

# International actors of democracy assistance in Egypt post 2011: German political foundations

German  
political  
foundations

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims at a qualitative investigation and analysis of the complicated situation of the four German Political Foundations (GPFs) – Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Friedrich Naumann Foundation and Hanns Seidel Foundation – as actors of democracy assistance in Egypt post 25 January 2011 revolution. It explores the relation between the restrictive political circumstances and the weakness and potential failure of the GPFs while considering their internal structural and operative misconducts as intervening variables.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The researcher uses the qualitative research method and its interpretive practices of data collection. The backbone of this study are the field visits and extensive interviews with the resident representatives of the GPFs in Egypt, and the representatives of the international departments of their headquarters in Germany. These interviews were complemented by further interviews with members of related organizations in Germany, as well as Egyptian professors, diplomats and experts on Egypt and the broader Middle East. The interviewing method is semi-structured in nature and audio-recorded. In Germany, interviews and information were gathered throughout a four-month field-research stay in Germany.

**Findings** – The paper concludes that the restrictive regime and political limitations were determining variables undermining the success of the GPFs in the area of democracy assistance in Egypt post 2011 revolution, while the GPFs' own operative malfunctions and lack of adaptation to the political reality post 2011 were contributing factors in the process.

**Research limitations/implications** – Owing to security concerns and trust issues, many interviewees were reluctant to give information openly and freely; also requesting complete anonymity in the study. Some information and documents were denied to the researcher out of security concerns.

**Originality/value** – The added value of this paper lies in the qualitative research, investigations and personalized views on the functions and situation of the GPFs as international actors of democracy assistance in Egypt post 25 January 2011 revolution, considering the restrictive political landscape in which they exist. The study can assist scholars and researchers who explore the processes of democratization during transitional periods and the harsh grip of restrictive regime.

**Keywords** Egypt, Democratization, Arab spring, Civil society organizations, Democracy assistance, German political foundations

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

This paper investigates the German political foundations (GPFs) as long-lasting international actors in the field of democracy assistance in Egypt, particularly in the



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aftermath of the 25 January 2011 uprising. For nearly 40 years, the following foundations were/are operative in Egypt: Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS) and Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSS). The paper examines how the political circumstances and legal restrictions have affected the incapability and potential failure of the GPFs in Egypt post 2011 uprising; at the same time, how the GPFs own operational misconducts and misjudgements to the political reality has impacted their stance and situation. The paper also explores how the GPFs lack of consideration to the exceptional political momentum in the aftermath of the 25 January 2011 uprising has influenced their work continuation in regards to democracy development. The political reality led to the division of the GPFs into two groups: survivors (FES/HSS) and non-survivors (KAS/FNS). On the one hand, the two foundations, the FES and the HSS, try to cope and adapt to the political circumstances in Egypt; nevertheless, they are faced with numerous restrictions and limitations, as well as uncertainty and mistrust. On the other hand, the KAS and the FNS were not able to adapt to the political changes in Egypt post 2011 uprising. The former foundation was police-raided and forced to close down its regional Cairo office in December 2011, while the latter opted for relocating its regional Cairo office from Cairo to Amman in 2016.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Because the paper is concerned with democracy promotion and democracy assistance by international foundations, i.e. GPFs in Egypt post 25 January 2011 uprising – which has recovered the discussions and debates on the universality of democracy, the relation between democratization and political transition, the relation between democratization and civil society, the effectiveness of democracy promotion and democracy assistance from outside – the theoretical framework of this paper is based on three theoretical conceptualizations:

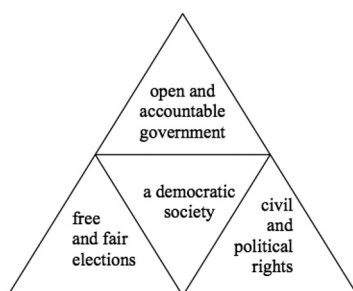
Firstly, the different conceptualizations of democracy and democratization: how democracy and democratization processes are conceptualized among the different scholars, and the relation between democratization and political transition. In this regard, it is pivotal to develop a definition and understanding of democracy. Hence, David Beetham's "democratic pyramid" (Beetham, 1994) is used as a tool to determine the state of democracy in Egypt, in which he recognized four dimensions that characterize democracy in modern societies. Beetham's four dimensions are the following: Firstly, the use of free and fair elections, i.e. characterized by the electoral process, its *inclusiveness*, its *fairness* and its *independence* from government power or control (Beetham, 1994). The second dimension deals with *open* and *accountable* government; he categorizes accountability into political, legal and financial accountability represented in practice by the parliament, i.e. the legislature of a country. The third dimension of democracy includes the civil and political rights given to the people as a means to guarantee popular control over the first two dimensions (Kuijpers, 2006). (Figure 1)

Furthermore, scholars such as Dahl (1971), Sorenson 1993) and Diamond (1999) stressed on the idea of political culture as a crucial value system within society that enables the process of democratization. Egyptian sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim views that "the lagging democracy of the Arab World is due to the absence or stunting of its civil society and its corresponding political culture" (Ibrahim, 1995). Carlos Santiso regards democracy assistance's greatest influence is often the transmission of ideas that can change people's outlook and behaviour and alter their political culture (Santiso, 2001).

