Regional Policy Network

About journeys of liberal ideas

A

QUESTION

OF

POLICY

elf

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European Liberal Forum

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A handbook offering essential insights into how policies are developed

Table of Content

The Why

When thinking about policy cycles from a liberal perspective and trying to define what would the methodology of policymaking, applied by liberal political activists from different sectors, look like, one can conclude that it would be useful to have some of the best practices from liberals across Europe gathered in one handbook. Such a handbook can then be used as a guide on how to influence internal policy, as well as for finding the best approach for developing liberal policies and defining existing and potential roles in the process.

So, what would be the role of different groups of political activists, and what is, or could be, the role of liberal political foundations and think tanks in the policy-making process? Taking into consideration how Wilks and Wright[1] tried to define the relationships and networks involved in policy cycles, by proposing a three-fold typology: *policy universe, policy community, and policy network*, we can start thinking about which groups inside a liberal political family would represent each of the aforementioned three. How so? According to Wilks and Wright, a policy universe is a large population of (potential) actors who share common goals and interests in industrial policy. A policy community involves (potential) actors with an interest in a particular industry who work with each other to mutual benefit. And a policy network would, according to them, represent a linking mechanism between policy communities.

If we replace the industrial principles with those of liberalism, we can potentially transfer their concept to groups of liberal political activists developing policies based on shared ideological values. A national or international liberal organisation of actors who cooperate due to shared ideological values and principles, be it individual political activists, political parties, political foundations and think tanks, liberal youth wings, or women's organisations, could then potentially become an example of a policy universe. Permanent, temporary, or *ad hoc* working groups of liberal political activists who share goals and knowledge regarding a certain topic, formed from within that policy universe, in order to develop a particular policy proposal, can be then considered a policy community. This leaves us with potentially granting the role

of a policy network to a group within the liberal policy universe. But can it be just one group? Probably not. Although the versatility of the concept makes it hard to exemplify a policy network, it also creates potential room for political foundations and think tanks to step in and strengthen their role in a liberal policy cycle, by becoming one of the most important policy networks within the liberal policy universe.

For determining the potential room for policy networks of political foundations and think tanks in a policy cycle, it is necessary to determine how the process currently looks like, to become familiar with the good practices liberal political organisations have cultivated over the years, and to try and learn from mistakes already made. The birth of a liberal policy idea is followed by the creation of a policy cycle that represents a *life path* for the development of the said idea. Each stage of this path represents a journey that must be undertaken to reach the next phase, which is important for the policy idea to become properly developed, adopted, applied, and modified if needed. In a liberal policy universe, birth to different policy ideas is given on a weekly, or even daily basis (by different policy communities), but is there a development principle that links them all? If so, isn't this a perfect opportunity for a liberal political foundation or think tank to step in and potentially become such a link? Absolutely!

A Question of Policy: About Journeys of Liberal Ideas offers a unique perspective on how policies are being developed within different kinds of liberal organisations, from different corners of Europe. All recommendations, advice, and messages (withheld in the quotes and figures) found in the booklet have been derived from the experiences of other fellow liberals. They are the experiences that are supposed to teach and be relatable to most of the liberal policy developers. The reader will have the opportunity to understand their experiences and hopefully find advice on how to approach policymaking.

1. Wilks, S. & Wright, M. (Eds.) (1987). Comparative government-industry relations: Western Europe, United States, and Japan. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The How

The methodology behind this handbook is mainly based on the research of policy-making practices, as well as examining the current and potential future role of political foundations and think tanks, conducted by exploring the habits of European liberal political parties, networks, associations, foundations and think tanks during different stages of a policy cycle. The choice is such because the best way to learn is from each other's experiences.

This has been done through a survey conducted amongst representatives (mostly policy developers) of the European liberal political parties, international organisations and networks, and liberal foundations and think tanks. The survey was sent out to 28 European liberal political parties, 3 international organisations and networks, as well as foundations/think tanks that are members of the European Liberal Forum. Finally, over the course of seven weeks, responses were collected from representatives of ten liberal political parties, from nine European countries, one liberal pan-European party, one international liberal youth organisation, and three liberal political foundations/think tanks. Liberal political parties involved in the research were from the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, and Sweden. The liberal political foundations and think tanks involved in the research are stationed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Estonia, and Italy.

This handbook consists of 16 chapters divided into three parts. Part 1 explains the importance of a well-defined ideological framework for setting clear policy goals, as well as how the way you communicate your ideology through official documents and public statements can contribute to defining the ideological framework. Part 2 intends to sum up the policymaking methodology used by European liberals, including their best practice examples and some of the toughest challenges they have had to face. Part 3 talks about the decision-making processes that lead to the adoption and implementation of the proposed policies; it is supposed to help map the path and hurdles that need to be crossed for a policy gaining the necessary support.

All chapters contain direct citations from our participants that are supposed to bring their experiences closer to the reader. Short advice on the different topics discussed can be found marked off in the chapters. Also, recommendations for potential roles of liberal foundations and think tanks in different phases of the policy cycle, which have evolved from the conducted research, are listed at the end of parts 1, 2, and 3, as ideas on how to increase their influence as a policy network in each of the policymaking stages, as defined in this handbook.

Part 1
The Ideology Behind The Policy

1.1
What Mission?
Understanding Liberal Beliefs

As mentioned in the introduction, the individual actors within a liberal policy universe share common goals and principles based on liberal ideological values. The ideology is what gives context to all ideas born within a policy universe, since one of the main goals of political organisations, driven by ideologies, is to transfer certain values to the societies they act in. One would come to think it is simple and logical that individuals who join a liberal political organisation would share the same values as everyone else in that organisation, but the reality is often a bit different than this. This is because, even though there are ideological collective identities, every individual also has his personal ideological framework, and organizing politically is, in its essence, more of an organic process rather than a calculated one.

When asked if they believe whether members of their organisations fully understand its ideological framework, only two of the respondents, who participated in the survey conducted prior to writing this booklet, have answered that they believe everyone in their organisation completely understands their organisation's ideological framework (*see Figure 1*). Other responses were either leaning towards "I believe most of our members understand the ideological framework of our political organisation" or "I believe only high-ranking members and some other members fully understand the ideological framework of your political organisation" – and this is something a lot of people involved in a work of political organisations can probably relate to.

