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## **Third Nordic Meeting of Political Party Assistance Organizations & First Nordic Academy**

**Espoo & Helsinki, Finland 18.–19.9.2014**

### **Introduction**

On the 18th and 19th September 2014, the third Annual Meeting of Nordic Political Party Assistance Organizations (PAO) was held in Espoo and Helsinki, Finland. This year the first Nordic Academy was held in conjunction with the Nordic meeting. It aimed at developing capacities to identify and implement results-oriented political party democracy support initiatives, promoting contacts among the Nordic PAOs, learning from each other, and nourishing and breeding new strategic approaches. The Nordic Academy was attended by a total of 40 representatives from five countries – Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Lithuania.

This report gives a short recap of the sessions held during the two days with a focus on how to develop the periodic event in a way that it will continue to give added value to the work of PAOs.



## Thursday 18th September: The Nordic Academy

The last Nordic Meeting in 2013 concluded with agreement of launching a Nordic Academy on Effective Political Party Democracy Support to enhance capacity development within our own ranks and allow critical reflection on key issues in our democracy support to political parties. The need for joint “master classes” is obvious as there is no professional training covering democracy support to political parties in the Nordic countries nor the rest of Europe. An organising committee was set up and it decided to start with an appetizer in the form of a one day Academy with the aim of extending the duration in the next Academy.

### **Session I: Party systems, electoral systems and democratic cultures – what message for political party assistance?**

*Context matters! This has been recognised for long, but just exactly HOW is the work of political parties and their incentives driven by the overall party system, the electoral system (and cycle) and the broader governance system? How does the broader regulatory framework determine the ways in which parties perform their democratic functions of representation and accountability and how does it influence the feasibility of different types of party assistance? At the same time it is important to remember, that the political parties in most countries have a stake in developing the overall system and the regulation under which they operate. Concrete examples will be given of the entry points for supporting a more conducive regulatory framework.*

This first session was introduced by invited experts (Sam van der Staak – International IDEA, Marcin Walecki – OSCE ODIHR, Ingrid Wetterqvist – EEAS). Focus was given especially on party funding, the overall party system, the electoral system and the broader governance system and their importance in effective project design.

