 11, 3 (2004), pp.63-87.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.65

- (a) In general, parties are essentially electoral associations which become active only for elections; between elections they are mostly dormant.
- (b) Generally only the bigger parties have bureaucratic structures and where such structures exist they are mostly confined to the headquarter in the capital and in a few major cities.
- (c) Only one or two of the major parties have offices at the district level, and these may not even be operational or linked to the party headquarters.
- (d) There appears to be no visible operational party structures below the district level (but that does not mean they do not exist).
- (e) In most cases, local party organisations depend on the national headquarters from which they do not usually obtain any support. In some instances local level organizations rely on irregular contributions of one or a few rich local party members.
- (f) Larger parties in general do not lack funds; but those which have come from famous party 'well wishers' are only partly used for the party. These private funds are never properly accounted for and mostly used by individuals to promote their own personal political (or business) career.
- (g) The parties do not provide any civic education about the democratic process; at most they only inform the electorate about the technicalities of voting.
- (h) Only the General Secretaries of the political parties in Ghana were able to place their parties in well-known ideological left-right schema on their own initiative; but the middle level functionary could hardly tell the difference between the parties.
- (i) Clientelism, originally thought of as supplementing the weak bureaucratic organisation, plays a far less important role for party organisation at the district and grass root level; it is, however, important at the top level of the party hierarchy in keeping the elite together.
- (j) Finally, aggregate electoral data as well as individual data from an opinion survey suggests that – except for Botswana – ethnicity or ethnic affiliations play a crucial role for party formation and electoral behaviour, although not in the way usually envisaged for a highly fragmented party system.

Categorising the African parties can be done with Gunter and Diamond's universal party typology (linked to the social basis/cleavage) which includes the category of the 'ethnicity based parties'.²⁴ For this type of party, Gunter and Diamond distinguish two subtypes, an

²⁴ Ibid, p. 70-3; Gero Erdmann, 'Zur Typologie politischer Parteien in Afrika', in *Afrika Spectrum* 37, 3 (2002), pp.259-285. Conceptually, I do not see these parties as neopatrimonial parties as I once suggested

‘ethnic party’, which is based on one ethnic group only, and an ‘ethnic congress party’, based on a elite coalition of several ethnic groups. The latter form is the most frequent in Africa.

One of our major problems is that we have very little reliable knowledge about the dynamics of these types of parties, and how they support the consolidation of democracy. Only Horowitz has discussed this issue.²⁵ In order to highlight the problem from the perspective of the party promoters, in a handbook on ‘Democratic Party-Building’ produced by the Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy (IMD), ethnic congress parties are not even mentioned. Instead the focus of this handbook is on the organizational strength and different socio-economic groups that are represented and penetrated by a political party.²⁶ This perspective is clearly that of a traditional ‘mass-party’ and its organisational and representational function. But it is a perspective that fails to capture the specific mechanisms and dynamics of political parties linked to ethnicity. The fact is, ethnicity based parties also aggregate and mobilise social groups, but in a different way to that of the ‘mass-party’. It is in fact quite questionable how African political parties can actually perform the five essential tasks for supporting democracy.

Despite all the so-called defects of the concept of the ‘mass-party’, it must be said that the literature is not overly pessimistic as regards its role in democratic consolidation. According to van de Walle, the particular types of weak parties in Africa tend to undermine the process of such consolidation.²⁷ On the other hand, Mozaffar et al. argue that the ‘dominant multiethnic pattern of ethnopolitical cleavages ... and the resulting party systems ... are generally conducive for democratic consolidation’.²⁸ The disagreement between the two views might be explained in that van de Walle bases his judgment on party structure, whereas Mozaffar et al. dwell on the party system. Both, however, seem to agree that contrary to the general percep-

myself (Gero Erdmann, ‘Parteien in Afrika – Versuch eines Neuanfangs in der Parteienforschung, in *Afrika Spectrum* 34, 3 (1999), pp.386-7). To consider a neopatrimonial setting requires a legal rational bureaucracy which is interwoven with or penetrated by patrimonial relations. But there are hardly any legal rational bureaucratic structures to be found in most African political parties – apart from a few exceptions such as Tanzania’s Chama Cha Mapinduzi or South Africa’s African National Congress. Hence there is very little to be penetrated by patrimonial relations; see for a detailed discussion of the concept Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, *Neopatrimonialism*.

²⁵ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

²⁶ IMD, *A Framework for Democratic Party-Building* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2004), p.11.

²⁷ Nicolas van de Walle, ‘Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa’s Emerging Party Systems’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, 2 (2003), p.316.

tion of the dangers related to ethnicity in party politics, there is a culture of compromise within the multi-ethnic parties of Africa. Although Vicky Randall and Lars Svåsand take the pessimistic view they caution against passing judgment too quickly, citing positive developments in Ghana, Senegal and Botswana (again, these authors focus on party weaknesses rather than on the performance of the party system.)²⁹

Another problem of democratic consolidation in Africa is the prevalence of the dominant party and the (pre)dominant party systems in Africa.³⁰ The academic literature, although not specifically concerned with Africa, is quite sceptical about this 'awkward embrace' of one party that promotes a return to authoritarian rule³¹. From this perspective, the contribution of the dominant parties to the consolidation of Africa's young democracies seem to be very thin. But, historically this need not be so: Japan and Italy are two cases in point.

Overall, the case for 'intervention' for the strengthening of political parties seem to be justifiable. But in order to identify appropriate points of 'intervention' a few other questions need to be raised:

1. What are the major problems that the parties currently face? Ethnicity based parties have their own problems which require different answers than the usual ones for the mass party.
2. Which of the problems need to be addressed first and why?
3. Which part of the party should be addressed: the party at headquarter, the parliamentary party, the party in government or the party at the district or constituency level or even below?