Most of our members understand our ideology

Everyone understands our ideology

All members have their own vision on what the party's ideology is

Only high-ranking members understand our ideology

Figure 1
Do your members understand your ideology?

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey
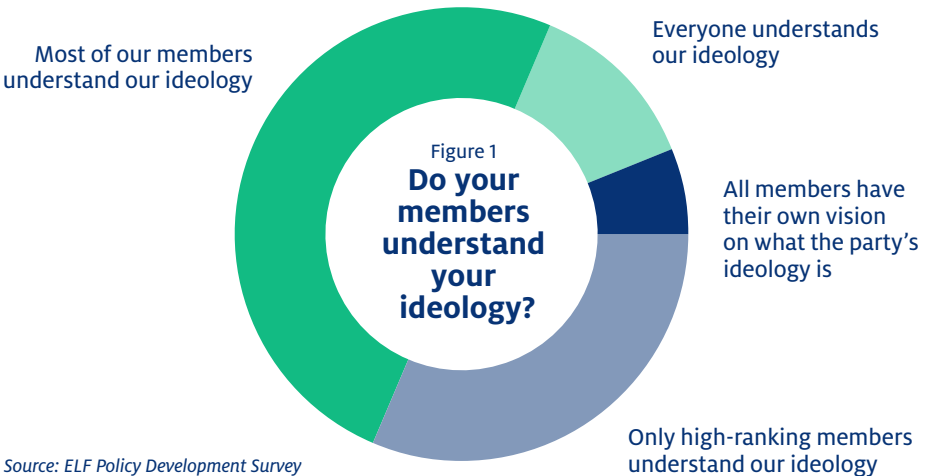
The respondent, who admitted that he believes all members have their vision of what their relatively young party's ideology is, explained:

„
Some members are focused on the local problems and have no major interest in the party's ideological framework

The choice of answer, among other things, had a lot to do with the length of each of the political organisation's tradition. The survey showed that the older and more experienced organisations tend to have members with a clear understanding of their ideological framework, as compared to the younger and less experienced organisations that participated in the same survey.

Nevertheless, why is it important to have the ideological framework be clear to most people within an organisation? Well, if aiming to increase the organisation's social influence, every member becomes an advocate for proposed policy solutions. Paradoxically, the public respects both – the organisations that adapt easily to new situations, as well as organisations that adhere to a set of core principles. Ideologies are a skeleton and should offer both *mobility* and *flexibility*, as well as *form* and *structure* to policies. Also, not all members will have the same knowledge and/or education on certain topics, but being aware of the organisation's ideological framework gives them at least an outline of its stand on certain issues and more

often an idea of what it definitely does not stand for. Shifting policies too far to the left or the right is particularly risky for advocates of liberal ideas. Therefore, it is important to project consistency when drafting a new policy.

Some advice on consistency:

1 Keep educating and informing your members and staff about your ideology through seminars, training, panel discussions, by making clear guidelines available to everyone within your political organisation, and through constant communication of leaders and political influencers with people involved in your organisation's work.

2 Make sure all policies are carefully aligned with your organisation's ideological principles, by always applying the abovementioned methods to persons involved in policy development for/within your political organisations.

3 Always do ideological evaluations of policy proposals and ideas for policy solutions. This kind of calibration happens with a careful approach towards the processes in the following chapters.

1.2
What is Declared?
Aligning Policy with Mission

The mission of a political organisation is declared through its official documents, which are usually the founding documents, declarations, and most often – manifestos. The declared mission and goals can be long-term, but also derived from present situations, mostly set to resolve current problems. All respondents answered that their organisation's policies are either always or often aligned with its manifestos and declarations of missions. Even though the majority admitted they only read the manifestos if they deem it necessary before developing a certain policy, some of them did believe manifestos are a pledge and that all policies should be carefully aligned with what is written in documents that declare the mission of an organisation.

Manifestos of political organisations are indeed a pledge, and they must reflect and sum up the organisation's ideological framework. Therefore, if ideology is a skeleton for all current and future policies, then manifestos and declaration are its tendons and ligaments. They are the *connective tissue* that allows the ideology to fully express itself by giving it both the *solidity* and the *manoeuvrability* it needs. Both are important, since unforeseen circumstances occur very often and it becomes necessary to adapt and sometimes even

offer policy solutions that might not be fully in accordance with manifestos and declarations. This may seem like breaking a pledge, or it may even lead to a need to change a manifesto. Neither are very popular with members or supporters.

"
One of our local vice majors had to support the closure of the party district in our capital to support a decision of the opposition coalition; this was heavily criticized by our base, as our manifesto defines our party as a generation movement and also on liberal economic development. The main consequence is that it has linked our actions with those of other parties and has created doubts about how coalitions might harm the movement.

A respondent from a more experienced party stated:

"
When the party manifesto was to be updated for the first time in many years, the very process of updating it with ideas that were not a part of the previous manifesto was very painful and caused conflict within the party.

Of course, electoral manifestos are very important for political parties, but this does not only relate to them. All kinds of organisations need some sort of organisational manifesto, or declaration of a mission, or a white book, or some other kind of document that can represent an organisation's pledge.

Some advice on declaring your mission:

1 Try to make your manifestos both solid and flexible, so they can project strong core principles, as well as the ability to adapt to new circumstances that might occur. This particularly important advice is for younger organisations.

2 Shape your manifestos in a manner that leaves room for adaptation. This way, resolutions and declarations that are adopted later, out of necessity, which are usually a part of an agenda-setting process for the development of a particular policy, are not going to be inconsistent with your organisation's initial pledge.

3 Make sure your manifestos and declarations leave room to compromise and to determine red lines your organisation would rather not cross. This is very important for staying open for any potential collaborations and coalition negotiations.

"
We do not have a manifesto in the Western European sense; it's more of a set of very general rules (like the ten commandments) and detailed electoral programs. The first one is very broad and open for interpretation so that the second one always fits in.

