

This thesis looks at the engagement and influence of Political Foundations on European Level (PFELs) and German Political Foundations in the process of EU enlargement. The case study of the Western Balkans is used. The research design includes qualitative research methodology based on semi-structured interviews with experts from the Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies (WMCES) and the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS), as well as relevant documents and publications.

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to filling a significant gap in the literature on these particular actors in EU Politics and EU Enlargement. The thesis uncovers networks, instruments, mechanisms, and channels that these foundations use and which they exploit to exert influence. Therefore, this thesis offers, in the first step, a refined conceptualization and, in the second step, an analytical, evaluative perspective on the role of Political Foundations in the process of EU Enlargement. By examining the functions of political foundations with the concepts of norm entrepreneurs, knowledge brokers, and watchdogs, the thesis offers a nuanced understanding of their role and influence in the process of EU enlargement. This thesis thus enriches the academic discourse and offers new insights for practitioners involved in the enlargement process. Furthermore, enhanced knowledge about these publicly funded actors is relevant to provide a basis for critically discussing their value beyond the academic sphere.