

Furthering Pluralism? The German Foundations in Transitional Tunisia

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Abstract This article examines the widely held assumption that Germany’s political foundations pursue distinctively partisan approaches that promise to be advantageous with regard to the furtherance of pluralist civil societies abroad. It reviews this assumption through a qualitative analysis of their partnerships in transitional Tunisia, following a comparison between the German foundations and other Western agencies. It exposes a common secular bias in Western civil society support and qualifies the assumption that the partisan approaches lead easily to pluralist civil society support. While the foundations partner with rather diverse organizations, they still favor organizations that follow Western lines, and their civil society support practices display interest in the furtherance of both pluralism and democratic stability promising corporatism.

Keywords Democracy assistance · Civil society aid · Political foundations · Pluralism · Germany · Tunisia

Introduction

The academic debate on the role of Western aid agencies, NGOs, and state-sponsored foundations in democracy assistance has become increasingly critical. It is beyond question that these agencies form an important part of a transnational network which seeks to further the democratization or the consolidation of young democracies through the use of tech-

nical, financial, and symbolic instruments (Scott 1999). While states and multilateral organizations remain the most important funders of democracy assistance, democracy-related monitoring and the design and implementation of projects are often the tasks of agencies that possess the respective expertise. However, at a general level, some scholars argue that the professionalization of democracy assistance since the 1990s resulted in a “taming” of democracy assistance (Bush 2015) that reinforced a liberal or even technocratic bias among the entrusted democracy assistance agencies (Carapico 2014, p. 4; Ottaway and Carothers 2000a, b). Accordingly, Western agencies design too tame projects with too ambitious goals and focus too much on civil society support in the target societies (Mitchell 2016). Local civil society organization ought to further democratization and accountable governments but can often do little in the face of reform-resistant elites.

The literature that deals specifically with civil society support within democracy assistance does not necessarily share the criticism of the new focus on civil society. Many conceive of a lively civil society as a corrective to political power, school for democracy, or necessary part of a lasting democracy. American liberalism equates pluralism with the existence of competing groups, which enable citizen participation and check as well as advise governments (Dahl 1982, p. 83; Mitchell 2016, p. 117). This definition informs much of Western democracy assistance (Ottaway and Carothers 2000a, p. 7) and has resulted in the funding of civil society organizations that mirror Western professional NGOs focusing on democracy-related themes such as human rights awareness, democratic education, or women’s rights (Stacey and Aksartova 2001, p. 395).

Still, there is criticism of how Western agencies support civil society abroad (Ashkanian 2007; Beichelt et al. 2014; Jamal 2012). Many Western agencies or international organizations, including the United Nations Democracy

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Fund (UNDEF), whose mandate explains a focus on civil society, the European Union (EU), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), tend to work with professional NGOs or conceive of the professionalization of their partners through cooperation as a primary aim. As the critics point out, this often results in the creation of short-lived and donor-dependent NGOs (Ottaway and Carothers 2000a, p. 304). At worst, new social divides between elitist NGOs and grassroots movements in the target societies are created (Challand 2005; Jamal 2012, p. 4). Here civil society support failures are part of the explanation for why assistance has not enabled enduring democratization, and the furtherance of indigenous social pluralism is the standard against which civil society support is evaluated. Pluralist civil societies encompass not only NGOs but a variety of groups, including social movements, trade unions, religious organizations, and professional (or vocational) associations, and they allow broad citizen activism.

The donor organizations that diverge from this pattern are, as are most often mentioned, the German (political) foundations (Philipps 1999; Worschech 2018, p. 204; 242). The term “German foundation” serves as a synonym for Germany’s political and state-sponsored foundations, which are best classified as quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations, and they have a curious standing in the academic literature on democracy assistance and civil society support (Quigley 1997, p. 26). Scholars and practitioners often praise the foundations as the founders of the first democracy assistance/civil society support practices in the 1960s (Rich 2017, p. 35), and even otherwise critical theorists sympathize with their political character and social democratic orientation (Philipps 1999). On the other hand, the literature on the foundations’ democracy assistance is often either encyclopedic, self-sponsored, or eclectic in the sense that the foundations are only mentioned in specific democracy assistance debates. It is still safe to say that the German foundations have received limited academic treatment.

Hence, there are only indications that the German foundations’ conduct diverges from the other donors’ patterns for the benefit of the furtherance of lasting and pluralist civil societies abroad. Some unique traits perhaps work toward the divergence. Whereas American institutions and foundations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its sister institution, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), pursue a rather nonpartisan approach abroad and display interest in the training of yet unprofessional organizations (Worschech 2018, p. 217), the German foundations maintain considerable ideological differences (Pinto-Duschinsky 1991, p. 46) and focus on different segments of civil society, such as business associations or even protest movements, in their democracy

assistance. At present, there are six German foundations, affiliated with the major German parties, which receive state funding to maintain field offices and to assist in the creation of pluralist democracies, characterized by the rule of law, competitive and enduring party systems, and pluralist civil societies. Since 1995, and aware of the German model, Sweden has adopted a similar approach and furthered agencies linked to the Swedish parliamentary parties to assist the consolidation of multiparty systems in developing states in Eastern and Central Europe (Öhman et al. 2011, p. 7).