Sometimes our opinion has shifted, or public opinion has shifted. This rarely occurs regarding larger proposals that attract a lot of media attention. When it comes to government: our party is a part of a coalition. That means that we made compromises in our coalition agreement, and at times our Ministers have to execute a policy that was not a part of our manifesto.

1.3
What is Promised?
Scrolling Through the Media

Most of the respondents felt that it is important to search for media content relevant to their organisation and the issue of the policy that is being developed. Some have stated that they only research potentially relevant media content if they are already aware of a controversial public statement on the topic. The important role of the media in the processes of agenda-setting and policy promotion has been identified by many survey participants. To best cover all bases, before developing a policy idea, it is important to be aware of things stated publicly by the organisation's representatives, especially if they are considered to be the political influencers and/or the organisation's leaders. Otherwise, serious damage control might become necessary, like in the example below.

"
One of our council members criticized the party's decision to commemorate the territorial loss of Hungary in 1920, after WWI. While our party stated an empathy to the so-called Hungarian tragedy, this official publicly stated on his social media account his contradictory views on commemorating the happening. This was immediately picked up by the government-controlled media and is still up today, creating a base of criticism for the party.

Although some of the survey participants claimed that their organisation's officials always comply with the party documents and currently adopted policies, most of the other answers left room for the assumption that statements, which were not in accordance with party policies, were made at least once in the past. This shows the importance of keeping public statements in check with your policies and missions, as well as the importance of being cautious when choosing ambassadors who are supposed to promote a policy.

"
Usually, it is MPs or local high representatives who publish statements that are not aligned with the party's policies. Most often, it has to do with the fact that each and every politician has moments when s/he struggles with the policies of the party and his/her own convictions, and that they are not aligned.

Some advice on public statements:

1 Use search engines on different online platforms to look for statements of your organisation's most prominent officials on the topic of the policy you plan to develop. Take everything you find into account, be it posts on social media or official statements in traditional media.

2 If statements are in accordance with the planned solutions found in the policy proposal, use them as promises your organisation has already made in the past, for better agenda-setting.

3 If statements are not in accordance with your proposed policy solutions, consult with your public relations department about evaluating and controlling the potential damage the statement could do to a good policy. Do not promote your policy through ambassadors who have made statements that do not conform to the policy's principles.

1.4
What is Discussed?
Putting Heads Together

Usually, a policy cycle starts even before a policy idea is born. This happens mainly because of an existing problem. This problem might already be of public interest, but it can also be something that has been a part of an organisation's political strategy or a general liberal agenda that has not yet caught enough of the public's attention. For situations like these, it is necessary to start an agenda-setting process that is connected to the planned policy.

The creation of narratives and advocacy are crucial to the process of agenda-setting and it is necessary to use political influencers, political leaders, and thought leaders to shift the public's attention to the problem the policy intends to address and to set the agenda for the promotions of proposed policy solutions. This requires a launch of an advocacy coalition made of relevant stakeholders, policy developers, and communication experts. They must collaborate and discuss strategies of agenda-setting, for creating a framework on how to influence the policy through various venues. For this process to be successful, resources must be employed. Those resources involve: [1] a formal legal authority to make decisions, [2] awareness of public opinion, [3] information, [4] mobilization of troops, [5] financial resources, and

[6] skilful leadership.[2] Lacking any of the mentioned six does increase the jeopardy for the agenda-setting to become less efficient, so it is recommended to find a way to ensure these resources are provided to an advocacy coalition.

Of course, for a policy cycle to become successful, it is required to ensure the agenda-setting is done based on defined ideological principles. For this, the leadership of the organisation has to be the one to initiate the process. Most of the survey participants admitted that their organisation's leadership and influencers are involved in the agenda- and course-setting of any policy cycle.

"

The party's leadership decides the main visions and policy development priorities. For example, it is the leadership that decides on the themes for the programs to the party congress (which is held every second year). Many policy development processes are initiated or anchored in the leadership in one or another way, but exactly where in the leadership and in what detail depends on the magnitude, importance, and timeframe of the political issue at hand.

Party Leadership always approves the policy and sometimes also initiates them.

2. Sabatier, P.A. & Weible, C.M. (2005, April). Innovations in the advocacy coalition framework. Paper presented at the American Society for Public Administration meeting, Milwaukee, WI.

Some advice on agenda-setting:

1 Involve leaders and influencers. They are important for agenda-setting and they are in most cases the ones who are best familiar with the topic and/or your ideological framework.

2 Make sure your organisation's leadership and influencers set the course of your policy cycle, as well as the agenda-setting process, so your organisation can control the outcome.

3 Take into consideration any advice you might get from outside experts and advocates. Be flexible, but try to keep the agenda within your ideological framework.

1.5
What is the Basis?
A Clear Picture of Policy Goals

When trying to define a clear picture of policy goals, all participants agree that the following should be taken into consideration:

• The final version of the policy: a clear scheme of the way the policy addresses the problems and what solution it offers.

• The adaptation of the policy: the path that needs to be undertaken for proposed policy solutions to be adopted by decision-makers; the policy needs to appeal to those who have to vote for it.

• The implementation of the policy: the policy must offer clear goals and solutions applicable to both the political, economic, and social context of the issue it is trying to tackle.

• The impact of the policy: potential scenarios of the policy's aftermath; by carefully defining the potential results of your policy, both the wanted and the unwanted scenarios can be considered.

• The public reaction to the policy: this is important to take into account during the entire policy cycle, since it might create the most problems for the organisation and jeopardize the achievement of policy goals; most of the times this is what defines how a policy reflects upon your organisation's future political work.

Heinelt[3] argues that the predictability of the effects of political decisions is related to the range of choices available. If more options become available, the effects of political decisions are harder to predict and the debate on how to solve a problem becomes more contested; that can lead to your policy becoming more muddled and fragile. This means that the more complicated the policy proposal, the wider the range of choices of political decisions that becomes available. This might lead to the loss of clarity of goals that are supposed to be achieved by the policy's solutions, and the real impact of the policy cannot be followed properly anymore.

3. Heinelt, H. (2007). 'Do policies determine politics?', p. 115, in Fischer, F., Miller, G.J. & Sidney, M.J. (Ed.) Handbook of Public Policy Analysis – Theory, Politics, and Methods. Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 109-119.