²⁸ Shaheen Mozaffar, James R. Scaritt, and Glen Galaich, 'Electoral Institutions, Ethnopolitical Cleavages, and Party Systems in Africa's Emerging Democracies', *American Political Science Review* 97, 3 (2003): p.389.

²⁹ Vicky Randall and Lars Svåsand, 'Introduction: The Contribution of Parties to 'Democracy and Democratic Consolidation'', *Democratization* 9, 3 (2002), pp.30-52.

³⁰ Matthijs Bogaards, 'Counting Parties and Identifying (Dominant) Party Systems in Africa', *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (2003): 173-197. Giovanni Sartori's well-known definitions of dominant and predominant party and party system are used here.

³¹ T. J. Pempel, *Uncommon Democracies: The One-party dominant Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins (eds), *The Awkward Embrace. One-party Dominance and Democracy* (Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers, 1999); Marco Rimanelli (ed.), *Comparative Democratization and Peaceful Change in Single-Party-Dominant Countries* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

4. Is it sufficient to address the problems of particular parties or is it necessary to focus on the party system, and perhaps even wider, on the linkage between parties and civil society?
5. How can the problem of dominant party systems be addressed which are at the same time prone to fragmentation?

3.2 *The Demand Side*

The success of political party assistance is dependent, of course, upon demand. Because most analysts agree that there are serious weaknesses of political parties and party systems, the necessity of party aid is taken for granted. However, we have no detailed knowledge about the sincerity of the demand. It is quite possible that party assistance is accepted simply because it is offered. As one analyst observed, in many countries ‘the prevailing domestic attitude towards party assistance was one of “benign neglect”’. There was no opposition to assistance, but no enthusiasm for it either, because ‘ownership’ of the programmes was missing: ‘The truth is that only a few countries have political constituencies that strongly favour political party assistance’.³² I do not know to which countries the author is referring to, but I am unsure whether this statement accurately captures the situation in Africa.

In the course of my own research on political parties in five African countries, I was regularly confronted with complaints by party leaders that international donors support all sorts of non-governmental organisations (NGO) but not political parties. These leaders also questioned the political legitimisation of NGOs and stressed the importance of political parties being legitimised by the electorate and that their members are sitting in parliament and take up responsible positions in government. In short, they desired equal treatment by the donor community.

Table 3: Kind of support for political parties (several responses were possible)

Material such as computers, phones, cars etc.	7
Organisational such as training, political education	8
Financial	8

Source: Survey 2005

³² Kumar, p.21.

A survey of 14 party leaders of eleven political parties in nine African countries revealed the following picture.³³ Asked whether political parties should receive such support from foreign donors, only two said that political parties should *not* receive support from abroad while all the others said ‘yes’. The nationality of the two who did not want foreign donors to support political parties was Nigerian and Mauritian; another Nigerian from the same party however wanted outside support. It should be noted that most of the resident directors of the foundations report a ‘high demand’ for party assistance, although in different degrees; and most local observers confirm that the foundations operate to a large degree according to local demand (although there are some exceptions).³⁴ A second question concerned the mode of assistance they would prefer, either ‘partisan’ or ‘non-partisan’. Again, the results were quite clear. Out of the 14 leaders, eight wanted only ‘non-partisan’ support, while only two preferred ‘partisan’ aid. Another two had a preference for a combination of both non-partisan and partisan aid at the same time – an option which was not offered in the questionnaire, but written in by the respondents. And asked about the kind of assistance they wanted, the responses were largely ‘material’: finance and equipment.

Although the survey is anything but ‘representative’, three points should be emphasised. First, the positive reactions from the questionnaire together with the complaints noted above and the general response to the supply of party assistance confirms that there may be a general demand for party assistance. Second, seven of the parties involved in the survey participated in government, while one was a former ruling party; six of the party leaders were the secretary generals of the parties. One should have assumed that party assistance would be more controversial on the side of ruling parties, because they are usually in a privileged position in that they command government resources and are rather hostile to foreign interference, especially if it involves supporting their competitors. This appears not to be the case and underscores the fact that most of the parties, including the ruling ones, are in severe financial difficulties. Third, there is a clear preference for ‘non-partisan’ assistance, which, again, gives support to the previous point. Finally, the demand for assistance in ‘money’ and ‘kind’ seems to reflect a

³³ The survey, using a confidential questionnaire, was conducted at an international political party conference in Accra, Ghana, sponsored and organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in collaboration with the Institute of African Affairs, Hamburg; the party leaders involved came from the following countries: Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania.

³⁴ This point has been brought out clearly by two independent evaluations which were available to the author: Theodor Hanf, Rolf Hofmeier and Stefan Mair, *Evaluierung der Aktivitäten der politischen Stiftungen in der Republik Südafrika* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, April 1995), pp.76-7; Stefan Mair, *Parlamentskooperation der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Afrika. Vergleichende Studie Ghana, Namibia, Simbabwe, Südafrika* (München, Dezember 2000), p.50.

general problem of the political parties in Africa, a lack of, and disinterest in, ideological and programmatic commitment – something that poses a challenge to the donors as well.

4. The Activities of the Political Foundations (in Africa): Misguided Perceptions

4.1 Historical Experience as Party Supporters

Thomas Carothers' emphatic argument that because it is an essential element of democracy assistance 'much greater attention to political party development should be a major part of the response' made by the democracy promotion community, has been taken up by the political foundations for quite a while.³⁵ Their engagement with political parties in Africa dates back to the 1970s. Although the foundations had already begun their work in the 1960s, it was only for 'nation building' and export of the 'German model' of economic and social policy. It was only after Willy Brandt was elected president of the Socialist International (1976) that FES intensified its collaboration with political parties in Africa, especially with socialist orientated parties in Zambia, Tanzania and Senegal. In fact, FES made contact with the liberation movements in southern Africa in the early 1970s, backing the ANC, Mozambique's FRELIMO, Namibia's SWAPO and Zimbabwe's ZANU/ZAPU 'with all means ... except for arms' – a move that was highly controversial inside FES, the Social Democratic Party and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁶ FES, for example, financially supported an ANC and SWAPO office in Bonn with the official approval of the then liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dietrich Genscher (in both SPD and CDU coalition governments) even in the face of conservative criticism. This collaboration of FES with the former liberation movements – with the exception of ZANU – has continued to the present as these movements converted themselves into ruling parties.