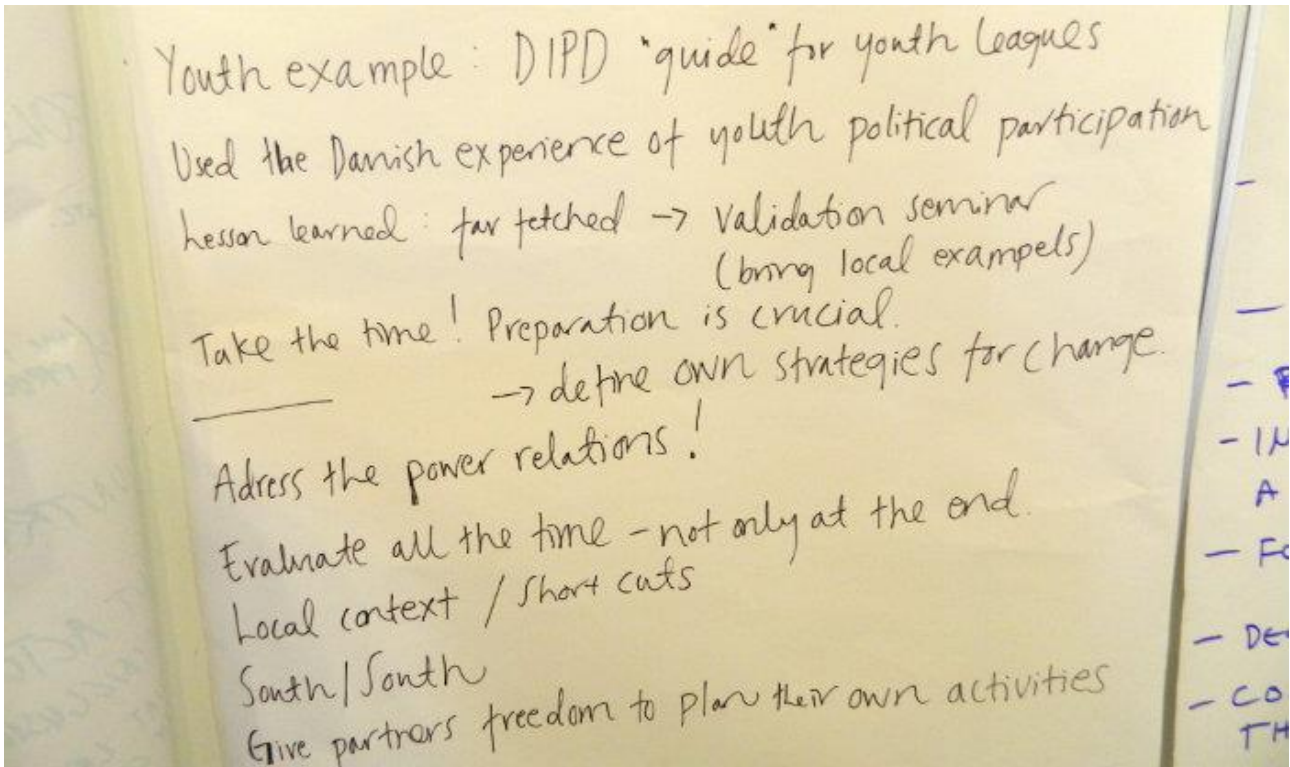
Marcin Walecki noted in his presentation that candidate trainings are often offered too late in the electoral cycle and that candidate selection is a crucial issue to consider, not just the elections per se. He also discussed the differences between presidential and parliamentary systems and their implications for the overall party system. Political polarization is a worrying trend globally and more dialogue initiatives are needed to counter this and the winner-takes-it-all -mentality. Sam van der Staak took a closer look at party financing and Ingrid Wetterqvist on the current process of restructuring and strengthening democracy support in EU's External Relations.

Some of the key observations were that party funding in itself is not the problem, but it is vital to identify where the money comes from, who is using it and for what purposes. The same can be applied to the electoral or the party system, whatever the system is, more important than criticizing or condemning, is to know who is using power and what are the consequences. By identifying these power relations, it is easier to ensure that the support is given to the right actors and will not just e.g. reinforce the ruling party in comparison to the opposition. A topic that might need more focus and discussion is also political party support in authoritarian context; how and with whom. Marcin Walecki also noted that internal party democracy control and ethics is a topic much disregarded in party support programmes. It was also agreed that there's a lot to gain from others and more coordination and cooperation is needed.

V-dem party system indicators offered a practical exercise for the analysis of the context that political parties are working in. It was found out that some of the organizations have their own tools for context analysis (e.g. SILC, Kic Sweden). In general, the countries that the PAOs engage in are not chosen only based

on needs assessments. There are several other factors, such as eligibility and funding rules from the back donors (Nordic MFAs), that affect the selection process. Thus, most support is given to developing countries that are eligible for development funding based on their poor economic and social status, and middle-income countries that would need political party assistance cannot usually be supported. A review of the V-Dem indicators revealed that they place very little emphasis on minorities, women and youth.

No matter how the partner countries are selected, it was agreed that strong knowledge and understanding of the local context is vital in choosing the actors and methods for political party cooperation. The assessment tools may also help in monitoring and evaluating interventions and progress later on.



## Session II: Supporting the democratic functions of political parties – representation and accountability – how?

*Too often party assistance has moved directly to capacity development without first understanding how the specific party performs its democratic functions. There has been a tendency to focus too narrowly on how well the party is organised or managed as an institution, rather than how well it performs its functions of representing citizens voice into government and ensuring accountability. What specific interventions and support types are relevant in assisting political parties to be more democratic internally and to better function as the link between citizens and government in terms of representation and accountability? What should be in focus when we look at strengthening this link rather than just making the party organisation stronger? What concrete mechanisms work to the betterment of representation and accountability?*

This session was facilitated by Dr. Marcin Walecki who in a participatory manner unfolded all the characteristics linked to the two democratic functions of political parties – representation and accountability.

