THE THIRD POWER IN LEBANON, CASE STUDY, ORGANIZATION OF THE FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

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**Introduction:**

On occasion, the most striking evidence of power and influence is the invisibility of its source.  In the contemporary international system, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have widely spread and have come to play a significant role in national and international politics and have appeared to be important actors in the globalization process.  How does development assistance contribute to peace building? Do projects consider the local conflict settings and are they designed accordingly?  What is the role and objective of a foundation’s activities in a given state? Is the assistance released a mere act of charity or a value-oriented one?  In view of growing international involvement in post-conflict societies, these questions have become increasingly important to deal with.  In addition, these questions have emerged in light of globalization, a process by which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite different parts of the globe.

NGOs merged in the globalization process and came to complement and compete with the role of the state nationally and internationally.  This paper assesses the role of NGOs in the international system focusing on the mechanism and objectives of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in Lebanon.  It further addresses the origin of this foundation and the corresponding programs it implements.  It is a unique foundation, however, little is known regarding how it is set up, how it operates, and what are its underlying objectives.

FES, like other German Party Foundations, is formally a non-state actor, yet state funded and associated with a particular political party:  The Social Democratic Party.  Ultimately, FES is considered a reliable instrument of German foreign policy.[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1%22%20%5Co%20%22)  However, this paper assesses its relation with the Social Democratic party and asserts that the foundation’s programs and activities cope with the party’s ideological aspirations.

**The Growing Role of NGOs:**

“International Organizations have come to play a growing role in formulating international policy.  IGOs provide frameworks within which governments can achieve agreements about elements of international public policy.”[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn2%22%20%5Co%20%22)  The explosive growth of NGOs is one of the most striking phenomena of contemporary international relations.  Jacobson states how NGOs have spread:  “The pattern of their growth can be seen through a few selected figures.  In 1850 there were only five INGOs.  By 1914 this number has risen to about 330, and by 1938 to about 730.  In 1980 there were almost 6000 INGOs.”[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn3%22%20%5Co%20%22)  We may conclude that the more conflicts erupted between states, the more INGOs emerged, and the more states became interdependent the more they searched for means of interaction.

NGO’s influence on the state politics seems to have steadily grown.  Analysts such as Jelica Minic argue that the phenomenon of non-governmental organizations could be understood as “association revolution,” because these entities had created a new space for political participation with the “traditional apparatus of the state (e.g. parties, unions of employees and trade unions)”[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn4%22%20%5Co%20%22)  Thus NGOs play a new role in the policy making process as well as interest groups and individuals because they cooperate or compete in the public arena with other social actors.  In this regard, Jacobson mentioned that the influence of these organizations on the state should not be underestimated.  In many cases NGOs representatives are registered lobbyists.  This means in his point of view that: […] “Those familiar with governments well know, lobbying activities are not confined to those who are registered.  Thus the fact that only a fraction of the total number of INGOs, have consultative relationships with IGOs does not mean that the number of INGOs that engage in activities having immediate political consequences is this limited, nor does it mean that the representatives of INGOs are IGOs’ only lobbyist.”[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn5%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Thus, we assert that beside the role of states in international politics, non-state actors do have a major role in this process (within and outside the state).  NGOs have to deal with the state in order to crystallize their goals as well as it is in the interest of the state to negotiate with these organizations in order to secure, improve and expand the power of the state.  Moreover, NGOs were seen by the people they work for as fair bodies to manage their concerns and preferences, to help them organize and amplify their voices, thus given the opportunity to the less favorable strata of the society to participate in domestic issues.[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn6%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**History and Origin of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung:**

The FES was founded in 1925 as a political legacy of Germany’s first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert.  Friedrich Ebert, a Social Democrat of working class background proposed the establishment of a foundation aiming at (a) furthering political and social education in the spirit of democracy and pluralism, (b) facilitating University access and research by gifted young people through scholarships; (c) contributing to international understanding and co-operation.[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn7%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The FES, banned by the Nazi Regime in 1933 and reestablished after World War II in 1947, continues to pursue these aims in all its extensive activities in Germany and around the world.  FES promotes international peace and understanding among peoples, as well as democracy, social and labor rights, independent media and the recognition of human rights.

In Asia, FES has been contributing to peaceful, just and stable development for almost 40 years.  Over the years, FES has been working to expand the understanding between Asia, Germany and subsequently Europe, reflecting the fact that global, regional and local political and social issues are closely interrelated.  The focus of FES has been the promotion of democratic development and the social dimensions of economic development.  Since the 1990’s, FES has emphasized international dialogue on issues related to international crisis prevention.