These activities of FES should not mislead us into thinking that all the activities of all the German political foundations in Africa are directed at supporting political parties. First, as regards this kind of party cooperation, FES was an exception among the foundations. None of the others were so heavily involved in party aid in Africa (a different situation from, for example, Latin America). With the exception of the FNS, the other two foundations at the time (KAS and HSS) cooperated with authoritarian state parties as well. Second, and this includes

³⁵ Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm', in *Journal of Democracy* 13, 1 (2002), p.19.

the FES, during the 1970s party collaboration was only one aspect of foundation work. Third, up to 1996, all the foundations had two budget lines, one for ‘civic education’ (*gesellschaftspolitische Bildung*) and one for the conventional ‘socio-economic development’ (*Sozialstrukturhilfe*). The budget for ‘socio economic development’ accounted on average for about one third of the foundations’ spending alone during the 1990s.³⁷ Before the changes of the 1990s, the major focus of activity was more with conventional ‘apolitical’ and ‘technical’ social and economic development aid rather than with party assistance. It included supporting civic and adult education, co-operative societies, savings and housing-building associations, or generally ‘commonweal activities’ (*Gemeinwirtschaft*), the promotion of business associations, improving the efficiency of small-scale producers and their influence on the political process, and supporting trade unions. In the 1980s, the promotion of the media and an attempt to foster intellectual capacity-building that would strengthen the role of the academia in engaging in political dialogue and political agenda setting became an additional focus of the work of the foundations which, in many cases, was not very successful.³⁸ Fourth, during the 1980s even FES’s interest in party assistance declined, because many of the parties were then perceived as not democratic. More generally, ‘FES’s efforts to intensify the co-operation in membership training with African political parties bore virtually no fruit’ was the perception inside FES.³⁹ The only exceptions were the cooperation with parties in two multi-party regimes, Botswana and Senegal, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and the Parti Socialiste (PS).

The winds of change that swept Africa in the 1990s resulted in a reorientation of foundation work. They now became part of the ‘mainstream’ promotion of democracy and human rights that focused on civil society organisations. By the mid 1990s, the BMZ budget line ‘socio-economic development aid’ for foundation operations was completely scrapped, with funds being shifted to ‘civic education’. This was, of course, due to the paradigmatic shift in devel-

³⁶ Ernst Hillebrand and Volker Vinai, ‘The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and German Policy on Africa – Some Remarks’, in Ulf Engel and Robert Kappel (eds.) *Germany’s Africa Policy Revisited. Interests, images and incrementalism* (Münster: Lit, 2002), pp.134 -5; or www.fes.de.international/africa (no pagination).

³⁷ Distribution of different budget lines of the foundations up to 1996, €million

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Civic education	112,5	120,2	120,1	113,5	117,1	118,1
Socio-economic assistance	48,1	51,7	46,6	43,3	43,8	43,9

Source: BMZ, K.H. Jonas, per e-mail, 08/06/2005

³⁸ See for a judgment of FES's work, Hillebrand and Vinai, p.137.

³⁹ Ibid.

opment aid towards the creation of a favourable political framework, the promotion of human rights and democracy.

Linked to this policy shift was also a change in the strategic approach and instruments. The ties to a few core-partners were loosened and some of the previous partners were even dropped and long term commitments to single partners became rare. Instead the foundations turned to a greater variety of partners, collaborating on an ad-hoc basis with numerous small projects or activities/measures; the number of activities led and run by the foundations themselves increased, too. The implication clearly left the foundations with a higher degree of flexibility and, at the same time, increased control over their policy, which became less dependent on the success or failure of a few big partners. Following the end of the one-party era, it was also a response to an increased demand on the African side which now had an increased number of potential partners. This change was more pronounced for the FES than for the KAS or FNS both of which retained their more long-term and intensive 'partner principle'.

It is remarkable that in the mid 1990s political parties did not feature on the foundations' list of priorities.⁴⁰ Instead the foundations concentrated their work on non-governmental organisations, and, to different degrees, collaborated with state institutions such as the legislature and judiciary. Civic education was, however, a top priority. Nevertheless it is quite clear that the foundations supported political parties in Africa. The FES continued to collaborate with the liberation movement parties and the also supported other parties. The FES explicitly stated that 'political parties are important, but not the exclusive partner', and for any kind of dialogue they need not have a formal social democratic programme. At that time (1996), KAS hardly mentioned political parties in their democracy assistance programme for Africa (while their major engagement, even with political parties, was in Latin America, closely and linked to the spread of Catholicism). It was only the FNS that declared a clear intention to shift its assistance towards auxiliary organisations of liberal parties.⁴¹

4.2 New Challenges – Hesitant Responses

⁴⁰ Stefan Mair, *Internationale Demokratisierungshilfe. Erfahrungen und Aufgaben*, SWP-AP 3020 (Ebenhausen: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 1997); only FES, KAS FNS and HBS responded to the questionnaire. See also Mair, 'Germany's Stiftungen', p.134.

⁴¹ Gero Erdmann, *Demokratie und Demokratieförderung in der Dritten Welt. Ein Literaturbericht und eine Erhebung der Konzepte und Instrumente* (Bonn: Deutsche Kommission Justitia et Pax 1996), pp.145-157.