Some advice on setting clear goals:

1 Clearly define and list all essential stages and goals you deem crucial to your policy's development and keep them in mind during the entire process. Losing sight of only one of these goals can cause serious problems in the process. Therefore, keep the process as straightforward as possible.

2 The list of essential stages and goals can also serve as a filter for any addition to the developing policy – just think of how it would look like when put under the magnifying glass of each and every one of the steps mentioned above.

3 The person in charge of policy development should be able to have support and assistance in making sure all stages and goals that are supposed to be achieved during the process are kept in sight.

Potential role of political foundations and think tanks in this stage:

Help with organizing seminars and training on ideological positioning and developing guidelines on ideologies and policies.

Help with researching the public opinion and offer training on doing such research and using search engines in the most efficient ways.

Offering support for creating networks for policy developers, in order for them to exchange best practices, recommend experts, and share new ideas and findings.

Part 2
The Methodolgy Behind The Policy

2.1
What is Principal?
Analysing the Liberal Clockwork

The *liberal clockwork*, in the context of policy cycles, is represented by the persons in charge of policy development within the organisation, or the persons hired by the organisation to develop a particular policy. Policy development can indeed be outsourced. However, most of our respondents stated that their organisations tend to manage policymaking in-house. The vast majority of respondents informed that policies are being developed either by permanent staff, or different ad hoc groups are formed: working groups, expert groups, support groups, and such. They are sometimes backed by stakeholders or parliamentary groups and their supporting staff. Also, depending on the level of government the policy is being developed on, some differences in approach were found in the examples of some organisations. Policies developed on the local level were handled with a less centralized approach and managed by local branches of the organisation.

4. Giddens, A. (1979). Central Problems in Social Theory. Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

"

Government policies are coordinated by the national level of the public policy department and involve parliamentarians, while local policies are coordinated by local departments and involve local councillors.

The process of policy development can be slightly different in the local community. If that is the case, we only work with those people from that area.

Big cities can be an exception here, but our council members and regional leaders have almost full freedom to shape policies on the sub-national level.

But how can we analyze the *liberal clockwork* of policymaking if some prefer permanent staff, while others create working groups, and if a part feels policymaking differentiates when applied to different levels of government? If we consider Giddens'[4] logic of social structures being based upon repetitive patterns of social interactions and apply it to a policy universe, policy community, or a policy network, we can assume they will only slightly change whenever or wherever they are applied. This means that although there might be slight differences in the policy-making processes in different political organisations and on different levels of government, a pattern will always emerge, and if recognized, it can be applied repeatedly in different situations. This makes the process more

consistent, and easier to manage within the organisation. After proper training, the same pattern can most likely be reapplied on all levels of government. This has already come to the attention of participants from some of the surveyed organisations:

„
Representatives in local government and local assemblies are rather substantive. The party structure is still not strong enough to provide all local politicians with sufficient assistance. Other than that, we strive to have the same approach.

There is no difference in ranking. Policy development can both be made in the organisation and in the parliament.

The process is basically the same at any level.

When you have already identified the problem, decided to develop a policy that offers solutions, started setting the agenda, you need to make final preparations before starting the actual engagement in the development process itself. These preparations are individual for every policy community.

„
First, problem analysis is made. What is the problem we need to solve? Why do we have to solve it? Then we look at our current policies and what decisions we have taken historically. We then make sure to anchor the process with some part of the party leadership. After that, we sometimes either create a reference group or make sure that the development process runs through an already existing group in the party, such as one of the thematic networks of committees.

After going through all the participants' recommendations, proper preparation for policy development has been summed up in the activities shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1
Advice on the preparation process

Activity	What/Who		
1 Analysis of…	**A** status quo	**B** current legal framework relevant to the topic	**C** appearances of potential stakeholders and decision-makers on the topic
2 Research on…	**A** organisation's past policies on the topic	**B** media coverage on the topic	**C** local, regional, or international practices on the topic and relevant studies
3 Discussions with…	**A** members of working groups and/or in-house experts	**B** with the organisation's leadership	**C** with members of parliament, ministers, and other prominent political influencers and thought leaders

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

Some advice on creating your own *liberal clockwork*:

1 **Find your routine!**
Whether you have permanent staff in charge of your policymaking, or you tend to form ad hoc groups, or even outsource policy development, with time you will find a most efficient routine for your political organisation.

2 **Recognize a pattern!**
Most efficient methods of policy-making are likely to repeat themselves within your organisation. These can be taught to staffers and representatives of local branches and other members of your organisation, with the goal that most people who might be involved in policymaking become familiar with your methodology.

3 **Transfer the methodology!**
Whatever the topic of the policy might be, the methodology behind policy making is usually the same within a policy universe and can then be trans-ferred to different policy communities and policy networks.

2.2
What is Essential?
The Core of the Process

After the necessary preparations have been made, at the core of policy development it is important to always undertake the following:

1. **Create a timeline for the policy cycle**

2. **Conduct consultations with groups of persons important for the policy's proper development**

3. **Generate an outline for the policy proposal**

It is important to have a timeline set, so that people who are involved in the process can be aware of the deadlines for completing their tasks in order to move from one phase of the policy-making process to the next one. The timeline of the policy cycle must be in accordance with the development of the related agenda-setting activities. This increases the chances of a more positive outcome for the policy that is being developed because when a policy is aligned with current public discourse, it is easier to control both – the policy development, as well as the narrative created around it during the agenda-setting process.