The second theoretical dimension entails the concept of civil society in relation to democratization. One cannot grasp the concept of democratization, especially in relation to democracy promotion/assistance by international actors, without relating it to the concept of civil society. One of the major pillars to democracy aid is civil society assistance; non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are regarded as critical agents of democratization. According to Beetham's democratic pyramid, to establish a "democratic society", civil and political rights should be given to the people. These rights will enable them to form interest groups and civil associations, i.e. civil society or what he calls the "democratic society". There are a variety of concepts defining civil society; however, "they all revolve around maximizing volitional organized collective participation in the public space between individuals and the state" (Ibrahim, 1995). Augustus Richard Norton's presents civil society as a cohesive unit, where citizens despite their various interests are able to cooperate with one another for the common good (Norton, 1995, 1994). The relationship between the state and civil society is particularly important as democracy promoters often target civil society actors or NGOs with the aim of rechannelling unfavourable social and political circumstances. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter highlight the idea of the "resurrection of civil society" and how its development is crucial to the transitions from authoritarianism to democratic political systems (O'Donnell *et al.*, 1986).

The third theoretical dimension entails the conceptualizations of democracy promotion/assistance from outside: the theoretical approaches to democracy promotion and democracy assistance, as well as the controversies on whether democracy assistance *actually works or not* and its effectiveness on bringing about democratization from outside. There have been several definitions to democracy promotion and democracy assistance; however, this paper applies only one institutional definition to each term. The term "democracy promotion" is defined as "*to encompass the full range of external relations and development cooperation activities, which contribute to the development and consolidation of democracy in third countries*" (Burnell, 2007). Democracy assistance, on the other hand, is involved with more or less the same issues as democracy promotion; however, it emphasizes less on technical assistance and much more on political parties and the mobilisation of civil society as a main pillar of democracy (Mohr, 2010). Therefore, the term "democracy assistance" is defined as:

The policy aimed at helping third countries build institutions of democratic governance, foster public participation in democratic governance, support pluralism in the shape of multiparty



Source: Beetham (1994), p. 30

**Figure 1.**  
Illustration of  
Beetham's  
democratic pyramid

“Democracy assistance is a very precise instrument within a broader democracy promotion paradigm” (Lappin, 2010). As an expert of democracy promotion, Peter Burnell differentiates between the different tools that are used by democracy promoters. On the one hand, there is the “soft-power”, where non-coercive means and methods are used in reaching specific goals, such as political dialogue and diplomatic pressure. On the other hand, the “hard power” by which coercive methods are followed, such as the use of force or military interventions (Burnell, 2007).

Furthermore, Thomas Carothers highlights the concept of democratization under the political and developmental approaches, in addition to the methods of democracy assistance according to each approach (Carothers, 2009). The main difference between the two approaches is that the political approach focuses on the technicalities of the political processes, while the developmental approach “looks beyond an exclusively political definition of democracy to broader conceptions that incorporate socio-economic concerns” (Carothers, 2009). In relation to democratization, the political approach regards the process as a political struggle between different and competing political actors. This approach relies primarily on “direct methods” of democracy assistance, whether training, advice, moral support or funding to the political actors themselves, political parties or associations, politicians or politically oriented NGOs (Carothers, 2009). The developmental approach, on the other hand, “regards democratization as a slow, iterative process, measured in decades and marked by the gradual accumulation of small gains” (Carothers, 2009). This approach inclines towards “indirect methods” because “they see the value of promoting social and economic development as a way of supporting democracy” (Carothers, 2009).

Withal, the debate on whether democracy promotion/assistance by international donors has worked or not, is a major discourse and hits the core of the assumptions of this paper. This debate not only questions the effectiveness of democracy assistance, but also investigates the tools, methods and strategies adopted by democracy promoters. In her work *Political Aid and Arab Activism* author Sheila Carapico presents a critical discussion on the role, methods and effectiveness of democracy promoters in political transitions in the Middle East. She deems democracy promotion as an “abstract” concept, not relating to the political reality of the recipient countries. She also considers it a tactic for “Western hegemony” and a tool for reinforcing the image of Western countries to their “own people” as preserving democracy abroad (Carapico, 2014). It poses the discourse of how realistic the “expected” outcomes of democracy assistance efforts are, as opposed to what the foundations themselves perceive as potential or desirable outcomes.

Finally, Peter Burnell answers the question of whether “international democracy promotion actually works or not” with a simple “yes”. He argues that:

[...] in so far as there is a reasonable amount of evidence to suggest that *some* cases of democracy promotion have had *some* effect especially when we go on to specify the cases more closely in terms of approach, time, place and circumstance (Burnell, 2007).

He also gives a “no” answer, in that “still *under* half the countries in the world and *less* than half of humankind live in political systems that most conventional judgments would call *liberal* democracies” (Burnell, 2007). Adding on, Carlos Santiso questions the viability and effectiveness of the existing partnerships between democracy promoters and the recipient countries, and calls for deeper and “genuine” partnerships based on mutual development interests (Santiso, 2001). Lastly, Burnell concludes with a “Yes? No? We Really do not Know” answer, which stresses on the viability of the methods and tools to make proper assessments and evaluations on the success or failure of democracy support (Burnell, 2007).

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To this background, the paper uses the qualitative research tools and methods, explained in the coming part, to assess the work and situation of the GPFs in Egypt post 2011.