This article shifts the focus to the question of whether the German foundations further civil society and social pluralism abroad. Pursuing the question, I seek to examine the German foundations’ civil society support in a single but highly important case: transitional Tunisia. After the demise of so-called Arab Spring, Tunisia is the only Arab democracy and a recipient of huge amounts of Western aid. As a German practitioner put it, Tunisia is a state to which no model applies but which might become a model for the rest of the region (Interview November 2017). Because of Western interests in turning Tunisia into a lasting Arab democracy, Tunisian civil society has become a chief target of foreign aid, and along with many Western and non-Western actors, the German foundations have increased their presence in the country (Carothers and Samat-Marram 2015, p. 9). All six of the foundations have maintained field offices in Tunis since 2012, and my case study builds on the academic literature on the foundations and on a series of expert interviews (November 2017–October 2018) with practitioners working for German foundations, other donor agencies, or their local partners. I also offer a comparison between the German foundations and the UNDEF and NED’s civil society support practices to tease out commonalities and differences in Western civil society support. However, my main focus relies on the qualitative discussion of the German foundations’ partnerships and civil society support strategies. Since foundations are comparatively difficult to access and nontransparent when it comes to their spending decisions, I do not offer quantitative comparisons as is typical for studies of American foundations (Stacey and Aksartova 2001).

This article is structured as follows: in the next section, I will analyze the state of the art on the German foundations and their actor properties. In “[The German Foundations in Transitional Tunisia](#)” section, I introduce the context of the Tunisian transition and show the main features of the German foundations’ activities. In “[Furthering Civil Society Pluralism?](#)” section, I analyze commonalities and differences between the foundations and UNDEF and the NED, and point to the German foundations’ furtherance of both pluralism and corporatism in Tunisia. The conclusion sums up my findings and analysis.

The State of the Art on the German Foundations

Similar to the first accounts of the German foundations' democracy assistance (Pinto-Duschinsky 1991), many of the more recent studies of the German foundations are authored by scholar–practitioners (Mair 2000). In view of the German foundations' opacity, scholar–practitioners provide interesting details (Mohr 2010) and insights into the political debates and power struggles within them (Adam 2012; Hofmann et al. 2012). However, these studies hardly connect with the debates in the democracy assistance literature. Here, one finds an eclectic engagement with the foundations' importance for Germany's overall democracy assistance, their party assistance, or their impact on particular target states. The following section makes use of all of this literature in order to highlight the special but changing traits of the German foundations as well as their understandings of democracy and civil society.

Studies of German democracy assistance have shown that Germany, the “civilian power,” has spent considerable amounts on democracy assistance and that the furtherance of the foundations was a means to underline commitments toward democracy without appearing as an assertive actor (Scott 1999, p. 149). For many, including scholar–practitioners working for the German foundations, the success of German re-democratization after 1945 is evident in the new German elite's internalization of the experience that foreign socioeconomic aid can stabilize indigenous democratization (Adam 2012, pp. 25–6; Maull 1990). Germany developed a distinctive understanding of democracy assistance based on multilateralism, socioeconomic aid, and party and civil society support (Spanger and Wolff 2017, p. 89). The latter task has belonged to the foundations since the 1960s. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) was re-founded in 1957, and the foundation's social democratic approach to democracy assistance resonated well with the redefinition of Germany's national interests and anti-communist attitudes in Western policy circles. Even Christian conservative governments praised the FES as a part of Germany's participation in Western burden-sharing (Adam 2012, pp. 35–37). Other foundations, such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS 1962), soon followed the FES and also became a part of Germany's democracy assistance establishment (Mair 2000, p. 134).

It is worth pausing to consider the different profiles of the German foundations and the relationships between their different understandings of democracy and civil society. The FES is affiliated with the social democratic party and identifies strongly with social democracy. After its re-founding, it hosted internal disputes between social democrats and members of the Deutscher

Gewerkschaftsbund/German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), the first German organization that was allowed to conduct trade union assistance in the name of the United Nations in Geneva (1949) (Eckl 2012, p. 23). The DGB now maintains a distinct foundation, the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, but the FES and German trade unionists continue to cooperate for the purpose of democracy assistance and international trade union support. Indeed, for the FES trade unions are the most important civil society organizations, before other human rights advocacy organizations. It views the furtherance of social equality and inclusion as both an empirical necessity in otherwise unstable (liberal) democracies and a normative end in itself (Adam 2012, p. 25). The FES has gained much international recognition for reusing domestic experiences with (re-)democratization in contexts other than Germany.

The KAS is affiliated with the Christian Democratic Union and is dedicated to the consolidation of representative democracy. In view of the German *Wirtschaftswunder*, it praises the social market economy as the most successful socioeconomic model. The Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung (1967) is equally affiliated with the Bavarian Christian Social Union and aims at both Christian and social ideals (Mair 2000, p. 34). The liberal Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung (FNS 1958) aims at democratic, market, and rule-of-law-based structures in democratic societies. All of these foundations are interested in employer organizations and other civil society organizations suiting their democratic conceptions. The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (1986), which is linked to the Green Party, is based on radical democratic ideas and aims at gender democracy, the social inclusion of migrants, and recognition of minority rights. Environmental NGOs are among its traditional partners abroad. Finally, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS 1990) identifies with democratic socialism and bottom-up participatory democracy (Mohr 2010, p. 35). By implication, the foundation works with left-wing groups. To varying degrees, practitioners emphasize the foundations' autonomy from both the parties and Germany's official foreign policy (Interview January 2018).