As of the mid 1990s, there has been increased awareness by the foundations of the importance of political parties. This can be seen in a 2000 evaluation of the FES's assistance to parliaments in a number of Africa countries, where it was critically noted that the promotion of democracy should in some cases comprise a shift from parliament to political party assistance in order to make the parliament more effective.⁴²

The six foundations currently operate in 29 countries with local offices in 22 of them. It is only in South Africa where all foundations have an office. Kenya has five offices, Tanzania four (of which the KAS office is run by local staff), and in five other countries only three foundations are resident with offices and a German representative (see Appendix 1).

With 20 offices and projects in 24 countries, the FES is the most active of the German political foundation in Africa. Of the roughly €6m received in the period 2001–2005, the FES spends about 22 per cent for its Africa activities (table 2). Next in line is the KAS with 16 offices and programme activities in 21 countries.

Interestingly, of the six foundations only three presently have programmes or projects that are designed for collaboration with political parties. These are the FES, KAS and FNS. The HBS, close to the Greens, does not work directly or indirectly with any political party in Africa (although they collaborate with representatives of parties on other continents). As an organisation with a post-materialist value orientation it is difficult for them to find congenial political parties in developing countries more generally. This is especially true in Africa. According to the head of the department for international collaboration at HBS, they acknowledge the relevance of political parties for the development of democracy. And they are in the process of overcoming the old problem of being close to a 'movement party' such as the Greens, who have generally kept a distance from to what is perceived as 'traditional party politics'. Now the HBS is closely watching party development in the countries in which they operate. But the foundation does have a fundamental problem: generally speaking the family of green parties is very small – and this is very true in Africa. For this reason the HBS has continued to focus its assistance on civil society organisations. If the Kenyan Noble Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai, who is also a Petra Kelly Prize winner of the HBS, decides to formally establish a green or environmentalist party in Kenya then the HBS will face quite a challenge. Because

⁴² Mair, *Parlamentskooperation*, p.31, 64.

although they have no objection in principle to cooperating with political parties it will be difficult to do so with a party that will be dominated by a charismatic personality and probably based on one ethnic group (the Kikuyu).

The HSS, close to the Bavarian Christian Social Democrats, does not presently collaborate directly with any political party in Africa although it did so during the time of one-party regimes (e.g. in Togo). The foundation now concentrates its democracy promotion on civil society associations, amongst them trade unions, business associations and rural cooperative societies. The target group of these programmes and projects are ‘local political multipliers’, e.g. priests, teachers, and mayors of which some will be politicians elected to public office or party representatives; the latter are included by chance, not by purpose as ‘party agents’; they do not offer civic education programmes exclusively for members of political parties.⁴³

The youngest German political foundation, the RLS which is close to Party of Democratic Socialism (successor of the communist party of the GDR), operates only in Namibia and South Africa and works with civil society organisations (trade unions), but not with political parties. The foundation has started to consider collaboration with auxiliary organisations close to the South African Communist Party (SACP), and, in fact, they are already assisting in the establishing the Chris-Hani-Institute, which is to be the think tank and civic education centre for Congress of the South African Trade Unions and SACP.⁴⁴

Table 4: Presence of German political foundations in African countries, 2005

	FES ^a	KAS	HBS	FNS	HSS	RLS
No of offices	20	16 ^b	3	5 ^c	9 ^d	1
Active in no of countries	24	21	11	6	11	2

a) The Sudan is included; FES administers the country in the North Africa / Near East Department.

b) 2 offices with local personnel

c) 3 offices with local personnel

d) 6 run by German personnel

Source: Appendix 1.

As indicated above, assistance to political parties is only one aspect of the foundations’ assignment. Of the three foundations that collaborate with political parties, none is in a position

⁴³ Klaus Liepert, Head of Africa Department, HSS, telephone interview, 06/06/2005.

to indicate how much assistance is provided for this specific field of democracy promotion; no aggregate data on party collaboration is available at the German headquarters. It is, therefore, almost impossible to assess the efforts that the foundations are making or compare it to other forms of democracy assistance. Related to this, is the basic question how 'party assistance' is defined? One can use a very narrow definition which includes only those activities or projects that are directly and exclusively linked (contractually) with one or more political parties; or one can use a wider definition which comprises the collaboration with the parties' affinity groups (*Vorfeldorganisationen*: kindred civil society organisations / groups) or even all sorts of activities which benefit the party system as a whole. This could even include projects related to the electoral system.⁴⁵ Regardless of the definition used, there will still be problems of demarcation because none of the foundations works with a clear concept (the FES, however, is working on a definition for reviewing their activities in Africa).

When pressed to give an estimate of the foundations' share of party assistance the following figures were provided (which are, however, not based on a common definition and cannot be properly compared):

- The estimate for FES was 'between one quarter and one third' of their activities; this would include the support for parliamentary groups;
- for KAS is was 'less than 20 per cent' of the total work in support of political parties;
- FNS indicated the largest proportion, of 'one third to 50 per cent' of their activities.

It should be noted that these are not real financial figures, but estimates about the amount of 'work' or 'output' including the advisory capacity of the resident directors that each office put into party assistance; and these figures are related to Africa in total, and will differ between the various countries. The FES's collaboration with political parties is, for example, 'strongest' in southern Africa, 'less so' in eastern Africa and 'weakest' in West Africa. The differences are explained by the different development of party structures in these parts of Africa which means it is easier for them to collaborate with more 'developed' parties.

⁴⁴ Jörg Schulz, Deputy Head International Relations, RLS, telephone interview, 18/05/2005; homepage RLS.

⁴⁵ See below (5.1) the various approaches and the field of operation they involve, which provide for a wide conceptualisation of party approaches.