### 3. Methodology

To explore the inquiries of this paper, the researcher uses the qualitative research methods and its interpretive practices of data collection. The following data-collection methods of the qualitative research method have been used in this paper: observational methods, in-depth interviewing, personal and group discussions and conversations, audio recordings and memos, field notes and documentary evidence and analysis. The backbone of this research is the extensive in-depth interviews, personal conversations and informal discussions. Numerous individual interviews with resident representatives of the GPFs in Egypt (FES, KAS, FNS, HSS), as well as the representatives of their international headquarters in Germany have been conducted. These interviews were complemented and accompanied by further interviews with members of related organizations in Germany, such as the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the German Development Institute (DIE), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and Deutsche Welle (DW) in Bonn, in addition to the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin. Adding on, more information has been used in the analysis from informal conversations with political science professors at Cairo University and the American University in Cairo (AUC). The selected professors were either specialized in the field of international relations, or have formerly collaborated with the GPFs on several occasions. From the Egyptian government side, interviews were conducted with former Egyptian diplomats, as well as the former Minister of Higher Education in Egypt. Several previous attempts and requests have been made from the researcher to conduct interviews with members of the Ministry of Social Solidarity; however, with no success. Nevertheless, a number of individuals who worked in partner organizations and NGOs of the GPFs and members of relevant Egyptian NGOs were informally interviewed. All interviewees, Egyptian and German, demanded utmost anonymity in the research due to security concerns. The interviewing method was semi-structured in nature and audio recorded, which enabled the researcher to pay full attention to the interviewee, and later on type out literally the exact wording and phrasing of the conversation. Interviews, conversations and information were gathered throughout a four-month field-research stay in Germany.

### 4. Civil society organizations post 2011: legal context

To grasp the complicated situation of the GPFs in Egypt post 25 January 2011 uprising, the “new” political variables regarding civil society organizations need to be analysed first. The transitional period post 2011 uprising, led by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood (until 2013) and their removal by the military in 2014, affected the legal status of NGOs and civil society organizations; in turn negatively influenced the work of the GPFs in Egypt. The legal context of civil society organizations and NGOs in Egypt was framed by Law 32 dating back to 1964. Under Law 32 of 1964 the *Ministry of Social Solidarity* or the *Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs* is the one in charge of all civil society related organizations and possesses the right to regulate, supervise, manage and direct all the activities of NGOs. The ministry has countless authorities and prerogatives; among others, it can either approve or refuse to give permission to form a new NGO, prevent money from coming to an association from abroad, and deny permission to raise funds through donations “and other methods of collecting money for social purposes” (Abed-Kotob and Sullivan, 1999). However, in conversation with a current Egyptian diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he pointed out that in many

countries, even those that claim to be “democratic”, civil society and foreign organizations are observed and closely monitored through laws and regulations. These are standard routines in several countries, to know what external actors are “actually” conducting (author’s interview, 15 November 2018). Nevertheless, due to increased pressure from human rights activists in Egypt, Law 32/1964 was amended by Law 153 in 1999. Yet, the provisions of Law 153/1999 did not allow for more space for NGOs; if anything, it has shifted the control of the major operations of NGOs, such as programs, structure, financing and management, even more in the hands of the state, instead of NGO members and directors. Finally, Law 153/1999 prohibited the communication and interaction of local NGOs with foreign organizations and institutions without firstly informing the authorities and taking their permission.

#### *4.1 Dilemma of foreign funding*

The issue of funding for local and foreign NGOs has been of major concern even before the 2011 uprising. The two main legal stipulations that regulate the funding of NGOs and other civil society organizations are the *Law on Non-Governmental Organizations* (84/2002) and the *Executive Statute* (178/2002). Law 84 not only allows for the ultimate control and monitoring of foreign funding by the state apparatus, it also prohibits NGOs from conducting any activities that can threaten “national unity or violate public order or morals” (Carr, 2013). Particularly post 2011, human rights organizations and politically oriented NGOs have revealed state violations in regards to human rights; hence, these same organizations were targeted for retaliation by the political elites. The GPFs, especially the KAS was one of those attacked by the “old” regime alliances. In an interview with the German news magazine “Der Spiegel” in 2012, Andreas Jacobs, the former and tried Head of KAS Regional Office Cairo, emphasized the deteriorating human rights conditions in Egypt since 2011, which he saw as worse than the previous regime. He stated that the “ruling military leaders (SCAF) are trying to delay or even obstruct the political transition” (Der Spiegel, Issue 6/2012).

In 2011, former Minister of International Cooperation, who served under former President Mubarak and during the transition period, Fayza Abou el-Naga, was considered the main instigator of the criminal charges and trials against foreign and civil society organizations that ended in the closing down of several NGOs and foreign organizations, among them KAS (Human Rights Watch, 2011a). In the words of Andreas Jacobs, “the incident in Cairo illustrates how difficult overseas work can be for these foundations” (Der Spiegel, Issue 6/2012). Under the Muslim Brotherhood’s President Mohamed Morsi, Egyptian courts tried and charged the staff members of several foreign organizations and NGOs with “receiving foreign funds, operating without permits, and fomenting unrest in Egypt” (Setzer, 2018). The court ordered closure of five foreign NGOs operating in Egypt and their funds confiscated: the US-based Freedom House, the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Centre for Journalists, and the KAS. NGOs’ existence in Egypt is dependent on financing from abroad; these verdicts are regarded a clear warning to such groups to avoid funding from overseas (Salloum, 2013). The US National Security Council spokesperson Caitlin Hayden articulated her concerns towards the trials and verdicts, describing it as “a politically motivated trial that undermined the protection of universal human rights” (Setzer, 2018).



#### 4.2 “New NGO law”

On 24 May 2017, three years after President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi was elected, Law No. 70 of 2017 was signed; a “new” law on NGOs and foreign organizations in Egypt. Under the “New NGO Law”, donations exceeding E£ (Egyptian pounds) 10,000 (\$550) must be preapproved. If no approval is granted within 60 days the request is automatically denied. Failure to inform authorities could result in jail terms of up to five years and fines of up to E£1m (\$55,000) (Aboulenein, 2017). The law also forbids local and foreign civil society groups from engaging in “politically-related” activities or anything that threatens or disturbs national security, public order, public morals or public health.