Participants discussed approaches towards assessment of strengths and weaknesses of political parties in representation and accountability, the main elements that should be targeted while strengthening parties' performance in these areas, and relevant specific interventions.

Concerning representation and accountability it was pointed out that it is important to look further and not rely solely on numbers, percentages and public documents. Both accountability and representation are about daily functions and actions of the political parties. Also, it is valuable to look at all levels of the parties and party systems; it is not sufficient to rely on party leaders and elites and how they conduct their work. Looking at the grassroots, the local level and its connection to the national level tells a lot about how party functions in terms of representation. Also, just looking at the obvious may neglect informal decision-making processes and hidden power relations.

To find out what international community can do, the participants discussed current projects for joint learning, based on concrete examples of enhancing the democratic roles of political parties in representation and accountability. In particular, the importance of enhancing youth and women in political parties were dealt with. Other projects aiming at enhancing accountability through better party finance regulation and management were found to be an area needing more attention as well as the development of checks and balances around the conduct of political parties.

In the discussion it was emphasized that accountability and representation also depend on the local context as discussed in the morning session; in some cases the parties cannot even undertake their basic functions and support will need to be designed accordingly.

In general, the role of the opposition was highlighted in the discussions on accountability. The oversight of the parliament is a task of the opposition, and a working relationship between the ruling parties and the opposition are often the key to peaceful and accountable elections, power transition and sustainable policy making.



## Friday 19th September: Seminar at the Parliament of Finland and the Annual Meeting of Nordic PAOs

The second day opened with a seminar at the Parliament of Finland and the opening speech was given by the chairperson of Demo Finland, MP Satu Haapanen (The Greens). Haapanen introduced her role and experience as the chair of Demo Finland and in her speech she emphasized that democracy deserves a role on the post-2015 agenda as the form of governance that can bring about sustainable change and because in a multi-party democracy people can get involved in decision-making about their own lives through political parties.

The keynote speech was given given by the Finnish Minister for International Development Pekka Haavisto (The Greens) who elaborated on Finland's democracy support and emphasized that the international community must engage in a dialogue also with non-democratic countries, as it is better to involve than only condemn and exclude.



Participating organizations also gave presentations on capacity development of political parties (examples of NDC Ghana, by Danish Social Democrats and National Restoration Party Zambia, by Danish Liberal Party), likeliness of impact by small actors (example of Kenya, by Norwegian Christian Democrats), support of cross-party cooperation based on the experience of Demo Finland and supporting change at the level of political culture (SILC, Sweden).

The afternoon session was dedicated for the actual Nordic meeting with updates from the Nordic organizations on their current funding, donor policies and other current developments. In Denmark, DIDP has fared well in the external evaluation of the first period and also overcome the initial scepticism among some Danish NGOs as to the need for this type of development work. The core funding has allowed DIDP a large flexibility in its operations and the funding is evenly divided between multi-party and party-to-party

initiatives. DIPD has developed a new strategy and is currently putting a lot of effort into developing a results framework that serves the needs of DIPD, partners and the MFA. DIPD also puts emphasis on the coordination and cooperation with other actors (Danish and International) and finds the Nordic Meetings and Global Political Party Peer Networks useful.

In Norway, the current funding (around 1 million € a year) managed by NORAD was surprisingly cut from the budget by the new government. Later on, the same sum was reintroduced to the budget. The whole program is currently being evaluated and results are expected during the autumn. Thus at the moment, the future is unsure, but the parties remain somewhat positive. Cooperation with NORAD has not been flawless but is enhancing.