The three heads of the Africa Departments of the three foundations said that party assistance has increased since the mid 1990s, but, as indicated above, they are unable to provide any figures for this shift in spending. For the KAS, the focus on political parties has become more important since 1996 when they held an internal conference of all their resident representatives and the headquarter staff of the Africa Department in Tunis (7-12 May), on 'Political Parties and Societal Change'.⁴⁶ As a reflection of the new efforts in favour of collaboration with political parties, FES for example began in 2005 to systematically gather information about the various activities of the foundations' offices related to political parties. Following internal discussions in 1998, the FES decided that the promotion of political parties is the specific task of a political foundation which distinguishes them from other organisations engaged in promoting democracy. In 2003, the foundation's international strategy paper identified 'organised liberalism', comprising liberal parties and the liberal spectrum of civil society, as their main target. While at least half of FNS' efforts (and probably more) is still not directed towards political parties in Africa, a recent internal strategic evaluation of the foundation's work (2005) recommended an even stronger focus on political parties. Compared to the other foundations, this explains the FNS' stronger engagement with political parties, while the FES and KAS see themselves in Africa as explicitly promoting democracy rather than promoting parties. This does not imply that FES and KAS refrain from their usual value and norm oriented approach, while FNS is emphasising its deliberate focus on 'organised liberalism'. It should be noted that the KAS, which is close to the German Christian Democratic Party, faces a problem in Africa where parties based on religion or ethnicity are banned in most countries; the KAS relates therefore to rather conservative or centrist parties.

Although all the three foundations stress that assistance for political parties has a high priority, overall it is at most 25% but probably only 20% of the democracy promotion budget which is directed towards 'party aid'. Hence it is difficult to see the foundations as predominantly 'agents of party aid'. It is only the FNS which explicitly sees itself as a 'party promoter'.

There are several reasons for this neglect of party assistance during the early 1990s. One is the 'bad experience' of the collaboration with the state parties during the 1970s and 1980s,

⁴⁶ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *Politische Parteien und gesellschaftlicher Wandel. Protokoll der Themenkonferenz Afrika/Nahost*, vom 7. bis zum 12. März 1996 in Tunis (KAS: St. Augustin, Dezember 1996).

which affected not only the FES. Second, the post-1989 era was the era of the ‘resurrection of civil society’ (Guillermo O’Donnell) in theoretical and practical terms. Promotion of democracy meant (almost exclusively) promotion of civil society organisations, and the foundations were no exception to that kind of thinking. It took quite a while until the international debate recognised that democracy was not built solely on civil society organisation, and re-discovered the existence of political parties. Third, as all of the foundation representatives explain, it is difficult for them to find congenial or even convenient partners amongst African political parties in Africa that share their political and ideological orientation. Fourth, the perception is that most of the newly emerging parties have little in common with the parties they know from home. This internal weakness of many African political parties makes it difficult to relate to them. This is, of course, an acknowledgement of the unknown ‘otherness’ of most of the parties in Africa and it relates, for example, to the lack of internal democracy in many of the parties, which makes the collaboration dependent on a few, sometimes erratic, leaders. Successful collaboration at this stage cannot be established without the consent of the leadership, but that can cause problems of its own because these leaders might try to use the collaboration not so much for the benefit of their party but for the promotion of their own position within the party. Fifth, and closely related to the previous point, collaboration with political parties is regarded as ‘risky’. This means it requires a high and long term commitment to gain trust on which a beneficial collaboration can be developed. But this kind of engagement can run into severe problems if one partner changes its political orientation. The switch from a liberal to a conservative political agenda by the New Patriotic Party of Ghana, which was supported by the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, is a case in point. In such cases the ‘investment’ will simply be lost for the FNS (but could still be a positive contribution to building party politics and democracy). Moreover, a too close involvement might create problems on both sides. In short, many of the new parties are not seen as reliable partners. All this reflects to some degree the weakness of political parties in Africa – although this is not unique to Africa but instead only most pronounced there. At the same time it also indicates some weaknesses on the side of the foundations, treated below.

5. An Attempt at an Assessment: Versatility and Conceptual Weakness

Given the particular features of political parties in Africa, the questions are (1) have these features (see section 3.1) been identified as a special challenge, and (2) what are the approaches to address these challenges adequately?

5.1 *High Versatility*

The following approaches in party assistance have been identified which are used here as a heuristic tool in the absence of a proper evaluation of the foundations' party assistance: a) party-to-party or partisan, b) multi-partisan, c) cross-party dialogue, d) institutional focus, and e) international party linkage approach.⁴⁷ Additional information from interviews and my own observations will be used in addition to earlier evaluations of the general work of the foundations and their support of parliaments in Africa in particular.⁴⁸ Before discussing the various approaches it should be pointed out that the foundations do not officially provide financial support or assistance in kind such as computers, vehicles etc.

The 'partisan approach' means working with sister- or fraternal parties that share the same ideological orientation. This collaboration builds upon trust and mutual understanding and is designed for a long term commitment. In one sense it is the most 'politicised' as well as the most controversial approach. Germany's foundations are most often seen as the well established practitioners of this approach – a perception which is only partly true as it is only one component of their party assistance. In fact the foundations currently collaborate on a bilateral basis each with only four to five political parties in Africa (table 5). In the case of the FES these partners are, apart from one, still the 'traditional' ones, the parties of the former liberation movements that have become dominant parties. This poses a special challenge for party aid. Often the collaboration, apart from direct talks and advice, is conducted 'indirectly' through the assistance of a think tank or research institute which is close to a political party, or, quite frequently, through parties' affinity groups (*Vorfeldorganisation* or *Kollateralorganisation*). To give an example, the FNS is not in a position to provide the means for the training of the 6,000 candidates of the Democratic Alliance for local government elections in South Africa, but they support the development of the 'curriculum' and the training of 100 trainers who then will take up the training of the candidates.

⁴⁷ Peter Burnell used these concepts in *Building Better Democracies*, pp.14-17; see also Burnell, *Globalising*, pp.13-16.

⁴⁸ For the evaluation of the general work of the foundations in South Africa (1995) and their assistance for parliamentary groups in Africa (2000) see footnote 34.

