

Taps German Experiences on positing Think Tanks in Foreign Policy Formulation and Analysis

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A delegation from the Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development (EIIPD), accompanied by experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has paid working visits to German based think tanks and foundations from 15 -20 October 2012. The lessons obtained are being considered as input to reviewing the Ethiopian institute.

Under the leadership of the honorable Sebhat Negga, Executive Director of EIIPD the group visited two think tanks, two foundations, the German Foreign Office, the Bundestag and German Foreign Service Academy. The working visit was aimed at learning how think tanks are working in Germany, in serving the Bundestag and the German Foreign Office in policy formulation processes and the working relations between think tanks, Bundestag and German Foreign Office. On recruitment and training processes of diplomats, counselor and clerk workers for the Foreign Service by the German Foreign Service Academy a run-down of the German practice provided useful ideas to the particular interest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff members.

During the visits officials and experts in the think tanks as well as in the foundations briefed the delegate about their function and contribution to the policy process of the German Foreign Office and the Bundestag. The discussion held with the respective institution officials and experts was effective in the way of the experience gained that will help to strengthen and improve the service of EIIPD.

The two think tanks visited by the delegates are German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA). The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) is Germany's network for foreign policy. The council is an independent, non-partisan, and nonprofit membership organization, the think tanks has been engaged in promoting public debate on foreign policy in Germany for over 50 years.

The second think tank that was visited by the delegate was the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) which is the biggest research institute for area and comparative studies in Germany, and is one of the biggest in Europe as well. This research institutes focuses on political, economic and social developments in Africa, Asia, Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East. GIGA researchers also concentrate on inter-regional linkages and global themes.

The delegates also visited two foundations; the German Institute for International and Security Affairs or Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) and Friederihc Ebert Stiftung (FES). The German Institute for International and Security Affairs is an academic research center which was established in 1962 with the legal status as a foundation. The institute is funded from the budgetary resource of the Federal Chancellery.

Major beneficiary of the institutes research output and policy advice of the institute are the Bundestag, the Federal Government of Foreign Ministry as well as the Chancellor's office on security policy issues .The institute is an independent research institute and has no organic link with any party. It is not a think tank but the function of the institute is basically behind the policy formulation processes. It provides policy options and advice and also summaries of findings and translates academic research into policy options so that the legislative organ and decision makers understand the issues easily.

The Friederihc Ebert Stiftung (FES) is a German political foundation associated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), yet independent of it.

Established in 1925, it is the largest and oldest of the German party-associated foundations. It promotes democracy and development, to contribute to peace and security. FES provides policy advice to politicians and trade unions as they to find viable policy solutions. In so doing the ideals and the values of Social Democracy –freedom, justice and solidarity are promoted.

Its interface with academia and political practice enables political actors to make informed and competent decisions. FES is also engaged in enhancing understanding of the global policy agenda and support public debate on future policy directions.

The delegates also visited the German Foreign Office and understand how the German Foreign Office is benefiting from the out puts of think tanks in scientific research as well as advice. The delegation visited the German Bundestag to be briefed on the working relation between think tanks and foundations on the one hand the Bundestag on the other.

At the German Foreign Service Academy the group was briefed how diplomats, consular and general staff in diplomatic services are recruited, trainees and oriented on relevant functions in diplomatic assignments. The experience was taken as useful reference in developing process of similar activities at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Towards the conclusion of its visit the delegation took advantage to participate in the caucus debate on African issues which is occasionally held by the parliamentary group of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. During the debate, Ethiopia's current developments figured importantly.