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'Political education key to democracy'

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Institutions which provide political education to the public play a crucial role in promoting democracy, said an official of Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation while on a recent visit to Seoul.

"Democracy is one thing. People think democracy is really the best form of political order. But something else that we should create is institutions and agencies that bring democratic education to the people," said Dr. Karsten Grabow, project coordinator at the foundation's Department of International Cooperation.

"And in Germany, we have some different agencies that provide this information. Political foundations are one of these agencies. These institutions together provide the necessary information on almost all political subjects you can imagine," he told The Korea Herald.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation is affiliated with the ruling Christian Democratic Union and the largest of politically linked institutions in

Germany.

The primary role of the organization is to inform the German population about the basics of the constitution and other topics such as European integration and the party's programs and ideologies, he said.

By contrast, agencies affiliated with Korean political parties limit their education and training to party members as they are highly dependent on the party for finance and personnel.

By law, Korean parties are required to allocate more than 30 percent of their government subsidies to their own think tanks while German political foundations "are financed exceptionally with public money," he said.

Korea has five party-affiliated think tanks, with the two largest ones attached to the ruling Uri Party and the main opposition Grand National Party. Critics have questioned their independence given that they are headed by incumbent lawmakers.



Karsten Grabow

However, Dr. Grabow said, "The situation is quite different in Germany."

"The political foundation and party are strictly divided in terms of organization, location, personnel and financing."

Dr. Grabow said independence plays a main role in maintaining the foundation's reputation.

"We are recognized primarily as independent providers of political information and promoters of democracy."

The interview was conducted during his visit to Seoul to attend the foundation's forum on party democracy and political foundations on Dec. 18.

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