The Swedish PAOs currently receive 8-9M€ a year, of which 70 % is distributed according to the strength of the mother party and the remaining 30 % is reserved for joint projects through separate application process. The PAOs have been satisfied with this. There will be an evaluation that will be handed out to the new government in 2015 and it may lead to changes from 2016 onwards.

In Finland, Demo Finland is currently renewing its strategy preparing for new funding cycle 2016–2018. Demo has been under several funding instruments since its establishment in 2005 and there is still no final solution or recommendation by the MFA. Currently it is under the NGO Unit, as is the Social Democratic Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, and applies for general development cooperation funds reserved for NGOs.



Additionally, during the afternoon meeting, the Global Political Party Peer Network knowledge online platform was presented by Hanne Lund Madsen from DIPD and regional and thematic working groups were held, aimed at sharing information on project activities among the Nordic partners, identifying joint issues and challenges as well as best practices, and exploring synergies and joint cooperation initiatives

As a result of the Nordic Academy, a joint statement calling upon the Nordic Ministers for Development to promote the inclusion of democratic governance and the rule of law as a sustainable development goal in the post 2015 framework was signed by all the participating Swedish PAOs, Demo Finland, Kalevi Sorsa

Foundation and the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy and handed to the Finnish Minister for International Development after his speech at the morning seminar.

## **The way forward**

The Nordic Academy and Meeting offered a platform for representatives of Nordic PAOs to exchange information and updates on the programmes, projects and activities that Nordic PAOs are engaged in across the globe. Participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with thematic and regional programmes of Nordic PAOs, approaches and challenges. The Academy gave the possibility for participants to share some of the best practices and lessons learnt by other Nordic PAOs, to be exposed to different methods employed in pursuit of the same objectives and to look for synergies and possible joint initiatives. It was also a good platform for networking and gave a deeper understanding on how the other Nordic PAOs, also within one's own country, work.

It was seen that the Nordic Academy was also instrumental in acquiring additional knowledge in the analysis of local contexts for political party assistance, becoming more aware of political party functions – representation and accountability – that are of vital importance, but nevertheless often neglected. The knowledge and insights acquired by participants can be used in the development of new programmes.

The format of the Academy that integrated and allowed participants occupying different positions in the organizations to participate together and engage in thematic or regional conversations seemed to work well and as a result, focused analytical discussions took place simultaneously at different levels.

The Academy was also seen as a good way to introduce new staff to the Nordic colleagues, their work and current themes in democracy support.

The use of outside facilitators and trainers was seen as a good way to gain the newest available information. It was also discussed if staff/partners from partner countries should attend but it seems that there are other platforms for the purpose, and the Nordic aspect of the Academy was valued.

With regard to a future Nordic Academy, sessions building practical skills more deeply could be included if the duration of the Academy is extended. In a longer Academy it will be relevant to assess carefully the interest and needs of the participants in advance so that the outcome and benefits of the Academy can be ensured.

Some ideas for future themes included exit strategies, working in hostile/authoritarian environments, and looking more deeply into multi-party cooperation. A lot of work is also done on developing PM&E systems and measuring the impact of our work, a topic worth looking into more detail in the future.

Thus, a future Academy of longer duration also targeting the building of skills in a more specific area would be a natural and needed continuation of Nordic PAOs' cooperation. The meetings will be sequenced with the PPPeer Network meetings, each every other year.

The duration of the internal Nordic PAO meeting on the other hand can be shortened as the attempt to match-make on a number of thematic and geographical topics did not bear the intended fruit of more seeds for alliance projects.

**It was concluded that Norway will look at the possibility to host the Academy and Meeting in 2016 after having received more information about the ongoing evaluation and the future of political party assistance in the country.**

Links to published articles related to the event:

DIPD: [Nordic Meeting issues joint statement to Nordic Ministers](#)

Demo Finland: [Nordic Development Ministers reminded to keep democracy high on the post-2015 agenda](#)

Demo Finland: [Nordic political party assistance organisations met in Finland](#)