### 5. German political foundations (GPFs) post 2011: background

The four explored GPFs that have (had) own representations in Cairo: FES, founded in 1925 and related to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), present in Cairo since 1976; KAS, founded in 1956 and close to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), active in Cairo from 1981 until its closure in 2011; (FNS) for Freedom, founded in 1958 and related to the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), represented in Cairo from 1982 to 2016; and the HSS, founded in 1966 and close to the Christian Social Union (CSU), with an office in Cairo since 1978.

The GPFs possess specific characteristics that distinguish their identity and define their missions and work. On the one hand, they are independent from the German government and are registered as non-profit (i.e. non-governmental) organizations; on the other hand, they are ideologically affiliated with the German political parties, advocate politico-developmental objectives and are almost totally *publicly* funded (95 per cent). The funds for their international work, which constitute almost *half* of the entire foundations’ budgets, come from the Ministry of Economic and Development Cooperation (BMZ), which grants funds to the GPFs since 1962. Representative of the BMZ confirmed that “the GPFs are only accountable as far as the allocation and distribution of public federal funds are considered; however, their programs and activities are solely their undertaking” (author’s interview, 21 February 2018). Pietro Marzo (2019) refers to the unique status of the GPFs as “legitimized independent” actors.

#### 5.1 Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES): adaptation and survival

Founded in 1925, the FES, founded in 1925, is the oldest GPF in Germany. It is associated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), one of the two major political parties in Germany. Due to its affiliation with the SPD, the FES stresses on union movements both in Germany and abroad. Operating in Egypt since 1976, the FES Cairo office collaborated for over 40 years with Egyptian local partners; including ministries, NGOs and other civil society organizations. The Head of the FES MENA Department in Berlin pointed out that due to the complicated political events post 25 January 2011 uprising, the situation and work framework of the GPFs has been challenging.

In an interview back in 2014, the former FES resident representative in Cairo stated that despite the pressures facing the FES since 2011, the police raids on KAS 2011, and the legal restrictions and limitations on NGOs and foreign organizations, the FES tried to continue its functions as much as possible (author’s interview, 16 January 2014). The Head of DW MENA Department views the remaining GPFs, i.e. FES and HSS, as knowledgeable of their limits in Egypt: “They would not want to surpass the red lines, they want to keep existing in Egypt” (author’s interview, 21 February 2018).

*5.1.1 Activities and partners: 2011-2017.* From 2011-2017, the FES conducted activities and partnered with several NGOs and CBOs, as well as governmental institutions. In the field of *Environment and Sustainable Development*, the FES collaborated with

environmental governmental and non-governmental institutions, business organizations and other associations interested in environmental projects. One the main projects was with the *Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency* (EEAA), a governmental institution and the technical arm of the Ministry of the Environment, with the objective of supporting environmental policies and raise environmental awareness. Specifically, from September to December 2018, the FES cooperated with the Wadi Environmental Science Center (WESC) on a series of workshops titled “*Renewable Energy and Climate Change*” held in schools in the area of Abu El Nomros, Giza (Workshops on Renewable Energy and Climate Change, FES, 2018).

The FES also focused on the empowerment of civil society, with a project titled *Collectivity Rather than Competition – Strengthening NGOs Structures, Capacities and Alliances* conducted from 2015 to 2017, which targeted NGOs from different sectors and fields of development. Taken the decreased impact of Egyptian NGOs in society post 2011, the project aimed at working with groups of selected NGOs by providing training programs, capacity building and establishing alliances based on common interests (Collectivity Rather than Competition, FES). On their work strategy, the Head of the FES MENA department highlighted:

The way we work is by keeping the contact and dialogue with our partners intact; we agree together on the demand for certain projects, based on mutual interests and benefits [...]. Our imbedded and wide-spread networks, built over many years, are what differentiates us from other donor organizations and international organizations in Egypt (author’s interview, 10 January 2018).

Also, on 1-2 October 2017, the FES, in cooperation with the American University in Cairo (AUC) in their project *Access to Knowledge for Development Research Centre*, organized a regional conference in Cairo. This conference aimed at providing a platform for vital developmental initiatives, such as improving public transportation in the MENA and similar topics in the region (Amman, Beirut and Cairo), as well as capacitating them.

*5.1.2 Hopeful prospects.* The “Arab Spring” and the 25 January 2011 uprising raised expectations for rapid democratization in Egypt, especially among the GPFs and their local partners. Criticizing the German stance, a number of the German partners on the ground saw the rapidly starting “transformation partnerships” of the Federal Foreign Office (AA) as problematic. There were talks of “instant democratization” that reflected false assumptions about the speed of change (Faath *et al.*, 2013). The FES, and others, rushed to assumptions and unrealistic conclusions on the political developments in Egypt post 2011 uprising, especially amidst the political and social chaos that existed at the time, according to members of the German Development Institute (DIE)[1]. Due to their misjudgement and the rush towards untimely actions and projects, the FES needed to modify its stance to meet the political reality in Egypt post 2011 uprising. The FES responded quickly to the new political and social circumstances: Firstly, regional measures were reduced in 2011 to meet national challenges. Initially, the FES Cairo office focused on programs and activities in the country within 230 event days in the year 2011 alone, yet, later it had to extend this time frame. Moreover, as soon as summer 2011, the FES tried to hold training seminars with Egyptian independent trade unions, with about 1,000 trade union members taking part. However, the FES chose to delay those seminars, choosing to adapt to the instability of the political conditions and considering the “sensitivity” of the momentum. Nevertheless, the Egyptian press attacked the FES training program for independent trade unionists, calling it an “inadequate interference in internal affairs” (Hegasy, 2016). The FES responded wisely to the rapidly changing overall situation by undertaking a comprehensive internal evaluation



of project progresses, as well as adjusting projects' objectives. The assumptions about the potential of democracy assistance organizations in post-revolutionary Egypt proved to be rather rushed and presumptuous, not only for the FES. Anyhow, the FES tactfully chose to stall and slow down its projects and plans adjusting to the political reality post 2011; it is not surprising that the FES is the *only* GPFs in Egypt that still has *German* resident representatives in office.

