

BULLETIN

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The Beginnings of the European Endowment for Democracy

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The European Endowment for Democracy was launched over a year and a half ago. Its proponent, Poland and later on the European External Action Service, expected the fund to be up and running by the beginning of 2012. But, due to its complicated structure (inclusion of all member states, European Union institutions and independent actors) and slow decision making in the EU, the process of establishing the European Endowment for Democracy is delayed. Despite the adoption of its statute in June 2012 and the selection of its representative bodies in November 2012, the fund will probably start operating no earlier than the second half of 2013.

In response to developments in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and the bloc's inability to react quickly to a fast changing environment in North Africa, in February 2011, at a meeting of the EU General Affairs Council, Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski called for the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). In December 2011, at the end of Poland's turn at the rotating presidency of the EU, the bloc's member states agreed on a political declaration to support the launch of the EED. In February 2012, an expert-level Working Group was established; it started working on the EED' statute under the auspices of the European External Action Service (EEAS). In June 2012, the fund was listed in the EU's first-ever Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy as one of the practical ways of supporting democracy (together with election observation missions and declarations, for example). Later that same month, the EED' statute was adopted.

Objectives, Geographical Scope and Financing. The EED is a grant-making organisation that aims to encourage democratisation and support deep and sustainable democracy (including freedom of expression and assembly, freedom of the press and media, and the rule of law). The European Neighbourhood countries are an initial though not exclusive geographical focus. The EED helps actors of change and emerging players (including civil society organisations, independent media, pro-democratic actors, bloggers, foundations and educational institutions), provided they adhere to core democratic values, respect international human rights standards and subscribe to the principles of non-violence. The EED is funded by voluntary contributions from the member states (which will also be able to provide in-kind support such as secondments to the Secretariat). The EED can also apply for EU funding and receive donations from third parties, public or private. The present proposals provide for €6 million from the European Commission, €5 million from Poland, €1 million each from Sweden and the Netherlands, and €60,000 from Slovakia. Among non-EU member states, Switzerland has promised to provide around €830,000, for selected projects.

Governing Bodies. The EED takes the form of a private law foundation established in Belgium, which is autonomous from the EU and is supervised by its own governing bodies elected for three-year terms. At the same time, representatives from all member states and EU institutions sit on the EED's Board. The governing bodies of the EED are the Board of Governors (BoG) and the Executive Committee (EC). The BoG consists of 41 members (representatives from the member states, EU institutions and independent experts with extensive experience in democracy support) and has the overall responsibility for the Endowment's operations (i.e. its strategy, budget, and the allocation of funds). The seven-member Executive Committee, selected from the BoG, looks after the EED's day-to-day business. During the first meeting of the BoG, which took place on

November 13, the governing bodies were selected. The BoG is headed by Elmar Brok, the current chair of the European Parliament's foreign-affairs committee. Slovakia's Pavol Demeš (German Marshall Fund of the U.S.) received the largest number of votes among the 10 candidates submitted by EU member states and members of the European Parliament for three positions reserved for civil society representatives. Demeš was followed by Sandra Breka (Bosch Foundation in Berlin) and Lisbeth Pilegaard (The KVINFO Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Diversity). The member states in the Executive Committee are represented by Spain and Romania and the European Parliament by Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, a member of the European Parliament's foreign-affairs committee. The election of the Executive Director of the EED Secretariat was postponed (instead of her/his selection by the BoG, there is an open call for this position). The next BoG meeting will be held in the second half of December.

Challenges. The adoption of the EED statute and the selection of its representative bodies do not mean that there are no further obstacles for the fund to gain momentum. In particular, besides the broadly outlined geographical and theatrical scope, there is no agreement on specific goals and ways of supporting pro-democracy actors (including chiefly through cooperation with member state embassies, EU delegations or political foundations). In addition, the modus operandi of the EED Secretariat (for example the question of how many employees it should have in order to stay cost-effective) and the decision making process that would enable the 41-member BoG to provide "quick fire" support, have yet to be agreed on. It is also necessary to ensure coherence with EU instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and other international organisations (e.g. International IDEA and the Council of Europe). With such a large number of projects and organisations dedicated to democracy promotion, effective coordination of support seems hardly realistic. Besides, at a time of crisis in the eurozone, additional efforts ought to be made to ensure a satisfactory level of voluntary contributions from member states (the aim is to raise €15 million). For example, Sweden initially pledged €5 million, but finally committed itself to contributing €1 million. The uncertain level of donations may not only delay the kick-off of the EED but negatively affect efforts to draw up a strategy for the short and medium term. To compare, the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED) receives an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress.

Recommendations. As Poland called for the establishment of the EED, it should keep stimulating the process of getting it off the ground and make some realistic and creative contributions. Despite the fact the EED became a common EU project and most of the work has been done under the auspices of the EEAS, at the end of the day Poland bears responsibility for the final outcome of the project. At this stage, Poland should aim at creating a collation of member states that will be actively involved in managing the EED and provide it with funds on a regular basis. Additionally, Poland should try to guarantee the EED fixed funding from the EU (e.g. from the EIDHR). Besides Poland should strive to ensure both an effective flow of information among the members of the Board of Governors and coherent external communication (lack of information could discourage the stakeholders from providing the EED with funds). This is important because the very idea of the EED can cause misunderstandings. On the one hand, the EED is independent and autonomous from the EU. On the other, representatives of EU institutions are members of the EED's governing bodies. What is even more confusing is that the chair of the European Parliament's foreign-affairs committee is also head of the BoG. In order to increase support for the EED, Poland should repeatedly emphasise the EED's added value, in particular its apolitical character and the nature of the European Union as a whole. This will help to avoid situations in which political foundations, for example, are accused of pursuing the agendas of third states. Due to the fact that the EED will not open its offices in third countries, Poland should try to make sure that the operational model of the EED Secretariat is optimal (e.g. try to establish focal points in the embassies of member states, EU delegations and recruit professional staff who would often travel to the region and create strong networks from the ground up). To compare with the proposed 20-strong EED Secretariat staff, the U.S. NED employs around 150 people. Finally, there is no doubt that Poland should also work to ensure its appropriate representation in the EED's bodies.