FES is a German party foundation; as such it is an institution or NGO established by a party – the Social Democratic – to serve its interests and meet its objectives.  The reasons why Germany developed the system of party foundations as channels for overseas political funding are too complex for this paper to explore.  But it may be stated that Germany has a long tradition of foreign political payments.  Moreover, it is a broader German practice to pay non-governmental organizations to carry out governmental functions in the domestic and foreign fields.  “The German party foundations are unique: formally non-state actors in international politics, they are nevertheless state-funded and, while associated with particular political parties, they serve as agents of German foreign policy.”[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn8%22%20%5Co%20%22)

These Foundations’ activities may involve long-term or medium-term projects to promote trade unions or other elements of civil society; it may also involve shorter-term activities such as finance for electoral registration or for election observer missions.  “Sometimes the intention is to assist a foreign political party or ideological tendency, or simply to promote contacts and influence among important elites.”[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn9%22%20%5Co%20%22)

German political foundations belong to the group of  “transnational actors that evoke interest because although they operate independently of the federal government, they are tied to their respective parties and therefore enjoy excellent contacts to elites and opposition groups in many parts of the world. […] German foundations have, in many ways, anticipated the organizational modus operandi in the age of globalization.”[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn10%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The German party foundations’ overseas work is partly open, partly concealed.  Foundation representatives do not hide their identities or their office addresses, many of their activities and projects are publicized, and each foundation issues a fairly detailed annual report in which a number of projects are identified and described.  However, full project lists have never been published, nor have the amounts spent on each project been revealed.  The reason for this discretion is that some projects are considered ‘sensitive’.

Annual federal funding for German political foundations is determined each year by the German Parliament’s budget committee.  The overall allowance as well as the project-specific grants are passed along with the annual budget.  The allocation of the total funds is proportional to the party representation in Parliament.  In 2004, FES received 33.75 percent and had projects in at least 100 countries.[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn11%22%20%5Co%20%22)  While the federal government is the largest source of foundation funds, additional support comes from the federal states, the European Union, and other cooperating partners.  The latter provide approximately 10 percent of the total income for the political foundations.[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn12%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**The Social Democratic Party and its Ideology:**

The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) is the oldest political party of Germany.  Rooted in the worker’s movement, it formerly was more explicitly socialist; more recently, under Gerhard Schröder’s lead, it has adopted a few tenets of neo-liberalism while remaining committed to social welfare.[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn13%22%20%5Co%20%22)  It advocates the modernization of the economy to meet the demands of globalization, but it also stresses the social needs of workers and society’s disadvantaged.[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn14%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Social Democracy is a political ideology that emerged in the late 19th century out of the socialist movement.  Unlike socialism in the Marxist sense, which aims to replace the capitalist system entirely, social democracy aimed to reform capitalism in order to remove its perceived injustices.[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn15%22%20%5Co%20%22)  The 20th century did witness a struggle between democracy and its enemies and the market and its alternatives.  But it is only a partial truth, because it overlooks a crucial point: democracy and capitalism were historically at odds.  An indispensable element of their joint history, therefore, was the discovery of some way for them to coexist.  In practice, that turned out to mean a willingness to use political power to protect citizens from the damages of untrammeled markets.  The ideology that triumphed then was social democracy.  Sheri Berman, a professor of Political Science, emphasized that: “correctly understood, social democracy is far more than a political program.  Nor is it a compromise between Marxism and Liberalism.  Instead, social democracy, […] represented a full-fledged alternative to both Marxism and Liberalism that had at its core a distinctive belief in the primacy of politics and communitarianism.”[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn16%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Contemporary social democracy is attempting to respond to the neo-liberal global agenda whose main objective appears to be the deepening of market-oriented development.  The 1990s, were marked by the magical return of social democracy.  Therefore, electoral victories led to the return to power of social democratic parties in various European countries especially in the United Kingdom and Germany with Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder respectively both advocates of social democracy.

The social democratic response to the neo-liberal global agenda centers around the establishment of global governance institutions.  Held’s ideas about governance are founded upon the concept of cosmopolitan democracy, which “is a way of seeking to strengthen democracy ‘within’ communities and civil associations by elaborating and reinforcing democracy from ‘outside’ through a network of regional and international agencies and assemblies that cut across spatially delimited locales.”[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn17%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Prime Minister Tony Blair and Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder expressed in several key documents, that globalization is a new reality to which social democracy would need to adjust.  According to Schröder, globalization is not an option, it is a reality.  It holds risks and anxieties, but it also opens up enormous possibilities.[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn18%22%20%5Co%20%22)  Blair stressed that the main challenge for social democracy would be to engage fully with the implications of economic and social changes, the most important of which are: the growth of increasingly global markets and culture, technological advance and the rise of skills and information as the key drivers of employment and new industries, a transformation in the role of women, and radical changes in the nature of politics.  According to Blair, the response to these changes should be informed by four values: equal worth, opportunity for all, responsibility and community (core values of social democracy).[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn19%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Social democrats view society as equal to the sum of its parts.  In other words, society is what people make of it.  People are social beings, and society is where people achieve their fullest potential.  Society is a place where all people are equal.  Greater equality, stronger bonds of community, are things which social democrats see as important changes.  However, change is gradual.  Social democrats share common values: cooperation, strong sense of community, equality, freedom, and social justice.  They embrace a foreign policy supporting the promotion of democracy, the protection of human rights, and effective multilateralism.