Furthermore, the FES representative in Berlin made it clear that the role of the GPFs was not to bring about democratic development; this is the task of the Egyptian population. The central role and impact of the GPFs is to bring different people together, people with dissimilar mentalities and backgrounds, and facilitate dialogue, discussions and communication among them. "If we can create room for tolerance, mutual dialogue and open discussions, then we are creating social awareness, which in turn is a major pillar of democratic development" (author's interview, 13 September 2018). Diplomats at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that the FES chose to abide by the political framework given to them by the regime, which should have also been done by KAS and FNS. Instead, these latter GPFs opted to seize the momentum of the 2011 uprising by shining personally, such as the director of KAS, or by enticing opposition journalists in a very politically and socially unstable time in Egypt (author's interview, 15 November 2018).

### 5.2 Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS): *legal havoc*

Founded in 1955, and affiliated with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the KAS was first established as *Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education*. Later in 1964, the foundation took the name of Germany's first federal chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. KAS has been operating in Egypt for nearly 40 years; the first KAS employee was sent to Egypt in 1981. Throughout KAS Egypt fulfilled all of its legal obligations, regularly paying taxes and social security fees for its employees, and always granting its staff with official residency and work permits. The GPF has been cooperating with the following state institutions with *cooperation contracts* for nearly 10 years: The *Information and Decision Support Centre* (IDSC), one of the major think tanks of the Egyptian Cabinet; the *National Council for Youth* – several contracts have taken place, with the last one having ended in 2012; the *National Council for Women* (NCW); and the *Faculty for Economics and Political Science* (FEPS), Cairo University.

The trial and closing down of KAS Cairo Office had major ramifications on the work progress and future of KAS in Egypt. The Head of KAS MENA Department in Berlin expressed his frustration from the way the Egyptian authorities dealt with the legal dilemma, the unproven allegations and the forceful closing down of the Cairo office. This legal turmoil resulted in the halting and suspension of all KAS' projects, leaving its partners puzzled and confused.

The former resident representative of KAS Cairo explained that until 2011, KAS was involved in political consulting, and worked in partnership with relevant institutions such as the IDSC, the National Council for Youth, the National Council for Women and FEPS among others. Post 25 January 2011 uprising the two "politically active and high-profile" GPFs were KAS and FNS (author's interview, March 3, 2018). He emphasized that KAS has continued to work immediately after the 2011 uprising and saw a lot of potential for democratic development, and the will from various civil society actors to cooperate. One of the immediate initiatives by KAS was the *Tahrir Dialogue Project*, in collaboration with the American University in Cairo (AUC) and the Egyptian Foreign Ministry. In the framework of this project, several seminars and workshops on global

governance and other democracy-related topics have taken place and more financial means were requested from Germany to conduct further plans and projects (author's interview, 3 March 2018). The former Minister of Higher Education of Egypt commented that KAS has misjudged the whole political situation in Egypt post 2011:

They wanted to do too much, too soon! Not being realistic in their assumptions and outcomes, they initiated projects and workshops aiming at political mobilization of youth in a time of utmost political and social unrest and instability [...]. Political transitions are long, hard and complicated processes that should be handled carefully and tactfully (author's interview, 29 January 2015).

Noteworthy, KAS was one of the GPFs that were more visible and exposed to the Egyptian press and media; it tackled politically sensitive issues that were not exactly welcomed by the authorities (author's interview, February 8, 2018). In an interview with an Egyptian diplomat, he criticised KAS' "miscalculations" post 2011 and viewed that the resident representatives started to represent their personal views, "their personal interests took over" (author's interview, 5 April 2018). Likewise, the resident representative of HSS Cairo expressed that KAS was "not really a victim", as portrayed by its members and resident representatives. In his view, members of KAS wanted to make personal triumphs in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising: "they wanted to shine and seize the opportunity to their own advantage, perhaps for the purpose of being praised in their home country as defiant and 'heroic' international actors" (author's interview, 5 April 2018).

*5.2.1 Work areas: civic education.* One of the main spheres of involvement of KAS Egypt was the political and civic education of young people. A major partner for KAS has been the Faculty of Economics and Political Science (FEPS), Cairo University. It collaborated for more than 20 years with FEPS, conducting several programs and activities in the form of seminars, conferences, and workshops relating to different economic and political topics. Numerous workshops and seminars were conducted in 2010 between KAS and Cairo University. The former Minister of Higher Education in Egypt expressed that "in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, plans have been made for further collaborations and activities between FEPS and KAS; yet none have been enacted" (author's interview, 29 January 2015). He explained:

Sometimes the regime needs to halt certain activities and projects for the purpose of ensuring political stability and national security; at least for some time. This fact needed to be put in consideration by the GPFs in Egypt, who put their own agendas of activism post 2011 prior to Egypt's best interest at the time (author's interview, 29 January 2015).

Defending their stance, the Director of KAS in Berlin emphasized that their domestic partners and local civil society actors and organizations, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, were the ones that actually reached out to them and not the other way round (author's interview, 10 January 2018). According to Pridham, often during transitions of power, the domestic actors and players are the ones who demand the assistance and aid of external actors (Pridham, 1994). Nevertheless, despite the closeness of KAS to various Egyptian ministries, universities and its wide spread partnerships and networks, as soon as they approached "politically controversial issues" subjects and work areas, they were categorized as a threat to national security, said the MENA expert at the DIE (author's interview, 20 February 2018). He pointed out that KAS should have been more considerate to the political reality of Egypt and not rush to conclusions.