Different groups of people can be rele-
vant for the consultation processes in
the policy cycle, according to our survey
participants – as shown in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2
Importance of consultations with relevant groups
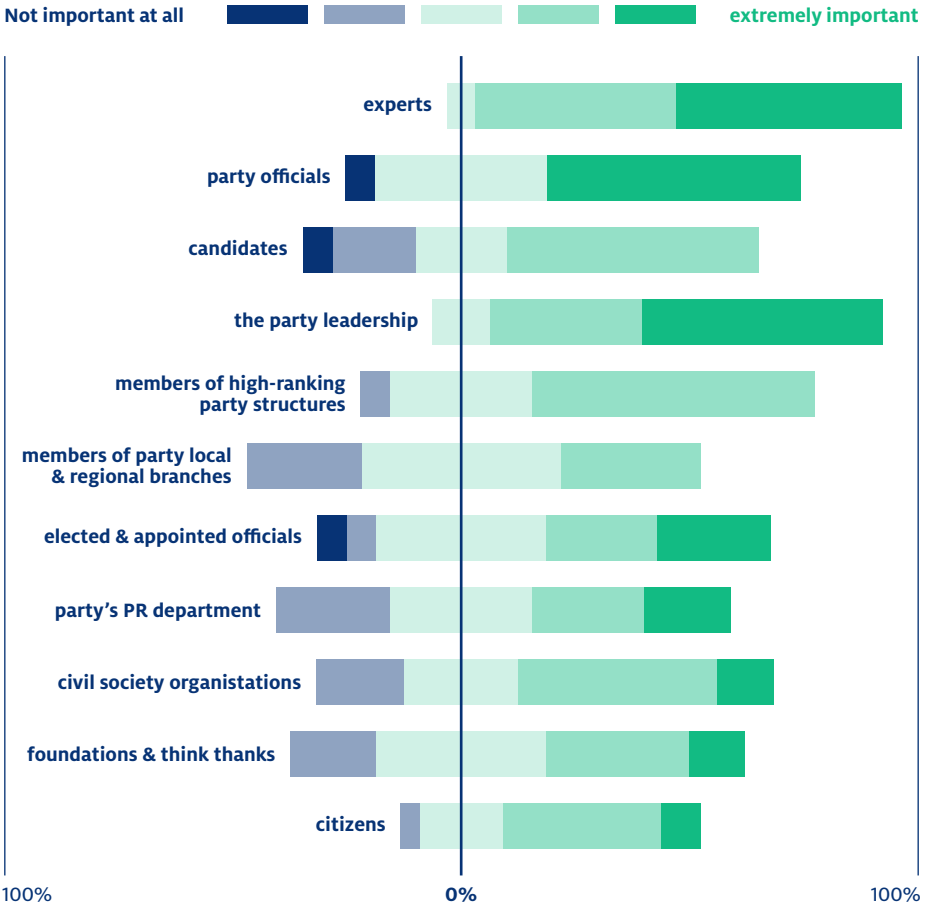
Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

The survey participants from different political parties gave the most relevance to consultations with their organisation's leadership, with groups of experts on the topic covered by the policy, party officials, and elected or appointed officials. They were followed by groups such as: civil society organisations, foundations and think tanks, candidates, and citizens. Needless to say, all of the groups seen above, in *Figure 2*, are important for your policy development process and should generally be consulted every time a policy is being developed. Opinions on the importance of all groups differentiate amongst the respondents of the survey:

"
Policy proposals in parliament are mostly discussed in parliament. Not so much with party officials that are outside parliament. Experts and civil society often play a role. We discuss with local and regional branches when the proposal affects them. This is also the case when it comes to the European level (EP).

Party leadership is often involved in 'battles' of their own, so consulting with them, while consulting with experts, MPs, civil society and PR is often a waste of time and resources.

There must always be a decision-making structure, and for me, for example, think thank organisations form is not so important for making decisions.

Every group from the above is important, except for the PR department – they only need final product.

Consulting with all relevant groups helps create the best outline for a policy brief, because this is the only way to have all bases covered. Developing an outline helps create a more structured policy brief.

Some advice on creating outlines:

1 Have a draft that you can use. Especially if you are a less experienced policy developer. Sometimes your organisation will have a prepared draft for policy outlines. If not, you will create the draft that best suits your preferences.

2 Make an outline that contains all or most of the following components: a) policy background; b) problem/current situation analysis and legal basis; c) risk analysis; d) visions and long term goals; e) concrete proposed solutions; f) methods of policy implementation; g) timeline of implementation; h) financial costs.

3 Make sure you offer a clear explanation of all components of your outline, since it can sometimes be reviewed by your organisation's leadership, prominent figures, and high-ranking officials.

2.3
What Number?
The People Involved

Although there are situations that require large policy teams, the usual practice recommends smaller teams of 3-7 people; almost all our survey participants agreed on this. Large teams can create layers of opinion choices and confusions about what the desired outcome of the policy is. It can also stall the process, all of which can be seen in the bad practice examples in the previous chapter.

"

It can vary a lot depending on the policy at hand. Anything from two persons (a member of parliament and his/her staffer) to 20-30 people (the programs to the congress).

Most of the participants have stated that they have up to three core members of their permanent policy staff who then work with working groups or elected/appointed officials on a particular topic. Nevertheless, some challenges regarding the people involved were also identified:

"

Limited expertise within the Party on certain topics; sometimes it is also difficult to engage outside experts to cooperate on the policy development.

Most are volunteers and they have to manage a large amount of work...

Some advice on volunteers:

1 Volunteers can be very passionate, and they are a good option for organisations with limited resources. On the other hand, they are also a bit more difficult to keep in check when it comes to meeting deadlines, so this can be a challenge. Remember that they are in it for the cause of your policy, so find ways to keep them properly motivated most of the times.

2.4
What Crisis?
The Need for
Snap Policies

Sometimes an unexpected situation occurs – political organisations should try and be prepared to develop snap policies in the occurrence of such situations. Participants' responses gave the impression they were unsure whether their organisation is fully prepared all the time for developing snap policies, but they expressed hope that some parties might be. A lot of their answers showed how they were shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic situation that has put everybody into a global state of emergency and had set the eyes of everyone in the world fixed on possible policy solutions to the current global health crisis. This is an unfortunate circumstance for policy development – the pressure is extremely high, people are dying, and the topic of health and scientific development has usually not been a popular one amongst political activists and their supporters, mostly because of its complexity. The truth is, even when contingency plans for different situations are put in place, a crisis you were not prepared for might still hit and shake you. It is important to learn as much as possible during the crisis, as well as after it has ended.

When it comes to snap policy development, steps are similar to standard policymaking, but the deadlines are much shorter, and one must be prepared to have a more reactionary role. When developing snap policies, teams should be kept small and the decision-making processes within your organisation as short as possible, because, especially in large scale crises, situations might change on a daily or even hourly basis.

