

Marianne Sieker

The Role of the German Political Foundations in International Relations

Transnational Actors in Public Diplomacy



Nomos

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

(Jules Renard)

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

(Max Frisch, Bin oder Die Reise nach Peking)

Abstract

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

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

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

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