Table 5: Bilateral partners of German foundations, 2005

<i>FES</i>		<i>KAS</i>	<i>FNS</i>	
ANC, South Africa		DP, Uganda	DA, South Africa	
SWAPO, Namibia		CAR, Togo	PDS, Senegal	
FRELIMO, Mozambique		PNE, Benin	CUF, Tanzania	
MPLA, Angola		MNSD, Niger	MDC, Zimbabwe	
MDC, Zimbabwe			[NPP, Ghana (1992-99)]	
ANC	African National Congress	MDC	Movement for Democratic Change	
CAR	Comité d'Action pour le Renouveau	MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola	
CUF	Civic United Front	MNSD	Mouvement National de la Societé de Développement	
DA	Democratic Alliance	NPP	New Patriotic Party	
DP	Democratic Party	PNE	Parti National Ensemble	
FELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique	PDS	Parti Démocratique Sénégalaise	
		SWAPO	South West Africa Peoples' Organisation	

Source: Interviews, footnote 1.

Most of the party assistance provided by the foundations for Africa is clearly directed towards what is termed the 'multi-partisan approach' (multi-partisan or cross-party), which is the internationally most common and most favoured approach applied by organisations such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD). As can be seen from the list of bilateral collaboration above, the foundations collaborate with ruling as well as with opposition parties, although in most cases the assistance started when the parties were in opposition (particularly in the case of the former liberation movements). It does not make sense to stop collaboration as soon as an opposition party comes to power; the formerly weak party structures do not become strong overnight once an opposition becomes the ruling party. The promotion of internal party democracy is particularly important for ruling parties. However, in authoritarian or hybrid regimes the natural partners of assistance are usually opposition parties.

The multi-party approach of the foundations does not imply assistance to all parties. It means, instead, the identification of 'relevant' parties; anti-democratic parties are excluded. In a democratic setting 'relevant' parties usually include parties represented in parliament. To base

the selection of recipient parties on this criteria is certainly not ‘opportunistic’⁴⁹ as long as the representation is based on free and fair elections; the support of parties is then ‘objectively’ related to the choice of the electorate. However, in a pre-transition situation when no founding elections have taken place, gauging the strength of the various parties is not so easy and has to be based on informed guesswork. The usual way the foundations operate in this situation is through workshops, training seminars, foreign trips focusing on particular issues (media, parliamentary work, identifying programmatic and ideological orientation, code of conduct, special political issues such as decentralisation) offered to these parties.

‘Cross party dialogue’ is the third approach and difficult to distinguish from the multi-party approach. Although this model is in its entirety associated with the IMD⁵⁰ it has been long used by the German foundations. It is not only applied in countries with a history of violent conflict, but in many transition processes and in conflict prone situations. It is a useful approach to avoid high tension situations escalating into violent conflicts. The foundations frequently provide the forum (and perhaps the mediator) to help people talk to one another and create mutual trust between hostile party members. The idea is to make political tolerance and the democratic ‘rules of the game’ a practical experience. This is done partly by the foundations themselves as part of their local activities or by a third ‘party’ supported by the foundation. In some respects, the approach is even part of their routine collaboration with parties and not confined to conflict situations. Even many years after an actual transition to democracy the foundations regularly invite representatives of the major parties to all sorts of workshops and conferences to discuss particular issues which are of current national political relevance.

Fourth, the ‘institutional approach’ refers to the larger context of the institutional setting that influences the party system, such as the electoral system or the relationship between the executive and the legislature which is manned by party representatives. The collaboration with these contextual institutions is also part of the foundations' operations and projects. The foundations assist the electoral commission, the office of the speaker of parliament, support parliamentary parties or provide training seminars for members of parliamentary committees. The relationship between the electoral system and political parties or between parliament and political parties might not be considered as crucial for party assistance, but there is little doubt

⁴⁹ Kumar, *International*, p.23, makes this point about the ‘opportunistic approach’. But it is difficult to think of other criteria than representation in a democratically elected parliament that might be formulated (after ruling out anti-democratic or racist parties and the like).

that the electoral system has a bearing on the party system. As Peter Burnell has pointed out, weak parliaments lead to weak parties,⁵¹ which again can be related to a specific feature of presidential systems.

Finally, there is international cross-party collaboration on the sub-regional, cross-regional and pan-continental basis which provides the possibility to discuss common problems and share experiences of party development. Again the foundations support these encounters and joint activities by organising international conferences attended by party leaders of various countries, or by assisting regional federations of parties, such as the Union des Partis Africains pour la Démocratie et le Développement (UPADD)⁵² by KAS (together with the European Peoples Party) or the network of liberal parties by FNS (together with Westminster Foundation).

Taken together, the foundations are not confined to the ‘partisan approach’, but display a variety of approaches which gives them a high degree of flexibility. The flexibility becomes possible because of an almost singular feature of the foundations among political party promoters, ‘the cornerstone of the foundations international engagement’: in most countries in which they operate they maintain a permanent local office run, in most cases, by a German resident representative of the foundation.⁵³

This reliance on resident representatives has its advantages and disadvantages, but the advantages clearly stick out. As project manager, sometimes described as ‘mini-ambassadors’, they enjoy a high degree of autonomy; they are responsible for drafting new projects and programmes in collaboration with the local partners; and they report directly to headquarters. Hence the success of the foundations’ operations is very much dependent on the quality of the local representative. The long-term commitment to the post – usually at least three years in one country – enables foundation representatives to acquire a deep knowledge of the political situation and the dynamics of the civil society and party system, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of potential partners. Representatives not only act as project managers, but also as political advisors to all kinds of local actors which need not to be ‘contracted’ project partners. This situation permits the representatives to establish long term relationships with a

⁵⁰ Burnell, *Building*, p.17.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.18.