5.2.2 *Uncertain future.* The former Director of KAS voiced his opinion regarding the future of the GPFs in Egypt:

The GPFs can definitely continue to operate in Egypt; they need to work within the given restrictions and limitations [...]. Just like before (referring to the Mubarak era); however, in a more restrictive framework (author's interview, 3 March 2018).

He added that the "Additional Protocol of 2017"[2], which is the new legal framework of the work of the GPFs in Egypt, has proven a "more welcoming" approach from the Egyptian side to the situation of the GPFs (author's interview, 10 January 2018). Nonetheless, KAS team in Germany does not omit the possibility of re-opening the Cairo office in the future. However, as long as the verdicts are on and the legal case has not been resolved, KAS will not make any future plans regarding Egypt (author's interview, 10 January 2018). Questioning why KAS specifically was targeted among the GPFs in 2011, the Head of KAS in Berlin replied: "A good question! Probably because there needed to be a scapegoat to the 2011 uprising by the old guardians of the regime and foreign organizations happened to be valid ones" (author's interview, 10 January 2018). On the contrary, Egyptian diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not support this view. They regard the swift and untimely actions and voiced opinions of KAS' members as partly responsible for their demise (author's interview, 28 December 2018). Moreover, in an interview with the former Minister of Higher Education and other diplomats, it became clear that the "*Tahrir Dialogue Project*", was considered a form of defiance and resistance to the regime back then. Especially shortly after the eruption of the 2011 uprising, the political and social circumstances were very unstable and fragile, and this was not taken into account by the GPFs and other international actors. The GPFs wanted to seize the momentum of the political openness and social awareness that was happening" expressed by a member of the German Development Institute (DIE) (author's interview, 10 February 2018).

### 5.3 *Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS): closing down*

The FNS, founded in 1958, is the GPF related to the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) in Germany and Liberal International (LI). The FNS is regarded an agent of organized liberalism that promotes civic education, International Political Dialogue (IPD) and international political consultancy. The FNS MENA regional office was located in Cairo since 1982. The former FNS resident representative in Egypt highlighted the foundation's well-established relations and contacts to its local partners; governmental institutions, such as the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) and Cairo University, as well as non-governmental organizations, such as the Cairo Liberal Forum (author's interview, 14 March 2018). Before it closed down in 2016, the FNS Cairo office conducted numerous activities in the field of media training, conducting workshops for journalists and writers on freedom of media, publishing and journalism. The FNS also cooperated with its long-time partner the *Egyptian Radio and Television Union* (ERTU) on conducting training workshops for journalists and reporters. In 2011, the German *Zeit Online* highlighted the contribution of the GPFs in Egypt, and how they contributed to the social media movement in December 2010 with seminars on the use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which triumphed in Cairo's Tahrir Square. The GPFs spoke with the imams of the Grand Mosques about human rights; they also trained journalists and presented party structures. Moreover, they have discussed with women about domestic violence, divorce, female quotas and veils etc. (Lau, 2011).

However, in 2014 a turn of events took place that altered the situation and status of the FNS in Egypt. The FNS resident representative at the time explained that most of the Egyptian partners took their distance and refused to continue certain projects and activities;

“they were most probably given certain instructions by the Egyptian authorities and the secret service,” he said (author’s interview, 11 January 2018). After two years of consideration, from 2014 to 2016, the FNS team in Egypt and Germany came to the hard decision of relocating their regional office to Amman in 2016. According to the Head of FNS in Potsdam, the main reasons behind the closing down of the FNS Cairo office were as follows: Firstly, the “debilitating” and politically restrictive circumstances, in addition to the legal limitations posed by the Egyptian regime on the GPFs and other foreign organizations. Secondly, Egyptian long-time partners of the FNS have stopped collaborating and interacting with them; hence, projects have been stalled or unfinished.

However, a diplomat at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the “incorrect” stance of the FNS, especially as a liberal political foundation, which stood totally *against* the popular rejection of the rule of former President Mohamed Morsi and his removal of office (author’s interview, 15 November 2018). Not negating the fact that President Morsi legitimately came to power; yet, his reign was immensely rejected by the masses, which demanded his step down and supported his removal by military President Abdel Fattah El Sisi in 2014. Likewise, political science professors at FEPS pointed out that the FNS in their conferences and seminars posed obvious resistance to President El Sisi’s regime and how the SCAF mishandled former President Morsi and his supporters during the Rabaa sit-ins, held in Cairo’s Rabaa Square[3], in August 2013. In an interview with an Egyptian diplomat, he stated that the FNS, as a political foundation that advocates freedom and liberalism, could have shown its support to the free will of the masses and their demands (author’s interview, 15 November 2018). The German Bertelsmann Stiftung[4] in its *Egypt Country Report 2018* stated “the work of President Morsi between July 2012 and July 2013 showed some ambitious efforts but failed last not least because of poor mediation (BTI Egypt Country Report, 2018).

*5.3.1 Cairo liberal forum.* The Cairo Liberal Forum (CLF), founded 2009, is a non-profit NGO working to spread and publish the ideals and values of individual liberty, free market and minimum state intervention in Egypt. The CLF is a civil organization that seeks to spread liberal values and culture among the Egyptian youth. The FNS has been providing a lot of technical assistance, training, seminars and workshops to the members of the CLF, as well as support and assistance for publishing their work and articles. The former resident representative of FNS Cairo expressed his positive outlook for the Cairo Liberal Forum, which the FNS assisted and supported. Luckily, the NGO is registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, which is considered a success in itself. He pointed out that the Liberal Forum and others requested to cooperate with the FNS, and asked to give trainings, consultations, debates, etc. (author’s interview, 14 March 2018).