The foundations' democratic differences become apparent in different calls for different levels of state interference in the economy and in different positions toward economic liberalism. The FNS defends a liberal welfarist position, and the KAS tends to view economic liberalization and financial consolidation as preconditions to improvements in social security, while the FES is suspicious of the socially destabilizing effects of economic liberalization. The RLS actualizes opposition to what is known as the promotion of low-intensity democracy since it defends the view that the democratization of national institutions remains unlikely as long as formal, elite-based democracies are internationally recognized and as long as

international financial institutions hinder the introduction of domestic redistribution through programs of austerity (Rocamora and Gills 1992). In theory, the RLS position is at odds with much of Germany's official democracy assistance, and the RLS does promote critical debate of it, at home and abroad.

It is often argued that the German example inspired the creation of American counterparts such as the NDI (1983), which is linked to the Democratic Party, and the International Republican Institute (IRI 1983), which is linked to the Republican Party (Carothers 1999, p. 30). However, while these organizations receive state funding, they claim to pursue a nonpartisan approach abroad and work with parties with diverse ideological profiles. In addition, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy is affiliated with the major parties of the Netherlands but equally provides for nonpartisan party assistance or interparty dialogue abroad. Hence, only the German foundations have adopted an openly partisan approach abroad, which is evident in the choice of politically like-minded partners among the parties and civil societies in their target states. This approach and the entering of foreign contexts not just as technocratic democracy promoters but also in the role of ideological comrades lessened the donor–recipient gap and has had positive impacts on the local perception of democracy assistance. However, while the German model inspired reforms in Swedish democracy assistance when party assistance attracted more attention, it is not without its critics. Some suggest a moderation of ideological differences to allow for common projects and possibly even the merging of the six foundations (Mohr 2010).

As Thomas Carothers (1999, p. 98) noted, the German foundations at first sought to reproduce in other countries the contours of Germany's party system, social market economy, and civil society pluralism. Germany has redefined its democracy assistance agenda since then, but the shifts have re-affirmed the six foundations' importance for Germany's overall and official approach. After the optimism of the 1990s, unsuccessful democratization attempts, and recognition of the lesson that Western models of democracy cannot be imposed on transitional societies, Germany, as other Western donors such as Sweden, reformulated its official democracy assistance agenda. Today, Germany aims at the furtherance of sustainable and pluralist democracy and the "strengthening of key institutions in a democratic social order" even if it is clear that the German example cannot be reproduced (BMZ 2018). However, the rule of law, competitive parties, and pluralistic civil societies are still identified as the most important democratic institutions, and the German foundations remain entrusted with civil society support, political advice, and party assistance. Judiciary assistance and even transnational networking have also been added to their

tasks. Most empirical studies report that the foundations accord with and do not contradict Germany's diplomatic, bi- and multilateral efforts (Wolff 2014a, p. 98).

One can hence approach the German foundations as experienced democracy assistance agencies (Scott 1999, p. 148). The foundations are traditionally active in the field of civil society assistance (Philipps 1999) and were also the first Western agencies to begin political party assistance in the 1970s, when they supported the transformation of Spain and Portugal (Pinto-Duschinsky 1991). However, if they do not find ideological partners among the parties of transformative societies, they focus even more on civil society (Mair 2000, p. 140). In both fields, they usually adopt long-term and partner-based strategies, which distinguishes them from American or multilateral funders. The latter often work with calls for proposals, inviting NGOs to submit projects for previously defined and specific democracy-related areas (Kurki 2011). Democracy assistance scholars usually sympathize with these partner-based strategies and still find that the foundations' impact on the democratization of the target societies often remains marginal (Philipps 1999).

Since approximately the 1990s, and in line with the overall professionalization of democracy assistance, the foundations also work on in-house professionalization and make use of internal and external evaluations. They publish handbooks and organize workshops on party assistance (Weissenbach 2010, p. 1229). Practitioners of the first generation, who defined themselves also as political activists, eye this trend with skepticism (Eckl 2012, p. 73). However, the development of the competence to defend particular political views is certainly part of the in-house training processes, and this distinguishes between the staff of the foundations and Germany's bilateral aid agency, the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The GIZ conceives of itself as an apolitical development agency, even if it implements projects in the sectors of good governance, decentralization, local governance, etc.

On the other side, the foundations share similarities with democracy assistance advising think tanks (Scott 1999, p. 148). They exist in a grey area between academia and the policy making community where they generate new knowledge or actualize political positions in view of new situations. Each foundation has a research arm and furthers the publication of (former) scholarship holders, practitioners, or like-minded researchers. The foundations themselves increasingly emphasize their interest in transfers of knowledge to contribute to sophisticated policy advice. They conceive of themselves as think tanks and advisory agencies, producing academic studies for future German democracy assistance (BMZ 2018). The FES defines itself as a "think-and-do tank" (Interview February 2018), and each foundation tries to influence the public

debate in Germany and the future course of German democracy assistance. Hence, the foundations not only implement, but also create the political and epistemic basis for Germany's future democracy assistance.