After the scale and domain of the crisis have been evaluated, the policy team should immediately reach out to in-house experts on the topic, since they should be the ones that are the easiest to reach quickly. If there are no in-house experts that can offer answers to the policy team, outside professionals, who might share some or most of the organisation's core values, are the ones to ask for advice. The outline should also be short and with a clear strategic approach. All staff within the organisation will probably be in 'crisis management' mode, so the same will happen to the policy development team.

The COVID-19 Policy Shock

How did our liberal organisations manage to handle the global health crisis and all the following crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? Most of them felt that, even though it was a difficult situation for everyone, they have managed to do well. Some even stated that they thought they did so well that their organisation has managed to get the best out of the entire situation. A couple of them admitted that they have tried, but were simply overwhelmed by the situation and wished they could have done better. Here are some of their experiences:

"

This process was mainly driven by the political leadership along with local majors on support of cross-country EU regulations. Widely accepted decisions, but mostly tailored by communication experts.

The proposals we made were short and not very elaborate. At the moment we are working on more elaborate, in-depth, plans.

Our party was in opposition. The government was late with its proposals, so we managed to be the first ones to propose measures for the economy and healthcare. They were rejected, which was fully expected because in Bosnia and Herzegovina the most important thing is who proposed what, and not

what is being proposed. Later, we had amendments on their proposals, but as expected all of those were rejected.

We are in the process of developing a post COVID-19 policy document to be discussed and amended by member parties. There will be so many elements and interests that it could risk being a document for everything and everyone and no one at the same time.

The party was in the same direction as the government. We have strengthened the idea of the need to wear a mask and regular disinfection, for wider testing of citizens. We have not been consistent in our economic recovery measures.

They were all ad hoc. We are in the opposition. They were all quick responses to government proposals. The government has all the tools to propose new policies and we, a small and poor party, could only react. Our main role was to find underbellies and loopholes and draft our responses quickly; 99% of our proposals were rejected.

The COVID-19 health crisis required a wide interdisciplinary approach, and this is something a lot of political organisations struggle with when it requires leaving the comfort zone of political and social sciences. Health policy has been a neglected area for some time now, in most political organisations, but this might change due to the current pandemic. Therefore, all organisations are encouraged to start thinking about involving a wider range of experts and specialists in their policy cycles.

2.5
What is the Flavour?
Defining the Look, the Texture, the Feel

Even though some people feel a policy proposal should be very detailed and include everything one could think of, or perhaps that it should be as short and concise as possible, most of the participants chose a middle ground approach – not too detailed and using a language most people can understand. All of them preferred using a professional writing style with different levels of seriousness; not even one was leaning towards a free and playful one.

"
Short term benefit and immediate impact on the voter side should be easy to identify.
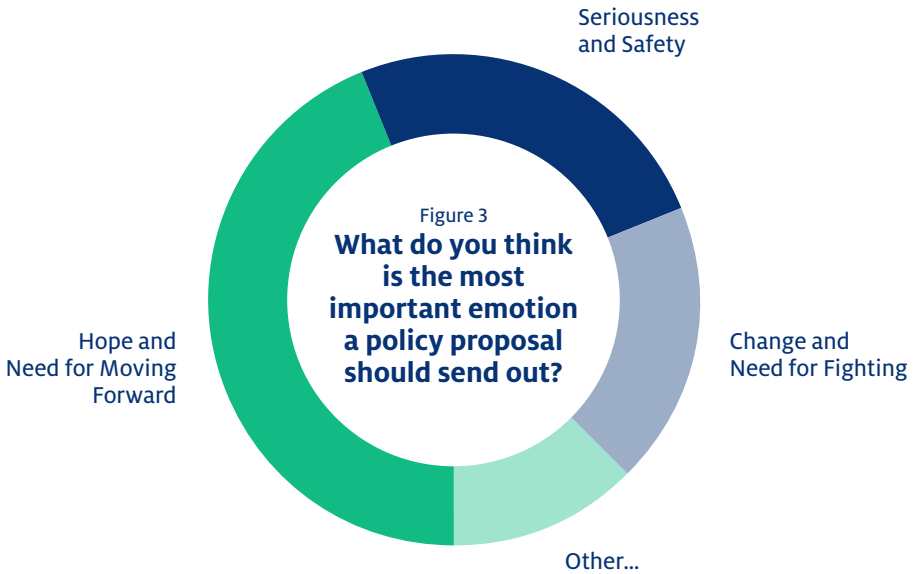
KISS (keep it short and simple), using real-life examples, and so-called mental images.

When creating policies, the policy department is the one focusing on the content and the communications department is focusing on how to make the policies understandable for everyone.

"
A policy proposal full of detail is great for showing expertise and for showing you have a clear plan, but this is not always the most accessible for wider communication. Consider two documents in different styles.

Regular collaboration with the organisation's public relations/communications department assures policy messages are sent out correctly, since developing and communicating a policy are two related processes. Policies should always be available on the organisation's website. Besides websites, the formats used for communicating policy proposals are the following: a) as PDF documents; b) via e-mail; c) as printed versions; d) via social media; e) press conferences.

Figure 3

What do you think is the most important emotion a policy proposal should send out?

Seriousness and Safety

Change and Need for Fighting

Other...

Hope and Need for Moving Forward

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

As seen in *Figure 3*, hope is the emotion most preferred for projection in a policy proposal. It is one of the two strongest emotions to move citizens and beneficiaries and it is good for countering the other one, which is fear. Change is also a strong emotion, but it can be a tricky one because a lot of people are afraid of change and that can cause a counter effect. Seriousness and safety are more conservative emotions, and they also tend to be an acquired taste – something a lot of supporters of liberal organisations and movements do not tend to lean towards.

Some advice on the policy's flavour:

1 Always try and project hope and positive messages in your policy proposal, while trying to balance between a gradual change and a feeling of safety.

2 Be more open to a free and playful style for a separate policy proposal, developed with the PR/communications department, while the main policy document will contain more details and have a serious and professional writing style.

