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Research Note 61

Party Players: EU funding of party political research

The EU has in the past been criticised for funding trans-national political groups with European taxpayers' money. There are a number of problems with that policy:

- Taxpayer funding of political parties does not fit with the established practice in Britain of using voluntary donations.
- It is easier for parties in favour of European integration to get the money than it is for those opposed to it, as the former tend to operate transnationally while the latter are more loosely aligned by definition.
- Extremist parties will qualify for state support once they cross the qualifying threshold.
- The very prospect of receiving such money, and the threat of losing it, may influence policy makers to favour European integration.

New evidence shows that, in addition to EU funding for parties, significant amounts are provided to research institutes supporting the main parties.

The **key findings** of this research are:

- The latest call for proposals (2009/C 125/09) offers funding this year in support of "political foundations at European level".
- There is a total of €7,140,000 (£6.4 million) allocated to support "political foundations at European level" in the next financial year (2010).
- Over two years, the policy and research teams of openly pro-EU political groups have received £7,544,000, while openly EU-critical political groups have received £665,000.

Budget for political foundations

The latest call for proposals (2009/C 125/09)¹ calls for funding for this year in support of “political foundations at European level”. The requirements for receiving funding are:

- That it must be a certified affiliate of one of the political parties at European level.
- It must have its own legal personality.
- It must subscribe to the EU’s principles (including the controversial issue of “human rights and fundamental freedoms”).
- It must be non-profit.
- Its governing body must be drawn from a number of countries.
- It must meet various criteria related to financial probity.

There is a total of €7,140,000 allocated to support “political foundations at European level” in the next financial year (2010) – approximately £6.4 million at current exchange rates.

This is separate from the €11,075,000 (approximately £9.9 million) spent supporting political parties at a European level, and also separate from funding streams operating covering European-level political activity for MEPs, such as €6 million spent in 2008 under budget line 4.0.0 “Current administrative expenditure and expenditure relating to the political and information activities of the political groups and non-attached members”.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:125:0024:0026:EN:PDF>

Grants to political foundations

The grant coordinators have not received any applications from the United Kingdom since the funding began in 2008. As the bidding process is currently ongoing, it is not yet possible to determine which if any bodies physically based in Britain have currently put bids in. However, the following amounts were paid out over the period to institutions with links to political parties:

Table 1: Parties, Foundations and Grants

Foundation	Affiliated to party	Party Context	Country	Grant awarded (€) (to 2009 ²)
Center Maurits Coppieters	European Free Alliance	Regionalist/separatist	Belgium	254,537
Centre for European Studies	European People's Party	Pro-integration, Centre Right	Belgium	3,794,500
Europa Osservatorio Sulle Politiche Dell'unione	Alliance for Europe of the Nations	Mutedly Eurocritical at the time (due to the presence of Italian MEPs)	Italy	555,050
European Liberal Forum	European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party	Liberal Democrat	Belgium	958,950
Fondation Politique Europeenne Pour La Democratie	Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe	Centre Right strongly Eurosceptic	France	190,746
Foundation for EU Democracy	EUDemocrats	Originally critical of European integration but aims to set out both sides for balanced debate ³	Belgium	253,700
Foundation for European Progressive Studies	Party of European Socialists	Pro-integration, Centre Left	Belgium	3,158,700
Green European Institute	European Green Party	Green, mixed views of European integration	Belgium	717,573
Institute of European Democrats	European Democratic Party	Pro-integration, Centrist	Belgium	550,610
Transform Europe	Party of the European Left	Marxist	Belgium	518,975

Source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/grant_amounts_foundations.pdf

² Final quarter 2008 (ie from passage of funding enablement) and year 2009

³ Providing links to documentation with commentary from both sides as an access resource rather than policy forum. Annual reports for 2008 can be found [here](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/grant_amounts_foundations.pdf). Source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/grant_amounts_foundations.pdf

These organisations mostly describe themselves and define their activities expressly in terms of their political affiliations:

Table 2: Political Backgrounds

Foundation	Affiliated to group	UK party affiliate	Quote
Center Maurits Coppieters	European Free Alliance	SNP, Plaid, Greens	Our organisation was founded in September 2007. Under a pilot programme of the European Commission we were recognised as a European political foundation affiliated to the European Free Alliance (EFA), a European political party recognised by the European Parliament. [...] In 2008 with the emerging European political foundations a new step in the building of a European public sphere with European political infrastructure is emerging. [...] In a nutshell, our aims are: observing, analysing data and contributing to the debate on European public policy issues with a special focus on the role of democratic-nationalist and regionalist movements and the process of European integration. ⁴
Centre for European Studies	European People's Party	Formerly, Conservatives	The Centre for European Studies is committed to promoting intellectual liberty, raising awareness and facilitating the growth of EU politics from the perspective of the ideologies and the central values of the EPP and its centre-right partners. ⁵
Europa Osservatorio Sulle Politiche Dell'unione	Alliance for Europe of the Nations		Il portale www.europaosservatorio.eu è un'iniziativa di Europa (www.e-uropa.org), fondazione politica affiliata all'Alleanza per l'Europa delle Nazioni, uno dei "partiti politici a livello europeo". ⁶
European Liberal Forum	European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party	Lib Dems	Founded in the fall of 2007, the European Liberal Forum, asbl (ELF) is the non-profit European political foundation of the liberal family. ELF brings together liberal think tanks, political foundations and institutes from around Europe to observe, analyse and contribute to the debate on European public policy issues and the process of European integration, through education, training, research and the promotion of active citizenship within the EU. [...] The role of the European Liberal Forum is to [...]: Observe, analyse and contribute to the debate on European public policy issues and the process of European integration, through education, training, research and the promotion of active citizenship within the European Union, particularly with regard to young Europeans. [...] Inform and involve the public in the construction of a united European democracy. ⁷
Fondation Politique Européenne pour la Démocratie	Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe	Formerly, a DUP MEP sitting as an independent	