The German Foundations in Transitional Tunisia

In the following section, I will investigate the German foundations' democracy assistance and civil society support in transitional Tunisia in particular. I do not aim at providing a comprehensive overview, but instead focus on the most important partnerships and trends. However, before I proceed, I will briefly introduce the features of the Tunisian transition and thus the context in which the foundations operate.

Since gaining independence from France in 1956, Tunisia has been ruled by the authoritarian regimes of Habib Bourguiba (1956–1987), a self-professed nationalist and francophone secularist, and Zine El Abdine Ben Ali (1987–2011), who established good relations with Western states (Gana 2013, pp. 3–4). Since 2011, however, Tunisia has been a progressing but fragile democracy. There is elite resistance to further democratic change in both political and civil societies (Weipert-Fenner and Wolff, forthcoming).

The origins of so-called Tunisian revolution 2010/11 are the topic of an ongoing academic debate (Gana 2013, p. 2), and it is critical to see the longevity of dissent. Civil society organizations such as the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH 1977) had protested against both regimes' human rights violations for decades, though they also managed to survive in the authoritarian context. Likewise, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT 1946), which is a trade union federation, played an ambivalent role, since its leadership was gradually coopted by the authoritarian regimes while the geographically dispersed local units held on to radical, left-wing, and anti-authoritarian ideas. Hence, there had been civil society organizations and socioeconomic dissent prior to 2010, but in spite of these protests, foreign experts and Tunisian citizens considered Ben Ali's regime a stable one.

The self-immolation of a fruit and vegetable owner in 2010 in the city of Sidi Bouzid, further primarily socioeconomic protests in Sfax and Sousse, and finally the costal elites' uptake of the protests led to the unexpected overthrow of Ben Ali and a series of transnational protests (Allal 2012). The UGTT elite first tried to mediate between the protestors and the regime, but when the protests grew, it sided with the protestors. They first demanded work, freedom, and dignity and then turned against individuals of the authoritarian regime (Gana 2013, p. 11). Democracy was not an original aim of the primarily socio-economic

protests and only became a part of the protesters' demands when they reached the capital (O'Brien 2015).

Although Western policy-makers had opposed Ben Ali's authoritarianism, they welcomed his enforcement of secularism and women's education, and since 2011, Tunisia is even more conceived of as the Arab state most similar to Western democracies (Borg 2016; Bush 2015, p. 189). It is recognized as the only state undergoing a promising democratic transition in a highly unstable region. In short, 2011 witnessed the election of a constituent assembly, entrusted with legislative competencies, who drafted a democratic constitution. Civil society played an active role in the constitution-drafting process, and the UGTT, together with other civil society organizations, established itself as a mediator between conflicting political parties (Weipert-Fenner and Wolff, forthcoming). In 2013, a National Dialogue Quartet was formed after political assassinations, and it was awarded with the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for its contributions to the transition. 2014 saw the adoption of a new Tunisian constitution, enshrining new participatory democratic rights, (Lübben 2015, pp. 5–6), parliamentary and presidential elections, and the creation of a new government made up of the two great parties: the secularist Nidaa Tounes and the religious Ennahda. Since 2015, Freedom House (2015) has rated Tunisia as free.

America, Germany, and France are among the most important Western donors of democracy assistance to Tunisia, and in particular America and Germany devote considerable amounts to civil society support (Aberrahim 2015; Kausch 2014, p. 16). Studies of foreign aid spent on civil society support in transitional Tunisia agree that the years 2011–13 saw abundant international funding, which turned Tunisian civil society into a chief target of international aid. Civil society organizations multiplied, and many of them at first remained comparably unprofessional and voiced substantial democratic demands (Bush 2015, p. 195). American donors adapted to this situation by lowering their bureaucratic demands (Aberrahim 2015), and they were positively perceived by Tunisian civil society organizations (Kausch 2014). However, the original influx of foreign aid created high dependency on foreign funding and spurred professionalism among at first unusually diverse Tunisian civil society organizations and the establishment of NGOs with an explicit interest in absorbing foreign funding (Bush 2015, p. 206). Western practitioners and Tunisian activists also report on many projects that were carried out in culturally insensitive ways, or that lacked clear democracy-related purposes (Interview January 2018). After years of dictatorial propaganda about corrupt and foreign-funded NGOs, these trends further reduced the local legitimacy of foreign-funded civil society organizations (Cherif 2018).

The German foundations became important Western donors, next to the Carter Center, the IRI, and Freedom House (Bush 2015, p. 200). As indicated, coordination has taken place among American or German donors but not at a greater scale, and German practitioners conceive of this situation as problematic (Interview March 2018). The foundations have been entrusted, for instance, with the promotion of the rule of law through juridical training and the furtherance of academic cooperation, civil society, and political and journalistic education, next to the GIZ (Westerwelle 2011).