⁵² UPADD has 17 member-parties from 17 countries.

wide network of local political actors which again deepens their knowledge of the local politics. This enhanced network also makes it possible to engage potential partners in a close dialogue about possible activities and programmes and adapt to new or shifting demands in a way non-resident donors cannot reach. For example, a foundation in Accra, Ghana, involved the major political parties in a discussion about the necessity of a new code of conduct for the 2004 elections. Although it was believed that a new code was unnecessary, a non-resident organisation from a different country came in and offered money for drafting a new code, to which the parties agreed. The money was spent in collaboration with a local consultancy on a two day workshop to draft and publish a new 'Political Parties Code of Conduct 2004'.

Versatility has been recommended as a condition for effective party assistance.⁵⁴ In particular, the use of local representatives allows for a high degree of adaptability to the conditions in each country. And in contrast to other promoters of democracy, the foundations do not work within the tight corset of a predefined strategy: there are no check lists or handbooks that outline a 'one size fits all' policy. It is true to say that the foundations are highly sensitive to the ideas brought forth by their partners.⁵⁵

A final aspect, usually not discussed in this context, is the special capacity of the foundations to link up civil society with political party assistance. The crucial role that civil society organisations can play in relation to political parties as a critical companion or corrective force or in agenda setting needs further elaboration. The possibility of furthering this is quite obvious for the FES assistance to trade unions for which they run special programmes. But this opportunity does not as yet seem to be consciously elaborated in the strategic policies of the foundations. It was only the representative of FNS who explicitly mentioned this point as part of their strategy of support to liberal civil society organisations which could influence liberal parties. One of the weaknesses of African civil societies is quite often that they do not engage political parties systematically, but instead try to avoid them (apart from the ruling parties).

A few remarks on the partisan vs. non-partisan approach are necessary here. The idealised conception of a partisan approach based on a pluralistic supply side that offers the local par-

⁵³ Mair, 'Germany's Stiftungen', p.136.

⁵⁴ Burnell, *Building*, p.14, 20.

⁵⁵ Mair, *Parlamentskooperation*, p.58; Hanf/Hofmeier/Mair, p.7, 76.

ties the freedom of choice as provided by the German political foundations⁵⁶ is difficult to find in practice. As indicated above, there is only one country in Africa which hosts the whole ideological spectrum of the foundations; and only six out of 29 host all the three foundations which provide party assistance: conservative, liberal, and social democratic (Appendix 1). There are many political situations in which a partisan approach may be completely inappropriate, while in others it is the only possibility.⁵⁷ In a transition period it makes little sense to support the ruling party which has reluctantly agreed to democratic elections and which controls all campaign means provided by access to state resources. The concern that a partisan approach 'blurs the distinction between assistance and manipulation'⁵⁸ might be justified in some cases, if there is only one donor which insists entirely on its own principles. However, this is not usually the case, and if taken as a general rule this kind of 'neutrality' tends to become a patronising. It certainly underestimates the self-consciousness of the leadership of African political parties, at least of the major parties, and their ability to choose with whom they want to collaborate. This is not to deny the existence of opportunism among party leaders, especially among smaller parties which do not have a large following. At the same time neutrality ignores the amount of partisan money which is poured into political parties from private coffers, from individuals, the famous 'well wishers', as well as national companies and international corporations. Compared to the latter, the assistance rendered by international aid organisations, especially by the German foundations, is, in financial terms small and in many cases, perhaps, even negligible. Though certainly not applicable to all situations, Stefan Mair's point cannot be dismissed that a partisan approach helps to clarify the recipients value and norm orientation, particularly in a situation as in Africa, where most parties display no clear ideological and political profile.⁵⁹ By comparison with other donor organisations the clear (partisan) ideological orientation of Germany's foundations is quite often explicitly lauded by African observers and partners; they are not perceived as 'ideological missionaries'.⁶⁰ It should be remembered, however, that in the small survey mentioned above most of the party leaders preferred a non-partisan approach.

⁵⁶ This point is made generally in favour of the 'German approach' of the Stiftungen; see e.g. Mair, 'Germany's Stiftungen', p.141.

⁵⁷ For examples see Burnell, *Building*, pp.14 -15; Kumar, p.24.

⁵⁸ Kumar, p.24.

⁵⁹ Stefan Mair, 'Multi-Partisan or Bi-Partisan Co-operation. What Is the Best Solution for Democracy Assistance?', Background research paper, in *A European Profile in Democracy Support* Conference Reader 'Enhancing the European profile in democracy assistance', The Hague, July 5-6 2004. Democracy AGENDA: Alliance for Generating a European Network for Democracy Assistance, p.131-5.

⁶⁰ For example Hanf/Hofmeier/Mair, p.76-7.

5.2 *Conceptual Weaknesses*

While the German foundations' assistance to political parties provides a high degree of versatility and flexibility they do exhibit a number of weaknesses:

- None of the foundations has a policy or strategy paper that deals with party assistance in general.
- None has such a policy or discussion paper that addresses the specific issues of political parties in Africa.
- None has either a particular post or a department that is concerned with political parties; while FES entertains a post that is responsible for collaboration with 'trade unions'.
- None of them runs a specific budget line for assistance to political parties, neither overall nor for specific continents or countries.
- None has something like a 'tool-kit', 'guidelines' or a 'handbook' that gives some practical ideas about how to tackle specific question of party aid; in the 1980s, FES had a handbook for party organisation which, however, is considered to be dated and therefore is no longer in use.
- None has systematically appraised their particular collaboration with, and assistance to, political parties, either internally or by external experts (although there have been various internal and external evaluations of specific other programmes of their work or their work in general, e.g. country wise).
- All acknowledge the lack of systematic knowledge about their work with political parties; FES, however, has recently taken-up the cumbersome task of defining, stock-taking and systematisation of their party related activities in Africa.
- Even the 'bad experience', the dark shadow of party collaboration with the state parties of the 1970s and 1980s, has not been appraised in any substantial way.