*5.3.2 Views and standpoints.* The FNS team in Germany emphasized the difficulty of conducting operations for Egypt through the Amman office; for projects to be implemented properly there needs to be a representation office with a full-time staff that executes the projects and follows up on work progress. Anyhow, they do not see a point in continuing the work that has been implemented in Egypt under the current regime, since any activities relating to political parties, civil society or human rights groups, women’s rights, or religious freedoms will not be permitted.

Nevertheless, in conversation with an Egyptian diplomat, it became clear that the FNS did not realize that in times of political transitions and social instability the regime needs to tighten its grip and gain control of the situation. He explained “it is the right of any host country to protect itself in times of political turbulence and instability, especially in the exceptional period post 2011 uprising (author’s interview, 15 November 2018). He also highlighted that Egypt, as a vast country with utmost political and strategic importance in

the region, needs to take its precautions and be very careful or else political chaos could be detrimental on so many levels.

#### 5.4 Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSS): neutral status

Founded in 1966, much later than the other political foundations in Germany, the HSS has the legal status of a registered association. The HSS is affiliated with the Bavarian political party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian counterpart party of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The HSS headquarters is in Munich, the capital of the regional state of Bavaria. Similar to the other GPFs, the HSS focuses on civic and political education, focusing on the relationship between the citizens and the state, as well as social responsibility and solidarity. The HSS operates 102 projects (including regional projects) in 64 countries worldwide, conducting over 5,000 seminars with more than 200 thousand participants (Annual Report HSS, 2016). The HSS has a representative office in Egypt since 1978, with several projects and activities conducted in various fields. Main partners of the HSS in Egypt include: Cairo University, Public Administration Research and Consultation Centre (PARC), training centres, and registered NGOs and experienced experts in the different project areas (our work in Egypt, HSS).

In Egypt, the HSS aimed at having a *neutral status*; it does not pursue any “direct” political activity that relates to controversial political issues or pose confrontations with the authorities, according to the HSS representative in Munich (author’s interview, 24 January 2018). In the words of the Head of HSS MENA Department: “Indirect political intervention can be achieved through educational training, civil education and projects relating to decentralization; no political involvement and neutrality has been its strategy for survival” (author’s interview, 24 January 2018). However, the HSS resident representative in Egypt explained that in spite of the stable legal status of the HSS and its apolitical stance and well-established relations to governmental institutions, still it has not been easy to operate in Egypt post 2011 (author’s interview, 5 April 2018). From 2015 till 2017 no projects have been conducted to the exceptional political situation, the legal dilemma of KAS, and the new laws and regulations restricting civil society organizations. Consequently, a minimal staff of Egyptians has occupied the HSS office in Cairo, with no German resident representatives.

*5.4.1 State information service/Nile Centers.* The HSS collaborated with its long-time governmental partner, the State Ministry of Information (SIS) that operates media and foreign press in Egypt, to conduct a wide-ranging program with the objective of supporting and endorsing the initiatives of local communities in the various governorates around Egypt. The *Nile Centers Project for Information, Education and Training* started in 2011 and ended in 2015. Up to 30 Nile Centers were established around Egypt with the aim of civic education of governmental staff and other social actors, especially in the fields of decentralization and public administration. Since the beginning of 2017, further projects and collaborations have been planned between the HSS and the SIS; however, none has been authorized yet. The *Nile Centers Project* aims at training different groups of people to interact and cooperate to solve their issues and problems on a more decentralized level. The participants in this project are predominantly governmental employees, selected by the SIS to receive proper training courses and participate in workshops (author’s interview, 24 January 2018). Before the collaboration between the SIS and the HSS took place, the government agency was clear about the HSS *not* involving in politically controversial issues, and abiding by the contents agreed upon. Believing in the benefits of the project, which aims to solve local problems using local potentials, the representative of the HSS Cairo stated:



The HSS *Nile Centers Project for Education*, with the collaboration of the SIS, signifies the *possibility* of partnership between the government and members of civil society [...]. The government together with active civil society members is trying to tackle local problems and crucial issues affecting the Egyptian people [...] (author's interview, 5 April 2018).

*5.4.2 Optimistic outlook.* After the ratification of the Additional Protocol in 2017, the HSS intends to resume its projects and activities in Egypt. According to the Head of the HSS MENA Department an upcoming project of the HSS has been planned in collaboration with Cairo University. The project entails the training of students, in the form of workshops and seminars for the job market and enabling them to find a way for achieving career goals. However, the project approval has not been taken yet from the Egyptian authorities. According to the resident representative of HSS Egypt, by coping and adapting to the political reality post 2011 uprising, the HSS was able to preserve its office, especially during the turbulent years 2015 till 2017. The HSS recognizes the limits of political interference in politically dynamic host countries, such as Egypt. "We were able to resume our work after the 2011 uprising, under the subject of public participation", said the Director of the HSS Cairo Office (author's interview, 5 April 2018).

Nevertheless, the HSS has been scrutinized by members of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)[5] in Berlin for collaborating primarily with governmental agencies and institutions; thus, making the government their primary beneficiaries and not civil society groups and actors. In defence, the Head of the HSS in Munich pointed to the difficulty of working with NGOs in Egypt, the "New NGO Law" has made it very difficult for foreign organizations to cooperate with NGOs (author's interview, 24 January 2018).

The head of the HSS MENA Department does not disregard the critics of the SWP; however, he views the HSS' existence and connection to Egypt as valuable and does not want to take the easy way and leave. The Head of HSS MENA Department in Munich emphasized that "one needs to remain optimistic and try to find ways of coping and adapting; otherwise, the GPFs will vanish from all the politically difficult host countries" (author's interview, 24 January 2018).