Foundation	Creation of Tunis office	Focus and activities since 2011
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	1970–73; 1988–	Good governance, social justice, human rights; party assistance for Ettakatol; cooperation with UGTT/LTDH; political and civic education
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung	1982	Good governance and administrative, political, and economic reform; party assistance for Nidaa Tounes; political education and furtherance of political science institutions; furtherance of academic studies about political and juridical change
Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung	1989	Promotion of the rule of law, administrative management reform, and juridical reform; decentralization and inclusive governance; furtherance of local judges and lawyers; furtherance of academic publications on juridical change
Friedrich Naumann-Stiftung	1964	Promotion of the rule of law and a free media; party assistance for Afek Tounes; furtherance of young entrepreneurs
Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung	2013	Gender democracy, transitional justice, and inclusive political processes; furtherance of critical art and activists
Rosa-Luxenburg-Stiftung	2014	Inclusive democratic processes and empowerment of marginalized groups; party assistance for Jabha Chabia; cross-linking critical research; memory and coping with the past/former repression

Incomprehensive depiction based on interviews and an analysis of the foundations' homepages. All foundations have a mandate to promote democracy and academic cooperation and make use of typical instruments such as the organization of workshops and seminars—I excluded this and a list of their numerous civil society partnerships from the table for reasons of space

The FES maintains the oldest (1970–3, 1988–present) and largest field office in Tunisia. Retrospectively, it justifies the previous adoption of a cautious approach, focus on cultural and social affairs, and avoidance of democracy and human rights-promoting projects by the need to maintain a balance between the support and necessary protection of its Tunisian partners (Interview November 2017). However, since 2011, and after the removal of many restrictions for democracy and human rights advocacy (Aberrahim 2015), the FES and all other German foundations have returned to a direct approach. They straightforwardly address democratic topics and make full use of the foundations' typical democracy assistance tools (organization of seminars, workshops, organization and educative exchanges, furtherance of publication, funding of like-minded civil society organizations). In Tunisia, as elsewhere, the office and project managers need to negotiate between the foundation's headquarters and the affiliated German party, general value orientations, the official democracy assistance mandate, and the democratic ideas and demands of the target societies (Mair 2000, p. 136).

The partnerships of the foundations that have been active in Tunisia before 2011 are shaped by a remarkable continuity. The foundations did not abandon established partnerships and rather added new ones. To further good governance and to support civil society, the FES focuses on its the long-term partnership with the UGTT (Interview November 2017). As indicated, the UGTT is a powerful but also contested actor in Tunisian civil society. Its elite was a part of so-called loyal opposition to Ben Ali, and since 2011, the UGTT has established itself as a partner of the democratically elected Tunisian governments. It is hence important to see that the UGTT acts increasingly as a political actor, or in corporatist arrangements, and that it represents the interests of public sector employees (Weipert-Fenner and Wolff, forthcoming). Still, the FES has continued to focus on this partnership after the electoral defeat of Tunisia's new social democratic party, Ettakatol.

For the FES, which often struggles to find strong trade unions or social democratic parties in transitional societies (Weissenbach 2010, pp. 1240–1241), the partnership with the UGTT promises proximity to Tunisian democratization and the confirmation of the contours of its social democratic ideology, which regards trade unions as democratizing actors (Interview March 2018). Indeed, the FES is engaged in a broad study of trade unions as transformative agents and conceives of the UGTT in this context as an actor that secured the success of the protests by coping with the conservative Islamic opposition (Adouani and Sedrine 2018). Yet, the FES also cooperates with the human rights advocacy organization, the LTDH, to promote socio-economic and human rights and the professionalization of civil society advocacy (Faath 2016, p. 305–312). The LTDH and

UGTT are both part of the National Dialogue Quartet, which received in 2015 the Nobel Prize for their contributions to social peace and the building up of a pluralist democracy in Tunisia. Finally, the FES funds smaller organizations, which monitor socio-economic protests all over Tunisia, and, with regard to the whole MENA region, finances studies on the prospects of alternative economies (Interview March 2018).

The KAS is active in the fields of policy advice, political education, elite socialization, and civil society support, and in accordance with its profile, it works with another member of the National Dialogue Quartet, the employer organization Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), in the civil society sector (Interview January 2018). However, at least equally important are its good relations with the political elites of the secularist party Nidaa Tounes. Instead of beginning a cooperation with the religious Ennahda party to demonstrate the option of moderate Islamic parties, the KAS chose to maintain its long-term relationships (many Nidaa Tounes members held posts under Ali). It offers workshops to increase Tunisian politicians' sensibility for and representation of economic concerns and to further the open discussion of the revolution's yet-unresolved social causes. Carothers (2010, p. 23) noted that political and economic goals easily merge in democracy assistance, when foundations offer political training to further the local parties' economic strategies, and here the German foundations offer prime examples. The KAS is the foundation most active in the realm of party assistance, also cooperating with the local Tunisian School of Politics. The related foundation, the HSS, addresses decentralization and judicial reform and furthers local jurists. The FNS provides economic consultancy, monitors respect of economic rights, and supports local start-ups as well as the Tunisian party Afek Tounes, which focuses on secularism and liberal rights.

The HBS translates the mandate to further good governance into a focus on gender democracy and environmental protection and has established itself as a funder of new NGOs. It was among the first supporters of Al Bawsala, an NGO run since 2012 by highly educated Tunisians with international experience. Since 2016, the HBS has increased support of various ecological and gay rights groups and has helped the creation of an ecological NGO. The RLS cooperates with left-wing parties and other groups. It also offers a platform to social movements, artists, and left-leaning activists in Tunis. As part of its academic cooperation promotion, the RLS furthers the diffusion of critical theory in Tunisia and the organization of a self-conscious left in the MENA region (Khalfat 2014). The RLS is also close to the Arab Forum for Alternatives, a mixed think tank which also offers critical studies of socio-economic development issues. Finally, the

RLF, as other foundations, supports Tunisian and German researchers to conduct studies on Tunisian democratization.