3 Consider adding a "Want to learn more?" button on your website that links the reader from a short version of your policy proposal to a more detailed one.

2.6
What is Efficient & What is Frustrating?

Best Practices

1. A well-developed policy proposal has been thoroughly worked-through during a longer period. The programs to our congresses are a good example. The politicians in the party board who are responsible for the programs begin working with them a year before the congress. They involve members, staffers, elected politicians, and experts in the work. They have several meetings with a reference group, and many people are involved in the writing process. The process is anchored at every meeting with the party board.

2. It should be proactive, using common language and format for the policy proposal. You should initially make very good research on the topic. It is necessary to consult and plan a communication strategy. It is really necessary to obtain approvals from the main players of the proposal.

3. Working on Amendments to the Criminal Code of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was great experience. First of all, it was not created in a rush. I had enough time not to skip any steps in the process. In the end, we submitted almost 50 amendments to the Criminal Code regarding hate speech, family violence, and unauthorized recording.

4. Our civil partnership bill was developed after long preparation, in a dialogue with civil society, and after various discussions in regions, public hearings in the parliament (all quite unique in Polish politics). It was supported by many organisations and media.

Notice how all the good examples of experiences imply that all the actions described in the previous chapters have been taken into account.

Worst Practices

1. A policy was prepared by a Party official who claimed to be an expert in the field, which excluded consultations with experts and background check on the policy, but it turned out that the proposal had serious flaws.

2. We have had a number of resolutions where elements have been amended down so that they are acceptable for all parties by not being objectionable to one. This reduced the impact of said adopted resolutions.

3. I can think of one of our tax proposals. It was consulted with some experts and it looked very nice and simple. However, once announced, it was criticized by many top experts, who said it was not good, too simplistic, and simply populist. And a label of a populist party, especially in the economic area, is not what we want and can afford.

4. Doing anything of this magnitude in a rush is a recipe for disaster. Advice for all candidates and MPs is 'give us an idea, organize interviews with your focus group, and give us time, so we can make you shine'...

5. In general, policies that are too short, vague, and don't follow the framework put in place.

6. Many of the policy proposals that were made during the COVID-19 pandemics this spring were hastily produced, which is natural considering the urgent nature of the problems. However, this led to a lot of criticism from mainly external experts, organisations, and companies who we hadn't had the time to listen to and consider their view of the proposal.

Notice how most of the challenges and obstacles were mainly related to:

• The lack of time necessary to do all the proper preparations, as described in the previous chapters, especially background research.

• Problems mostly arise if you skip consultations with expert groups, or if you skip doing an assessment of public opinion on your proposed policy, followed by consultations with your organisation's leadership and public relations department.

• Unforeseen circumstances and the involvement of people who might cause damage is also very common. Overcoming those by being alert and informed about topics relevant to current affairs and knowing who the persons in charge of policy development are, so they can oversee any process, is recommended. Make sure you have contingency plans for as many situations as possible.

Potential role of political foundations and think tanks in this stage:

Forming their own policymaking teams and either becoming a policy community on its own or a policy network that links different policy communities in a liberal policy universe; whenever a new policy community is organized around a particular liberal policy proposal, the foundation/think tank policy network can offer support to those communities.

A foundations/think tank policy network can do independent research and gather information on different policy cycles of different policy communities in a liberal policy universe, and their outcome is mainly the impact they have created and the impact they made on the public opinion.

Doing expert analyses of current and past policymaking experiences and offering recommendations of best practices.

Part 3
The Decision-making Behind The Policy

3.1
Where Do We Stand?
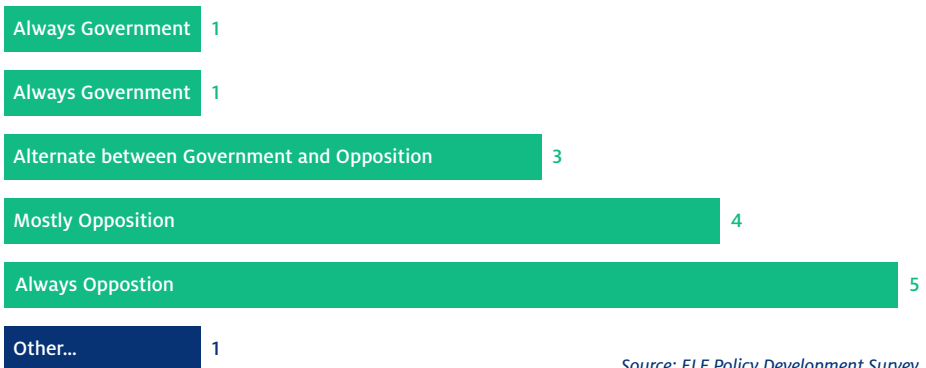## The Role of Liberal Political Parties in Decision-making

As one of the participants in our research stated, the main challenge after developing a policy is making sure a big majority of decision-makers are going to back it. This does not apply only to political parties. Political foundations, think tanks, and other kinds of political organisations and networks should also learn how to position themselves around political parties and their decision-makers, to increase the chances of their policies gaining the necessary support and making the intended impact.

Of course, liberal political parties, like any other, behave differently when being in government or opposition, mainly because ruling and opposing parties have different roles. Of course, both can make and propose policies. It is easier for the ruling party to get support for policy adoption and implementation, while the opposition can be a constructive critic that offers alternative policy solutions and hopefully learns from the government's mistakes.

So, to be able to offer advice on how to behave in both positions we had to explore different scenarios. As you can see in *Figure 4*, participants can offer different perspectives in this regard. With their help, a set of advice on decision-making processes has been created (*Table 2*). The advice focuses on political parties and their policy- and lawmakers, but the logic can also be applied to other situations of decision-making with majority rules.

Figure 4
What has been the position of your party in the policy cycle so far?