⁴ <http://www.cmc-foundation.eu/>

⁵ <http://www.thinkingeurope.eu/content.php?hmlD=16>

⁶ <http://www.europaosservatorio.eu/fondazione.php>

⁷ http://www.liberalforum.eu/index.php/about_whatself.html

Foundation	Affiliated to group	UK party affiliate	Quote
Foundation for EU Democracy	EU Democrats	UKIP	<p>A part of this Action Plan is specifically aimed towards the European political parties, which are encouraged to create foundations that fulfill the above criteria. These foundations are affiliated to the parties but yet exist as independent legal entities. The EUDemocrats considered this opportunity and found it perfectly in line with our party's goals.⁸</p> <p>[This group conducts the most balanced research. Although coming from a Eurosceptic angle, different political strands are involved, and the opposing viewpoint is often provided as part of a debate format.]</p>
Foundation for European Progressive Studies	Party of European Socialists	Labour	<p>Close to the Party of European Socialists (PES) but nevertheless independent, FEPS embodies a new way of thinking on the social democratic, socialist and labour scene in Europe. [.../...] What relationship does FEPS have with the PES? FEPS joins the same logic as many national political foundations and that could be summed up in the following motto: "close to, but independent from". Clearly affiliated with the Party of European Socialists which initiated its creation and is member of FEPS, the Foundation remains a distinct organisation with its own priorities. Of course, the nearness of FEPS to PES and its assumed political identity are the added value of the Foundation and gives credit to its action.⁹</p>
Green European Institute	European Green Party	Northern Ireland Greens	<p>The aisbl Green European Institute has two main decision-making bodies: the Board of Directors and the General Assembly. Members of the General Assembly represent the three main stakeholders of the Green European Foundation: the European Green Party, the Green Group in the European Parliament and national Green foundations from all over Europe.¹⁰</p>
Institute of European Democrats	European Democratic Party		<p>Its primary goal is to promote a better understanding of the core aspects of the European integration process, and to play an active role in strengthening the confidence of European citizens and their direct participation with regards to European Institutions and policies and, above all, in favour of the idea of a united Europe. [...] The Institute of European Democrats, serves also as an innovative European political and cultural Research Institute that could offer fresh political ideas as well as a strong and respected cultural background to the European Democratic Party (EDP) to whom it has been formally affiliated.¹¹</p>

⁸ Now offline but referenced at http://eph612.6.forumer.com/a/eudemocrats-initiatives-the-foundation-for-eu-democracy_post3126.html

⁹ <http://www.feps-europe.eu/index.php?id=352>

¹⁰ <http://www.gef.eu/index.php?id=49>

¹¹ <http://www.iedonline.eu/news/dir/12/presentation.html>

Foundation	Affiliated to group	UK party affiliate	Quote
Transform Europe	Party of the European Left		<p>Transform! is a network of mainly European organizations in the field of political education and critical scientific analysis. This collaboration of independent non-profit organizations, institutes, foundations and people means to utilize their work to contribute to a peaceful statelihood and to a transformation of the present world.¹²</p> <p>[This organisation is comparatively aloof from MEPs, probably due to the fractious nature of the Far Left, and does not flag up its EU funding]</p>

We can summarise this as follows:

Table 3: Funding by Political Orientation

Party Context	Two years of grant awards (£)
Pro-integration, Centre Right	3,380,000
Pro-integration, Centre Left	2,818,000
Pro-integration, Liberal Democrat	855,000
Green, mixed views of European integration	639,000
Mildly Eurosceptical	495,000
Pro-integration, Centrist	491,000
Marxist	463,000
Regionalist/separatist	227,000
Centre Right strongly Eurosceptic	170,000

These funds do not include payments potentially received from European Commission individual grant applications, but not centrally collated.

Funding is therefore clearly dominated by money going towards policy-making organisations that promote European integration.

The problem is compounded by historical alliances. While the Lib Dems, UKIP and Labour saw funding available for think tanks supporting their general philosophies, the Conservatives did not as funding went to a think tank more in favour of European integration, because of the nature of their political alliance at the time. A small shift in funding may now be expected towards a centre right think tank more critical of integration in 2010, but funding will still mostly flow to pro-integration think tanks.

¹² <http://www.transform-network.net/en/home/network-transformeurope/browse/1.html>



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