The German foundations occasionally pursue common projects. Perhaps most important, the FES and the KAS, together with the GIZ, initiated dialogue among the UGTT and UTICA, and it is indicated that the meetings paved the way for the National Dialogue that secured the Tunisian transition (Interview November 2018). The foundations continue to view dialogue between the UGTT and UTICA as a positive achievement, and envision a replication of a social dialogue along the lines of the German one as a means to further both labor rights and economic stability (Interview January 2018; Interview July 2018).

Generally, political preferences and different understandings of democracy shape local partnerships, different organizational cultures, and competitive evaluations of the Tunisian democracy. The KAS conducts well-planned political training for young politicians or journalists, is aware of the IRI's activities in Tunisia, and perhaps conducts its workshops in a similar style (Glenn 2000, p. 163). In contrast, the RLS is dedicated to a bottom-up and participatory approach and critical debate, and tries to address students rather than members of the socio-political establishment. Furthermore, the center-left foundations purport different judgments of the state of the Tunisian democracy and rather problematize an elite consensus or pact between two men (President Beji Caid Essebsi—Nidaa Tounes and the head of the religious Ennahda party Rached Ghannouchi) for halting the democratization process (Ilse 2018). Politicians who were in power under Ben Ali have regained important posts and halted the implementation of the new democratic constitution. The FES calls straightforwardly for a dividend of democracy to secure the social legitimacy of democracy, since the transition has not yet provided tangible results for Tunisian citizens (Claes 2016). Youth unemployment, which is seen as a major cause of the revolution, and regional inequalities remain equally pertinent. The “social question” in Tunisia has thus a generational and regional dimension (Weipert-Fenner and Vathauer 2017).

The center-left foundations view a series of protests (2016–18) and the emergence of new social movements as proof of an unfinished democratization process, since activists revolted against political and economic exclusion and regional inequality (Ilse 2018). Key demands of the late and most influential protests in 2011 concerned dignity, understood as a condition evolving from the absence of poverty and seen as necessary preconditions to the realization of human and democratic rights, and employment. These and other demands remain unmet. Other new social movements such as (in English) “I do not forgive” were generated in 2017 in opposition to a law guaranteeing

the political elites who had been in power under Ben Ali immunity from prosecution. The center-left foundations tend to view the movements as legitimate and as democratizing actors, whereas the Christian conservative foundations only agree on socioeconomic problems (Aldailami 2017; Interview January 2018).

Furthering Civil Society Pluralism?

As indicated, civil society support scholars regard the furtherance of pluralism, or of a variety of civil society organizations, such as trade unions, religious organizations, professional (or vocational) associations, and even social movements, as desirable (Ottaway and Carothers 2000a, b). The benefitted organizations ought to allow broad citizen activism and the representation of diverse interests in dynamic arrangements in transitional states or young democracies (Schmitter 1974). In view of my interest in the related questions as to whether the German foundations' practice civil society support in a unique and pluralism-enhancing manner, I will move in what follows from a comparison between the foundations' and the UNDEF and NED's civil society support practices in Tunisia to a discussion of the German foundations' partnerships. I will expose a common secular bias in Western civil society support and the German foundations' (conflicting) interest in the furtherance of pluralism, wide participation, and democratic stability.

The German foundations, UNDEF, and NED lend themselves to a comparison because of a common focus on civil society support. The UNDEF increased its funding for Tunisian civil society organizations after 2011 but still remains a relatively small donor. It is a headquarters-centered organization in New York that recruits its partners through a competitive system of calls to guarantee that only professional organizations with promising projects receive funding. The quality of the English- or French-speaking proposal is decisive, and to judge it, UNDEF relies on its own and the wider UN expertise (Interview October, 2017). In Tunisia, UNDEF-sponsored projects last usually for about 2 years, and the organization has worked with local partners on, for instance, participatory budgeting. UNDEF has furthered many projects focusing on empowerment of women or the Tunisian youth, and projects outside of the capital. Partner organizations, such as the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, are also well known for their indigenous basis and demanding, feminist, and socialist profiles (Antonakis-Nashif 2016, p. 133). However, in Tunisia, UNDEF is foremost interested in projects to enhance democratic governance and less in civil society organizations themselves, or the long-term furtherance of social pluralism. Subsequent funding or further cooperation

with a once benefitted organization is uncommon. The German foundations are hardly aware of UNDEF activities.

The NED works from its headquarters in Washington, but its staff travels frequently to states such as Tunisia. The NED also increased its funding for Tunisian civil society organizations after 2011 but relies on different techniques than the UNDEF. Though it likewise demands well-written project proposals, local organizations can submit them in any language, and beyond the proposal, the commitment and independence of the organization are critical (Interview October, 2018). In Tunisia, there are informal exchanges between the German foundations and the NED, and the actors agree that local partners ought to be furthered in both direct manners, such as through the funding of workshops, and in indirect and long-term manners, such as through the provision of networks or resources. The NED conceives of civil society support as a cross-cutting aim and has worked with many local NGOs in often small projects toward the furtherance of women and youth empowerment or further participation in communal administration. The NED is eager to avoid duplications, and this explains why it rarely works with local organizations that also entertain relations with the German foundations.

