

The FMS's approach to democratization

How can we achieve change?

The FMS and its predecessor AMS have been active in the area of democracy support since 1990. As a political foundation we are involved in a part of this: building political parties.

Macro objective

The objective we want to achieve is a world in which democracy and the rule of law are the norm. Democratic states governed by the rule of law are characterized by well-functioning political institutions, respect for human rights, freedom of expression, professional media not controlled by the state, minority rights enshrined in law and an impartial justice system.

Meso objective

The FMS is actively engaged in supporting democracy. We focus on political institutions within democracies and specifically on political parties. The FMS contributes to the development of a democratic state governed by the rule of law with a representative democracy, in which citizens can organise themselves in political parties. These political parties are based on a political ideology: a coherent system of ideas about the organization of society.

Micro objective

The FMS is specifically focused on strengthening political parties with a social democratic political character. These are parties that identify as social democratic and are connected to or seek connections with international social democratic structures (PES, S&D, Progressive Alliance, Socialist International). These parties have a recognizable social democratic political programme and act accordingly. They are democratically organized and subscribe to fundamental democratic values formulated under the macro objective and actively work towards realizing them. This means that they respect human rights and the rights of minorities, comply with the principles of a democratic state under the rule of law and fight for the weaker members of society. In the countries in which we are active we strive to ensure that social democracy is strongly rooted in well-organized political parties that represent a substantial part of the electorate.

Sub objective1

Social democratic parties are parties with a highly diverse active membership and leadership, with equal participation of women, youths and minorities, both in terms of ethnicity and gender.

Indicators

Our trainings contribute to the development of the capacities of parties, political youth organizations and political women's organizations. If the partner takes diversity seriously, we

will know this from the requests we get because training is necessary to achieve this goal. If the party takes diversity seriously, it will develop policy to achieve this and put it into practice, because that is necessary to bring about change. If the party takes diversity seriously, we will find this in the training courses because the groups will be highly diverse in make-up. If the party takes diversity seriously, we will find this in the representatives of this party because they can more easily advance to leading positions.

Sub objective 2

Social democratic parties are democratically organized with fair and transparent decision-making processes and active participation from the members.

Indicators

If our partner is democratically organized, this will be borne out by our partner analysis carried out based on independent sources and in discussions with members and representatives of this party. FMS training courses actively contribute to this sub objective. If internal democracy is taken seriously, this will be borne out by the applications for training courses that we get, because these training courses contribute to achieving this objective.

Sub objective 3

Social democratic parties have a clearly defined political programme that is laid down in writing and in which social democratic core values are recognizable.

Indicators

This is evident from our partner analysis and from the fact that the partner is able to produce a political programme. The participants in the FMS activities are aware of the programme and know its contents. If our partner takes programme development seriously, this will show in the applications for training, in discussions with party representatives and in the party's public statements. If our partner takes programme development seriously, this will show in our training courses, because the participants are able to use the party's programme in practice in exercises.

How we achieve our goals

The FMS actively works to achieve the objectives presented above. We have developed a method for this that has the following features:

Context analysis

Before the FMS becomes active in a country we thoroughly analyze the political context. The context in which political parties have to operate is decisive for the probability of successfully achieving the objectives set out above. First of all, we need to determine where the country stands in relation to the standards of a democracy governed by the rule of law, because that determines the extent to which political parties can develop at all. For example, can political parties campaign unhindered, does the media give all parties equal opportunities and are elections run fairly? We also check whether political parties are (legally) anchored in society. And we analyze the political system and the role political parties play in it. For example, it is important to know whether we are dealing with a presidential or a parliamentary system.

Partner analysis

Before teaming up with a new partner, the FMS conducts an analysis. This analysis is performed primarily by means of a literature study. Frequently, meetings are also held with the potential partner during international gatherings, or at our offices. The FMS staff also make enquiries with the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D group), sister foundations and experts. If there is enough ground to take the potential partner seriously, we visit the relevant country. Below we list a number of indicators. For us to take a partner seriously, a number (not all) of these indicators have to be met.

The indicators are:

- Election success lasting more than 1 cycle
- Representation at local, regional and national level
- Has multiple branches in the country
- Has a party programme or election programme that has clearly recognizable social democratic core values
- Is known in our international network
- Has a youth/women's movement
- Is mentioned in the media of the relevant country
- Well-known leaders with national standing
- Has a good reputation on transparency and fighting corruption

Fact finding mission

An intensive fact finding mission is sent over to visit the party and hold meetings with leading figures in the party and with the youth and women's organizations associated with the party. Further meetings are held with the authorities, civic organizations and international institutions. It is also important to see if there are other parties that have the label social democratic. After the fact finding mission, which we usually carry out with other international partners, a report is written about the relevant party. This report is discussed at the international level, after which the FMS takes an independent decision whether or not to team up with this new party. If the answer is affirmative, first a pilot training course is held to see if we really have a new partner. After the pilot, further decisions are taken about the future relationship and activities.

How do we gather context and partner information?

The FMS is responsible within the European social democratic network for the daily running of the secretariat of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. The European Forum collaborates with PES, the S&D group and with European political parties and foundations that are dedicated to supporting social democracy across the border. This role puts FMS in a special position. We analyze the political developments in all eastern and southern ENP countries, with special focus on social democracy. By means of a website, a newsletter, country profiles and an email alert for important events we disseminate crucial information about the political context in the countries in which we are active. Our team of project managers complemented by interns devotes a large part of its time to this work. Based on the analyses, choices are made in consultation with our partners about working methods in specific countries.