## 6. Additional protocol 2017: progression

Due to the legal dilemma of KAS in 2011, intensive diplomatic dialogue and formal negotiations between the Foreign Ministries of Germany and Egypt took place. Consequently, the Egyptian authorities issued in March 2017 an *Additional Protocol* to the regulation of the legal framework and status of the GPFs in Egypt; signed at Federal Foreign Office in Berlin ([Federal Foreign Office, 2017](#)). The Additional Protocol of 2017 is considered an amendment to the Cultural Agreement of 1960, which outlined the status and nature of the work of the GPFs in Egypt. The Additional Protocol of 2017 was ratified by the Egyptian parliament in July 2017 and entered into effect in November by Presidential Decree 267/2017.

Views and perspectives regarding the Additional Protocol have differed, both in Egypt and Germany. On the governmental side, the Federal Foreign Office (AA) of Germany pointed out that the Additional Protocol provides the GPFs with "a special status". In relation to the KAS legal dilemma, the AA regards the Additional Protocol as "a first step towards finding a solution" ([Federal Foreign Office, 2017](#)). As put forward by the resident representative of the FES in Cairo, "the positive thing about the Additional Protocol is that it provides a legal framework and a security status for the representatives of the GPFs in Egypt" (author's interview, 13 September 2018).



Nevertheless, there is scepticism towards the “actual” application of the protocol, in the sense that “it puts even more restrictions on the fields of activities and the areas of work of the GPFs” (author’s interview, 11 January 2018). The former Head of the FNS Cairo was critical of this protocol and believed that even after its enforcement the GPFs “will still be unable to work in Egypt” (Brady, 2018). He told Germany’s international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) that the agreement, as opposed to political assistance work, refers solely to the scientific and cultural domains as work fields for the GPFs; “whether we can work in economic affairs remains to be seen” (Brady, 2018). On a constructive note, the Head of the HSS MENA Department in Munich clarified that after the ratification of the Additional Protocol, the foundation intends to resume its activities in Egypt: “The Additional Protocol is regarded a positive step towards rekindling the work and activities of the HSS. We have to remain optimistic” (author’s interview, 24 January 2018). At the Deutsche Welle (DW) in Bonn, MENA correspondents regarded the Additional Protocol “a tool to keep the connection to Germany going” (author’s interview, 21 February 2018).

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the fact that so far in academia the international dimension to democratic transitions has been marginalized (especially in the MENA) in comparison to domestic forces, still some scholars emphasize the effects of international variables on processes of regime change (Whitehead, 1996). Members of the SWP in Berlin viewed that the decreasing freedoms and restrictive political environment in Egypt has incapacitated the GPFs of becoming viable international actors in the development of an active civil society in Egypt (Roll and Brozus, 2017).

Nonetheless, this paper came to the following conclusions: Firstly, the capacity and ability of the GPFs to work in Egypt post 2011 uprising was restricted and discontinued due to the deteriorating political conditions. Secondly, the “new” political variables, including the laws, restrictions, and the allegations and closure of KAS and the relocation of the FNS to Amman, posed negative repercussions on the role of international actors in supporting democratic political transitions in Egypt. Thirdly, the line of political events resulted in the division of the four operating GPFs in Egypt post 2011. On the one end, KAS faced legal trial and permanent closure in 2011, while the FNS was pushed into relocating its regional Cairo office to Amman in 2016. On the other end, the FES and the HSS are still trying to cope and continue their work within the existing political context. Lastly, the miscalculations and malfunctions of the GPFs themselves was a crucial and intervening variable in their failure in the area of democracy assistance post 2011 uprising. In particular, KAS and FNS, wanted to seize the momentum of the political openness that was happening, especially shortly after the eruption of the 2011 uprising, as expressed by a member of the DIE (author’s interview, 10 February 2018).

Nevertheless, professors at Cairo University and other experts in the field, who collaborated with the GPFs on several occasions, regard the GPFs only way of survival is to work within the given legal and political framework in their host countries. Despite all the restrictions and limitations on their work, the continuation of the two surviving GPFs (FES and HSS) is favourable and beneficial. The respondents view that the GPFs’ long legacy in Egypt has made them trustworthy and reliable partners. However, the GPFs’ international work is *not* void of disputes and controversy. On the one hand, they are criticized by the SWP for their lack of political activism in the MENA region; by that not being true to their core mission and role as international actors of democracy assistance. On the other hand, they are criticized for prioritizing their own views, assumptions and expectations that do not correspond to the political reality of Egypt.

To conclude, taken the dominant narrative that “Western democracy assistance is necessary, but not sufficient for democratic transitions abroad” (Carapico, 2014), the paper deducts that the political circumstances and the restrictive regime, in addition to the GPFs’ own miscalculations and unrealistic assumptions, led to the inability of the GPFs to work in the area of democratic development in Egypt post 25 January 2011 uprising. Still, the GPFs, as independent international actors of democracy development, are equipped with a sound basis for continuation and persistence as capable and adjustable foreign actors. The challenge remains to be seen if the GPFs are able to effectually operate, adapt, and restructure their work objectives, tactics and purposes in the context of Egypt’s existing political framework in the near future.

### Notes

1. The German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) is one of the leading think tanks for global development and international co-operation worldwide.
2. For more details see Section 6 of this paper.
3. In August 2013, supporters of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi held sit-ins in Cairo’s Rabaa Square, demanding the return of the elected President, who was removed by President Abdel Fattah El Sisi.
4. The Bertelsmann Stiftung, founded in 1977, is a German independent foundation under private law.
5. The German Institute for International and Security Affairs/Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), founded in 1962, is a major European think tank in international relations with an advisory role on issues relating to foreign affairs and security policies.

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