In Tunisia, as shown, the German foundations usually do not recruit their partners through a system of calls for projects that demands high degrees of professionalization, and the foundations explicitly distance themselves from this practice, which has been common in official American civil society support (Interview June 2018). They prefer partners that appear to have a local basis, and their support is direct and indirect (Faath 2016, p. 320). They conceive of their local partners' professionalization in the course of the cooperation as a positive side effect, but not a primary aim, even if views may vary from office to office, or with regard to the specific local partner (Interview July 2018).

From a perspective interested in the furtherance of social pluralism in Tunisia, two commonalities deserve emphasis. First, there is still a common hesitation to cooperate with religious organizations (Ottaway and Carothers 2000a, p. 305). The UNDEF signals that it has never received a project proposal from a religious organization based in Tunisia, but that it would give it full consideration. Some American organizations explain the situation by arguing that religious organizations do not work in democracy-related fields (Interview October, 2018). This argument is unconvincing, since attempts have been made at the mobilization and networking among civil society organizations with mostly religious members for the purpose of democracy-related work such as electoral observation, which means that possible partners have been available (Lübben 2015, p. 13). The German foundations are aware of this fact and do not preclude cooperation with religious

civil society organizations in a dogmatic manner. The RLS is currently even headed by an expert on Tunisia's religious civil society. However, German constituencies, who have become increasingly critical of Islam, ideological traits, and institutionalized partnerships impose limits—the RLS's local partners are mostly secular Tunisians who would protest against working with religious organizations (Interview November 2017). Formal partnerships between the foundations and religious civil society organizations such as the Pole Civile pour le Development et Droits de l'Homme have not yet materialized, and the foundations also avoid cooperation with the democratically elected, religious Ennahda Party (Dihstelhoff 2018). Hence, there remains a common secular bias.

Second, since 2011, all donors further NGOs established explicitly to support the Tunisian democratization process. While this focus is typical for the UNDEF and NED, it is less typical for the foundations. Still, in Tunisia the foundations support professional pro-democracy NGOs: the FNS began cooperation with ATIDE (Association tunisienne pour l'intégrité et la démocratie des élections), which is an organization focusing on electoral integrity, and Action Associative, which is, as indicated, active in the realm of democratic education (Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit 2018; Interview January 2018). The HBS and, as indicated, Al Bawsala, an organization that was established to monitor the constitution-making process, established a cooperation because of a common valuation of participatory democracy and accountability (Interview March 2018). The HBS also furthered a project (Marsad Baladiya) for the monitoring of municipal activities. In some cases, earlier personal contacts between the foundations and the staff of the new NGOs eased the establishment of these partnerships.

Aside from these commonalities, differences in Western civil society support exist. Even if the UNDEF occasionally places itself in the tradition of the German foundations' civil society support (Rich 2017, p. 35), it uses very different techniques to make funding decisions. It also furthers projects in the realm of democratic education rather than providing long-term support for civil society organizations. The NED is closer to the German foundations' civil society support than the UNDEF, but it exhibits less country presence than the foundations and cooperates more often with NGOs, due to both domestic pressure and an interest in cost-efficient democracy assistance (Nautré 2008, p. 8). Foundations such as the HBS, on the other side, engage with small civil society organizations outside of the capital (Interview March 2018). The HBS also fosters horizontally organized groups, such as CHOUF (Interview March 2018; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2015). Hence, the German foundations'

country presence, cooperation with ideologically like-minded partners, and the comparable autonomy of the local staff with respect to funding decisions remain remarkable. A common value orientation is important for the selection of any partnerships, including in cooperations with professional democracy NGOs. While the exclusive furtherance of professional pro-democracy NGOs can counteract the furtherance of civil society pluralism at large, the German foundations' partnerships are too divers to attract criticism in this respect.

In Tunisia, the partisan approach enabled longstanding partnerships with Tunisia's oldest and most important mass-based civil society organizations, including the UGTT, UTICA, and the LTDH. These labor or employer organizations, or hybrids of professional associations and human rights advocacy organizations, already voiced dissent during former authoritarian times. Furthermore, since 2011, the HSS has cooperated with the most important organizations of jurists, or those tackling questions of legal reform (Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung 2018). These cooperations are examples for partnerships with vocational organizations, which represent different indigenous interests. As indicated, the foundations, and the HBS and RLS in particular, also further rather small organizations or activists. The RLF provides training to trade unionist to further their capacity to represent the interests of marginalized workers during international free trade negotiations, even though this practice is partly at odds with Germany's official interest in the furtherance of free trade and economic liberalization (Interview November 2017). The RLF is also sympathetic to social movements and offers spaces and resources to artists and critical activists, in spite of the ruling elites' frequent assaults on dissenting voices, especially since 2016 (Interview November 2017; Interview January 2018). The partnerships enabled through the partisan approaches hence appear supportive of pluralism in Tunisia, even if much of the foundations' work can be regarded as the furtherance of indigenous trends that have already begun.

However, and even if the partisan approach brings about comparative advantages, it also puts limits on the capacity to adapt to the civil society landscape of transformative societies. The Tunisian case indicates preferences for civil society organizations that broadly follow Western and secular lines, such as think tanks, trade unions, or professional associations. The foundations' hesitation to cooperate with religious organizations shows that the exclusion of Muslim organizations from Western funding, which has prompted academic and public criticism, is still in place (Ottaway and Carothers 2000a, p. 305).