Plan of action

After we have analyzed the context and the partner and carried out a pilot training, it is important to outline a process. In principle the partner is leading in that process. The party that we work with sets itself an objective and considers how the FMS can contribute to achieving that objective. Here, again, context is decisive. Our sister parties in an almost complete dictatorship like Belarus first set themselves the objective of getting rid of the dictatorship and democratizing the country. The support of the FMS primarily serves this objective. In a country with an established multi-party democracy, such as Albania, the objectives tend to be tied to the electoral cycle that every political party faces. The objective may be for example becoming or remaining the biggest party in the next elections. The FMS' activities then contribute to this. In Macedonia, the FMS supports the SDUM. With the other parties and parts of civil society, this party is fighting against an increasingly authoritarian trend in the country. The SDUM is fighting for democracy and does this by organizing street protests and participating in elections. Here, too, the activities of the FMS support the SDUM's objectives. In Ukraine, however, there are no longer any social democratic parties that are active in parliament. In this country the FMS supports a political social democratic youth organization which strives to change politics from the outside and may become a political party in the long run. In Jordan, elections are held but members of parliament are not chosen based on their political colour, but based on their family or clan and their loyalty to the royal family. Change is slow and our sister party has endeavoured to change this system. Slowly we are seeing political parties claiming and carving out a bigger role in society. The FMS is helping our partner realize this.

The examples mentioned above show the importance of the context of the country and our partner's position in the political landscape.

The FMS works with a step-by-step plan:

- 1) General objective is fixed
- 2) Context analysis and partner analysis
- 3) Specify general objective for the relevant country and partner
- 4) Partner sets the objective and the contribution that the FMS can provide
- 5) Partner works with the FMS to realize the objective
- 6) Interim (semi-annual and annual) evaluations to check that we are on the right track
- 7) Possible interim adjustments
- 8) The objective is achieved, or not
- 9) Reorientation on the FMS' role
- 10) Repeat of the cycle or decision to discontinue with partner or withdraw from country

The FMS works demand-led and based on equality

The relationship with our partners in the countries where we are active is characterized by equality and respect for the sister party's own considerations and priorities. The equality is based on the fact that we are both members of the European/global institutions of the social democracy and on a shared political background and motivation.

The FMS works demand-led

The FMS becomes active when the partner has put in a request to the organization. Obviously, there has usually been advance contact about what the FMS has to offer, but ultimately we do not impose

programmes. We know from experience that impositions do not work because then demand is not properly internalized, and the impact of the training will be limited. Furthermore, the partners often find it difficult to reject something, either for politeness or because it is better than nothing and trainings also represent economic value. When the organization receives a request, it has further contact with the partner about the specific content of the programme. The question that is put to the FMS must relate to improving key parts of the party's functioning. We try to make the question as concrete as possible: what is the formulated objective and how can the FMS contribute to realizing it?

The FMS only offers training, but no consultancy, financial or material assistance

The FMS contributes to the partner's objective to be realized by providing practical training. The FMS does not provide financial and/or material assistance to political parties. That means for example that the FMS does not offer direct financing for election campaigns, does not pay salaries or the rent of offices or the purchase of office supplies such as servers or computers. The FMS does not provide advice to political parties on how to improve their functioning. The FMS organization and the FMS trainers do not present themselves as political consultants. The FMS provides training to help parties find out for themselves how they can realize their objectives. That is a conscious choice. We believe it is more effective to enable parties to come up with their own solutions. At the end of the day this is a far more sustainable approach than (short-term) tactical or strategic advice. In principle the FMS trainings are held in the country that requested it and not in the Netherlands. We sometimes move them to a neighbouring country if the situation requires it.

Capacity development: the FMS handbook and additional modules

The FMS has developed a handbook with 19 chapters of theory. Each of these chapters discusses a key topic in the area of political skills. These political skills are vital for a party or a politician to become more professional. Based on the partner's request trainers compile a modular programme and present it to the partner. If there is agreement about the content, the FMS trainers carry out the programme. We frequently add new modules if there is demand for them, such as on subjects like gender, debating and new media. These modules and the handbooks are available on a special website, which is publicly accessible: www.politicalskills.org. A great deal of FMS material is also available in multiple languages.

Experienced political trainers

FMS trainers are volunteers, and are selected by the FMS office based on their curricula vitae. In principle, FMS trainers have gained political experience themselves. FMS trainers are trained by the FMS, during which they familiarize themselves with the FMS method. The FMS also trains local trainers for local partners.

Training method

The FMS training courses build on the experience that the participants already have. Knowledge is imparted to the participants in short theoretical introductions, which are followed by an exercise. The exercises are as realistic as possible and in line with daily practice. FMS trainers aim for the information learned to be immediately applicable in practice and create a safe and predictable learning environment in which the participants can strengthen their capabilities.

Selection and evaluation

The selection and the intake interview with the participants are handled by the local partner. However, the FMS sets requirements for the profile of the participants. For example, it is a requirement in a training for trainers that the participants have already followed a training course so that they are familiar with the FMS method. The minimum age for participation is 18 in principle, and we expect that the participants have been associated with the party for some time.

The training is always followed by an evaluation in which the participants can point out what went well and what should be improved. We do this both in a plenary meeting in which each participant is asked for his or her opinion, and in a written questionnaire. Afterwards the trainers and the local party submit their evaluation of the training to the FMS office. The FMS project managers always make follow-up calls. Evaluations focus on both content and practice. In future activities the lessons learned from the previous activity are implemented.