Viewed from this perspective, the foundations appear not be in a position to address the particular challenges of party promotion adequately, either in general or in Africa in particular (see section 3). The foundations are certainly not distinguished in party promotion. This, however, does not imply that the assistance to political parties is ineffective or useless. There is a long practical experience with party assistance, but it is very personal and has yet to become institutionalized.

At the same time, the local representatives cannot be regarded as ‘party experts’; some might have knowledge about the practical work of political parties from their private experience of being a party member back home. Generally they are employed as ‘political technocrats’, they do not necessarily have backgrounds in party work or as active members of the related party. A few join the ‘mother party’ only after joining the foundation.

Nevertheless, given this context, the lack of policy guidelines and strategic planning and the autonomy and flexibility of the local representative means that there is a danger that some of the foundations’ advantages can be turned into a disadvantage, namely into arbitrariness, opportunism or lack of relevance.⁶¹

6. Conclusion

The German political foundations are often portrayed as the genuine ‘partisan’ promoters of political parties. This is only partly true. This misconception is probably related to the fact that the foundations are ‘close’ to political parties in Germany; but they are not ‘party foundations’, and their engagement for political party assistance is restricted by German law. Although some of the foundations collaborated with the state parties during the era of single-party regimes in Africa, most of their assistance was directed towards rather conventional development projects and civic education.

As of the late 1990s, African political parties have increasingly enjoyed the attention of the foundations, while during the first part of the last decade the foundations moved to the mainstream of democracy assistance focusing support on civil society. However, despite this change, only three of the six foundations – the social-democratic FES, the Christian democratic KAS and the liberal FNS – are engaged in political party assistance and perhaps at best only 20% of their efforts is devoted to this field of international democracy promotion.

Moreover, their party assistance is by no means confined to the ‘partisan approach’ as perceived by international observers. In fact, the foundations have only a small number of ‘partisan partners’ among African parties. Instead they display a high variety of approaches. This, together with their special feature of working through resident representatives and their ability

⁶¹ Mair, *Parlamentskooperation*, p.54, makes this point as well.

to combine political party with civil society assistance gives the foundations a versatility which, compared to many other donors, is unique and can be seen as the most appropriate approach to political party aid in Africa. At the same time, the discussion about the partisanship or non-partisanship of party assistance seems to be misguided if it is based on principle and ignoring context. At least the foundations are *not* perceived as ‘ideological missionaries’.

Overall the reluctance to get too close to political parties is one reaction, amongst others, to the particular ‘otherness’ – commonly called ‘weakness’ – of political parties and party systems in Africa. A characteristic feature of this ‘otherness’ is the lack of clear cut ideological and political orientation of the ‘partisan work’ of the foundations. The foundations also have a particular difficulty digesting the predominance of ethnicity based parties, particularly ethnic congress parties, and the predominance of dominant party systems.

Although this reluctance is understandable, it reveals a crucial weakness of the foundations: none has a strategic concept or policy outline to address the particular challenge to party assistance in Africa. Even the practical experience acquired in collaboration with these parties has not been translated into systematic institutional knowledge. This fact is crucial because it greatly affects the capability of the foundations to function effectively; and a lack of a clear policy makes evaluation of performance extremely difficult.

This brief summary of shortcomings (see also the end of sections 3.1 and 5.2) provides a rough outline of the issues and tasks ahead that need to be addressed in order to make party assistance more meaningful. There is also a definite need for close collaboration between political party researchers and practitioners of party aid, because many of the problems encountered in party aid are in part the issues raised in political party research.

It also seems to be clear that we need to steer clear of a ‘one size fits all’ strategy. Each country, each region, each party type, and each party system calls for its own solution. Despite, however, the necessity for highly specific approaches this does not mean that we have to eschew general strategic considerations about how to focus party assistance in general in the light of experience and research.

In sum, the problems that the foundations have with political party assistance in Africa are not specific to each and every foundation, but affect all promoters of political parties. A review of

the literature and of documentation (handbooks) of other donor organisations suggests that the specific challenge of assistance to political parties in Africa is more or less completely ignored. In general one only finds a mindset that represents the organisational and ideological issues related to old Western European parties. This mindset is, in all likelihood, outdated. The African challenge highlights not only the problems of international party assistance in Africa, but also the problems of young democracies and hybrid regimes of other continents.

Appendix 1

Project activities and offices of German foundations in African countries, 2005

	FES	KAS	HBS	FNS	HSS	RLS
1. Angola	X	x ^a				
2. Benin	X	X ^b			X ^b	
3. Botswana	X					
4. Burkina Faso		x ^a			X ^c	
5. Cameroon	X					
6. Cap Verde	x ^a					
7. Cotê d'Ivoire	X				X ^c	
8. DR Congo		X			X	
9. Ethiopia	X		x ^a			
10. Ghana	X	X		X	x ^a	
11. Kenya	X	X ^b	X ^b	X	X	
12. Lesotho			x ^a			
13. Madagascar	X					
14. Malawi		x ^a				
15. Mali	X	x ^a				
16. Mauritius	x ^a		x ^a			
17. Mozambique	X	X ^b				
18. Namibia	X	X	x ^a		X	x ^a
19. Niger		x ^a				
20. Nigeria	X	X	X			
21. Senegal	X	X		X ^c		
22. Somalia			x ^a			
23. South Africa	X	X	X ^b	X	X	X ^b
24. Sudan ¹	X	x ^a	x ^a			
25. Tanzania	X	X		X ^c	X	
26. Togo	x ^a				X ^c	
27. Uganda	X	X	x ^a		x ^a	
28. Zambia	X	x ^a				
29. Zimbabwe	X	X	x ^a	X ^c		
	23	19	11	6	11	2

a) no office

b) regional office

c) local staff only

1) At FES the Sudan office belongs to the Near East / North Africa Department

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