

Gero Erdmann: Problems of International Party Assistance

International party assistance has not been an issue of its own for a long time, although international and transnational party support has a long tradition: Its origins go back to the year 1864, when the Socialist International was founded. However, this form of international cooperation between like-minded parties, i.e. *party cooperation*, must be distinguished from the promotion of parties by third parties, i.e. *party assistance*.

Not only the German political foundations play an active part in party assistance. Since the year of Germany's reunification, 1989, if not earlier, there have been numerous other European and extra-European institutions next to them, including the American National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and the International Republican Institute. Of all the organisations that promote political parties, the German political foundations probably have the longest experience as they are active not only in the field of party assistance but also in other areas of democracy promotion.

However, there is hardly any reliable information about expenditures on party assistance. By the same token, there are no hard data about the nature of that assistance. We do know that the European foundations are using their funds as follows: 33 percent are allocated to supporting party organisations, 15 percent to enabling parties to run election campaigns, twelve percent to ensuring the participation of women, eleven percent to parliamentary representation, nine percent to the party system as a whole, eight percent to training election observers, and twelve percent to miscellaneous measures.

Party research differentiates between five or six approaches: First, supporting an ideologically close party (partisan approach); second, promoting several relevant parties (multi-party approach); third, supporting supra and inter-party dialogues (cross-party dialogue); fourth, promoting institutional development (institutional approach); fifth, supporting transnational cooperation between parties from the same region or continent (international cross-party collaboration); and possibly sixth, supporting the civil-society environment (civil-society approach).

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the following political foundations are regarded as close to a political party: the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAF), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FEF), the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF), the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLF). They all have this in common: None of them has compiled a policy or strategy paper which is available to the public, none of them has executives or departments that are responsible for party assistance, none of them has a budget dedicated exclusively to party assistance, none of them states very clearly what party assistance as such consists of, none of their party assistance programmes has so far been examined by political experts, none of them has analysed its collaboration with political parties in the seventies and eighties and, ultimately, none of them has, as a result of all this, any systematic and institutionalised knowledge of the matter as such.

By now, most foundations – the KAF, the FEF, the FNF, and the HBF – are dealing with this issue more systematically, although deficits still remain: There is the fact that promotion portfolios and guidelines follow a North European model. There is the practical uselessness of this, according to Carothers (2004), 'mythical' model that reflects the reality of political parties in Europe's established democracies. There is the fact that, because of this, the development of the political parties is controlled by a West European sequential model and, ultimately, the fact that party assistance is not related to the local context.

Another specifically German problem arises from the German foundations' clear value orientation in the promotion of democracy and parties as well as from their predominant orientation towards sister parties. Although positive aspects exist, such a pluralist promotion concept may be effective only under two conditions: On the one hand, the German foundations must be willing to cooperate in the countries concerned; on the other, there must be parties in these countries that have a value orientation which is comparable to that of the German foundations. However, outside the European region, it is rather rare that these two conditions are met.

Within the framework of democracy promotion, party assistance leads a rather marginal existence. In 2006, Burnell argued: 'Party assistance has been too marginal or, perhaps, too invisible for it to be the subject of passionately held and strikingly opposing points of view.' This being so, we know only little about the party-assistance complex, so that opinions on party assistance turn out to be predominantly critical. In 2004, for example, Carothers listed a series of practical deficits especially in American organisations that promote political parties. In it, he mentions training workshops that are too brief and too schematic, donors that pick the wrong issues, training experts who do not have sufficient knowledge of the local context, selecting the wrong participants, the practice of giving unrealistic advice, and study trips to donor countries that are nothing to do with reality. And in 2005, he added that he was missing a 'transformation effect' in party assistance.

In 2005, Kumar arrived at positive conclusions in his evaluation of USAID, especially with regard to promoting organisation in Central and Eastern Europe. However, he does not attempt to conceal failures in, for example, supporting parliamentary participation. Carothers' criticism may sound exaggerated; nevertheless, it highlights the basic problems of party assistance: There is a lack of concepts and strategies that formulate motives, objectives and routes. There are neither standards nor tools to assess party assistance. There are neither expert reports nor studies to provide well-founded empirical data. And, finally, it should be discussed whether funds should be increased to secure a more sweeping effect.

Summing up, we may say the following: International party assistance is not capable of tackling the existing problems either conceptually or strategically. It would be necessary to develop consistent concepts which identify objectives and name the methodological and instrumental directions that are required to achieve them. Party assistance should not follow a rigid methodological and instrumental model; rather, it must be adapted to local conditions. Based on their experience, the German foundations could provide party assistance by contributing institutional knowledge to the framework of conceptual and strategic orientation. In many cases, there is no local partner with a compatible profile in the 'German' pluralist approach of promoting sister parties, so that it would be sensible to think about other concepts of party assistance. It would be a good idea for the parties themselves to promote their civil-society environment. In view of the parties' relevance in representative democracies and the marginal importance of party assistance within the framework of democracy promotion, it would be necessary to change the way in which funds are used.

And, finally, two other difficulties of party assistance begin to show that will probably gain in importance in the future. On the one hand, there is a conflict of interest between the organisations that promote political parties and the personalist, clientelist, and nepotist parties in young democracies and hybrid regimes. On the other, it is highly problematic to collaborate with dominant political parties that have been in power for several legislative periods, especially in

democracies that are still unconsolidated. In both cases, there is great need for discussion and action.