**FES in Lebanon:**

Underlying the basic ideological concepts social democrats embrace, the following is an attempt to highlight how FES, through its activities in Lebanon, promotes these concepts.

The office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Lebanon was established in 1968, maintained its work during the civil war (1975-1990) and continues to operate up to this point in time.  On their web page, they declare that FES Lebanon is dedicated to develop and strengthen democratic structures and processes at the political and social level by means of consulting, training and advanced training courses, as well as providing information and resources.  Special attention is paid to the integration of civil society in the context of a local, regional and international socio-political dialogue.  Furthermore, the FES aims at implementing the principles of good governance, and improve the work and rights of trade unions.

Concerned about the integration of women and youth in political decision-making processes, FES emphasizes the organization and support of gender and youth-projects.  FES also focuses on contributing to the development of socio-economic policies and improving environmental awareness.

The methods FES uses to implement its activities in Lebanon vary between organizing conferences, seminars, workshops, training courses, supporting research projects and publications.  FES also works through financing short-term experts as well as visiting and consulting programs.  The creation of political confidence with partners is characteristic of the work of FES.  Partners of FES are typically politically oriented groups and institutions of the civil society such as political parties, trade unions, foundations, associations, women and human rights organizations and media, but also governmental institutions in need of reform.  Furthermore, their activities aim at strengthening relations between representatives and members of other regional, and international organizations.

FES uses a set of instruments in order to plan, control and evaluate its programs:

* The external framework is set by the standards for cooperation of the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ):  The FES develops medium term project proposals, defining overall objectives and core issues of programs.  Every year, a detailed planning is elaborated, using a planning method derived from the “Logical Framework”, which contains project objectives, indicators, activities and budgets.  On this basis, annual progress reports, which also contain information on the political development in the partner country are presented to the ministry (and to broader, political interested public).  At the end of a project, a final report about the use of the funds is produced.
* The funding governmental institutions demand regular external evaluations of the FES programs by independent experts, by the ministry (BMZ) or the FES itself.  These evaluations are elaborated by country, by project or by subject.
* The internal quality management – coordinated by a specific department within the FES head office – includes the elaboration of long-term country concepts as a framework for project planning and improvement of internal competences for key subjects relevant for all FES programs.  An important field of activity is the regular training of staff in quality management instruments, as well as the continuous development of new methods and instruments.[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn20%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The following will shed light on their actual programs and activities according to principles derived from basic social democratic beliefs.

**a. Democracy and Good Governance:**

During the last couple of years, FES mainly focused on the cooperation with municipalities throughout the country.  In the run-up for municipal elections 2004, FES supported mainly women and youth organizations that are struggling for a higher degree of representation and influence in municipal elections.  FES asserts that they were able to contribute to the increase of elected women from 139 in 1998 to 230 in 2004.  They further enhanced the actual role and performance of municipalities all over Lebanon.  This was a project aiming at helping elected municipal boards assess their needs and develop projects with the participation of local representatives to better govern and serve their community.  FES focused on the integration of Lebanese youth in the work of local NGOs.  In addition, FES contributed to local development by means of instruction and advanced training for employees in municipal administrations within the field of municipal law, integration of civil society in municipal politics, gender and good governance.[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn21%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**b.  Dialogue:**

On their web page, FES observed that Lebanon is characterized by social and sectarian conflicts, the intervention of foreign powers and the presence of Palestinian refugees.  They added that coexistence of some 18 different religious groups remains a challenging task.  Ultimately, FES considers that dialogue projects with civil society contribute to peaceful coexistence in the post-war years.  They added that a continuous dialogue between civil society actors had a great impact on the achievements of the year 2005.  Hence, FES recommends establishing intensified dialogue between confessional and political groups, not only due to the ever-increasing complex situation in Lebanon itself, but also in the region.  FES confirms that Lebanon needs regional and international integration through socio-political dialogue programs in order to redefine its political role in regional and international affairs in the context of socio-political and economic globalization.  Therefore, FES promotes the cooperation of civil society activists, with special reference to the young generation, in a socio-political dialogue on local, regional and international levels.  This involves explicit support for the exchange between Lebanese and German and/or other European civil society members on topics such as current socio-political developments, including environmental and gender issues, and the development of conflict resolution strategies.[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn22%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**c.  Trade Union Rights:**

FES summarizes the history of trade unions in Lebanon, assesses their socio-political situation, and therefore sets programs and objectives to help in the field:

The Lebanese Trade Unions were established in the 1920s. Unlike trade unions in other Arab countries, they have ever since been relatively free, democratic and independent. In the beginning of the 1970s the CGTL (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs au Liban) was founded as an umbrella organisation, embracing 18 trade union associations. During the civil war however, the CGTL was the sole social and political organization representing all confessional groups as well as all political currents. Hence, the CGTL became a symbol of the country's unity. But like all other public organizations in Lebanon, the CGTL at some point developed into a playground of power struggles along sectarian lines.
 When new trade unions were authorized in the 1980s and 90s the CGTL eventually turned out to be a toy of domestic politicians. Although the CGTL used to be a symbol of unity during the Civil War, the struggle for power of its president in the 1990s transformed the entire organization into a post-war theatre for battles yet unresolved. Long overdue organizational reforms have been postponed, strikes failed to bring along solutions, and the once powerful umbrella association lost its influence. Those unions with the largest memberships - in total ten out of the twelve unions, which are members in the ICTFU - opposed the former CGTL president and were eagerly trying to establish new majorities.  During the past years party-political and personal conflicts continued to hinder the work of the umbrella organization.
 The FES was involved in a promising mediation attempt between the umbrella association and the trade union associations at the end of 2003. Therefore the FES is keen on promoting reform initiatives. But the cooperation poses its challenges, and despite several serious attempts during the past two years, the umbrella organisation did not manage to regain its role as a powerful socio-political actor. Against this background, the FES further concentrates on advanced training of different trade union associations in cooperation with the independent Lebanese Trade Union Training Centre (LTUTC), which was created in 2001 with assistance of the FES in the course of the EU-MEDA Democracy Project. In 2005 the trade union activities focused particularly on gender issues and supported the cooperation of youth in trade union associations. This approach is aimed at being strengthened throughout 2006. Furthermore the FES attempts to integrate the umbrella association in the current civil society discussion.[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn23%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**Conclusion:**

German Party foundations are tied to their respective parties in terms of content and to some extent in terms of organization.  Their mission, however, is to fulfil a non-partisan, socio political good.  In addition, it is legitimate for the foundations to commit their work to the ideas and basic values to their respective political parties.

FES is no exception.  The main aspects of influence of the Social Democratic Party on Friedrich Ebert Stiftung can be summarized in policy, funding, and exchange of expertise.  FES gears its activities worldwide towards promoting policies and basic values of social democracy.  “Social democratic politics are based on firm fundamental values which give orientation and which have still lost nothing of their validity.  Freedom, justice and solidarity form the foundations, although they must be constantly redesigned in accordance with the conditions of the times.”[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn24%22%20%5Co%20%22)   Funds are mainly derived from the party or the German government, which may be representing the social democratic party.  After all,  “political aid aims to exercise a direct influence on the working of politics within a foreign country.”[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn25%22%20%5Co%20%22)  Experts relate to ideas they strongly believe in.  At the beginning of the 21st century, three principles form the core of the social democratic program: opening up chances, promoting self-initiative and organizing social cohesion.  Individuals strive to acquire them longing for security and perspective.

Finally, as discussions continue about democracy, good governance, accountability, equality, and social justice, it becomes increasingly clear that NGOs have a vital role to play.  Globalization has created both cross-border issues that NGOs address and cross-border communities of interest that NGOs represent.  National governments cannot do either task as effectively or as legitimately.  In the globalizing world of the twenty-first century, NGOs will have a growing international calling.

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[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref4%22%20%5Co%20%22) Minic, Jelica. “Relations between NGOs and Governments.” The Management Center, Belgrade, 1999 18/05/07 at <http://www.management.org.yu/minic.php>

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**القوة الثالثة في لبنان، دراسة منظمة فريديريك إيبرت ستيفتونغ**

تضطلع المنظمات غير الحكومية بدور بارز في النظام الدولي المعاصر، وتؤثر في السياسة الدولية بشكل واضح، وتؤدي دورًا ملحوظًا في السياسة وبنائها، وتتهيَّأ لتكون صاحبة الدور الأكثر فعالية في ضوء حالة العولمة المتنامية.

وتتقدم المنظمات غير الحكومية في دورها لتشارك الهيئات والدوائر الرسمية في أعمالها، على المستويات الوطنية والدولية على حد سواء.

إن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو الإضاءة على الدور الذي تؤديه هذه المنظمات غير الحكومية في النظام الدولي والأهداف التي ترنو إليها من وراء ذلك واحدة من هذه المنظمات وهي منظمة فريديريك إيبرت ستيفتونغ في لبنان، وعلاقات هذه المنظمة مع الحزب الديمقراطي الإجتماعي.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/third-power-lebanon-case-study-organization-friedrich-ebert-stiftung#sthash.4o2Lvbkw.dpuf