Furthermore, the case of the German foundations' civil society support points to the coexistence of different civil

society support strategies, or, to borrow terms from democracy promotion research, “conflicting objectives” in civil society support (Wolff 2014b, p. 75). There are intrinsic conflicts in civil society support since the aim to further civil society pluralism, contestation, or the democratization of existing civil society organizations may be incompatible with the interest to mobilize as many citizens as possible, or with interests in democratic stability (Jamal 2012, p. 12; Schönwälder 2018). Put differently, a furtherance of pluralism all the way down can conflict with donor interests in democratic stability and governability—a government’s capacity to implement sensitive economic policies may be impossible under conditions of democratic pluralism and the articulation of diverse interests (Wolff 2014b, p. 75).

In Tunisia, the German foundations’ civil society support is directed toward at least two aims at once: the furtherance of citizen participation, contestation, and social pluralism on the one side, and the stabilization of the Tunisian transition and consolidation of democracy on the other side. The latter interest led to the furtherance of corporatist, as opposed to pluralist, structures, as continuous support for UTICA and the UGTT shows. Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which a limited number of hierarchical organizations are granted an interest representation monopoly by the state. Corporatist arrangements secure the influence of few civil society organizations but often reduce (radical) criticism of the government. Pluralism, in contrast, envisions a system of interest representation in which an unspecified number of at best bottom-up grown organizations have a temporally limited mandate to represent specific interests and to check a government in specific fields (Schmitter 1974, pp. 93–94; 96).

As indicated, support for the UGTT illustrates that the German foundations have not decided between the furtherance of pluralism and corporatism in their civil society support strategies in Tunisia. As a national trade union federation, the UGTT’s organizational form is incompatible with trade union pluralism. Furthermore, its history shows conflicts between the elite and a more radical base, and a focus on the representation of public sector employees. The majority of Tunisians suffering from unemployment are not represented by the UGTT, and unemployed university graduates especially have established new but minor unions (Weipert-Fenner and Vathauer 2017, pp. 1–2). These unions, as well as a competing and religious trade union federation formed during the transition, the Organisation Tunisienne du Travail (OTT), have not managed to raise considerable domestic interest, in part because international actors’ support of the UGTT enhanced the costs of dissent (Hartshorn 2018, p. 127). German foundations such as the FES are aware of these

developments as well as of the UGTT’s heterogeneous structure or the problem of the nonrepresentation of the interests of informal work, but still seek to “reform the UGTT from the inside” (Interview November 2018). Yet, since the UGTT has become an internationally respected actor, it is questionable whether the foundation can foster internal reform, and the partnership with the UGTT also precludes the possibility of furthering trade union pluralism in Tunisia.

During the transitory period in Tunisia (2011–2014), external democracy promotion has been most effective when it has supported the cohesion of a trade union in spite of its undemocratic elements (Hartshorn 2018, p. 135). As a part of the transition-securing National Dialogue, the UGTT furthered dialogue and the transitional process continued, and many civil society organizations have since been included to considerable degrees. By now, however, the democratic consolidation process is slowed down because elites in the Tunisian political and civil society protect their economically beneficial position instead of developing socioeconomic reform programs for the mass of the citizens (Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Tür 2018). Against this background, trade-offs between stability-securing corporatism and further democratization-promising pluralism are likely (Carothers 2018; Cherif 2018).

Conclusion

This article set out to approach the questions of whether the German foundations work differently in democracy assistance and civil society support, and whether they work toward the furtherance of social pluralism in transitional Tunisia. In the following conclusion, I will sum up my findings.

To begin with, the foundations remain actors with uncommon traits due to their employment of partisan approaches, different organizational cultures, and institutionalized cooperation with different civil society organizations. The foundations’ maintenance of partisan approaches is evident in different understandings of social democracy or the appropriate level of state economic interference, and the respective principles shape their civil society support. By now, the foundations professionalize their partisan civil society support and view themselves as think-and-do tanks, which means that they not only carry out but also seek to influence the epistemes and policies governing civil society support, in Tunisia and elsewhere. My comparison of the German foundations and other Western agencies in transitional Tunisia revealed both the development of shared understandings of ‘good’ civil society support and the maintenance of specific civil society support patterns.

In transitional Tunisia, the German foundations' employ direct and indirect civil society support strategies and nurture diverse partnerships, including partnerships with the most powerful civil society organizations that secured the transition, such as the Tunisian trade union federation UGTT. However, the foundations, like other Western agencies, exclude religious civil society organizations from their support. The foundations also prefer organizations that broadly follow Western lines, and they remain bound by the interests of domestic constituencies, which means that the partisan approaches put limits on the capacity to adapt to the contours of civil society in transitional states. Finally, the German foundations demonstrate interests in different and partly conflicting objectives: the furtherance of pluralism and contestation, on the one side, and wide participation and the stabilization of the democratic transition and consolidation process, on the other side. In the realm of civil society support, the latter interest led to the furtherance of corporatism and strengthening of already powerful civil society organizations. In sum, the German foundations' civil society support in transitional Tunisia reveal patterns that work toward/against the furtherance of pluralism.

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