Always Government	1
Always Government	1
Alternate between Government and Opposition	3
Mostly Opposition	4
Always Oppostion	5
Other...	1

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

Table 2

Some advice for policy developers and organisations working with parties in government or opposition
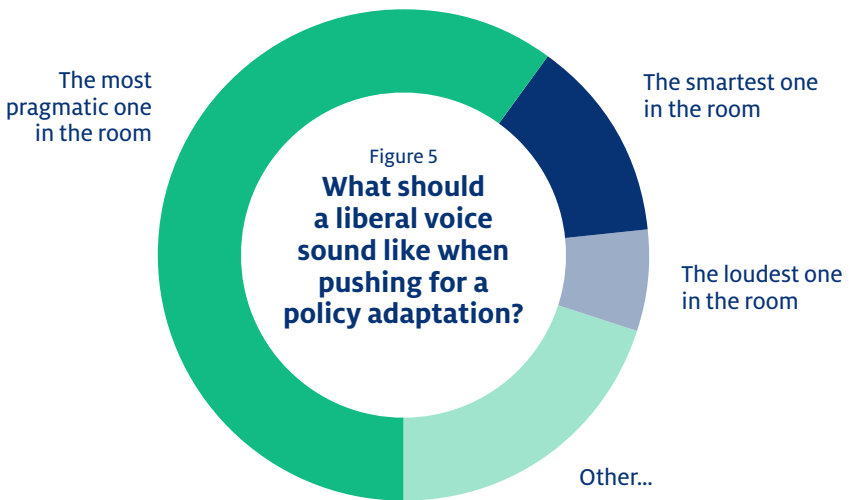
Government	Opposition
Obviously, the chances of executing your policies are higher – use this!	Use the opportunity to develop policies that could increase your ratings.
Use the opportunity to create new initiatives based on your policies. This way you can engage more with citizens, experts, CSOs, and other stakeholders, even with opposing parties.	Propose amendments to policies initiated by the government. This way you can increase your visibility, make clear stands, and keep the government "in check".
Do not stop proposing new policy ideas. Being in government does not simply mean you have to execute what you've promised in the past – you can come up with new solutions as well.	Being in opposition is also a great opportunity to turn inwards and work on developing your policymaking capacities or increasing the efficiency of existing ones. Keep on working!

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

Securing a majority to support your policy solutions is preceded by sets of negotiations between two or more different parties. Usually, in negotiations, all the parties involved tend to have their position and approach. *Figure 4* shows that most participants feel liberals should be the most pragmatic ones in the room, and this is a good position for negotiations with other parties. It has already been concluded that if liberals move too far away from the ideological centre they risk jeopardizing their position and risk losing support, as that would mean showing too much inconsistency in terms of the policy. This can be prevented by determining the red lines that should not be crossed when negotiating, and those mostly have to do with what you have determined your core values to be.

Some advice on what red lines not to cross:

1 Never abandons your core liberal values for the sake of popularity. Try to balance close to the ideological centre.

2 Never agree to policies that could compromise the principles of individual freedoms, rule of law, human rights, and democracy.

3 Never behave unethically; do not promise something you cannot deliver.

Figure 5

What should a liberal voice sound like when pushing for a policy adaptation?

The most pragmatic one in the room

The smartest one in the room

The loudest one in the room

Other...

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

3.2
Where Do They Stand?
Mapping the
Path and Hurdles

When you try to advocate for your policy to be adopted and implemented, there will indubitably be opponents who will criticize your solutions for different reasons. As shown in the quotations below, and *Figure 6*, most common critiques will be coming from opposing parties, if you are in government, or from ruling parties, if you are in opposition. If you are not a part of a political party, but a different kind of liberal organisation, sources of critiques will vary, but in terms of decision-makers it will depend on whether your proposals are aligned with those of the governing or opposing parties.

"
To be honest, the loudest critic is the government and its media. Any other criticism is marginal

The loudest critic, by far, were opposing parties because some of the proposals were opposed to their ideological positions

The media is largely controlled by the two major parties that have ruled the country in turn for the past 30 years. The emergence of the USR is a real problem for the current establishment.

Figure 6
In your experience, who have been the loudest critics of your proposed policies?
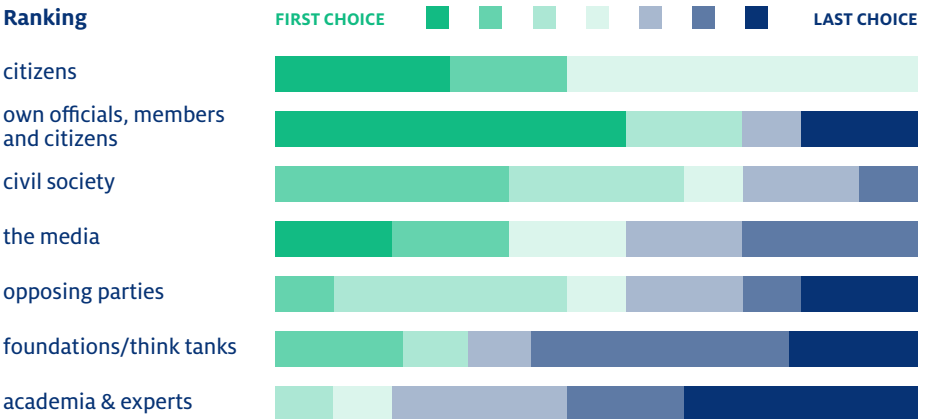
Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

Some advice on dealing with opponents:

1 After identifying your most prominent critics always listen to what they have to say, even if it is not pleasant, and assess their arguments.

2 If they are wrong, use arguments to prove it and to continue the discussion, because that is the easiest way to increase the public visibility of a good policy.

3 If it turns out you are the one who is wrong, take responsibility for your mistakes and work closely with the PR/communications department on assessing the potential damage and create a strategy for damage control.

3.3
Where the Adopting Happens?
Who Decides and Who Advocates

We have discussed the critics, but what about your allies? After analyzing the importance of forming so-called advocacy coalitions for creating an agenda-setting framework, one can say that it is especially important to identify allies and supporters when new policies are proposed. For this, it is key to identify pro-change groups that, according to Birkland,[5] you will often find already coalesced into advocacy coalitions. In advocacy coalitions, groups come together to work on a problem because they share the same goals, beliefs, and interests when it comes to that particular issue. This means that, for a political organisation to have its public agenda set for a policy proposal, it is necessary not only to identify an advocacy coalition whose members will also gain from the implementation of your proposed policy but also at least shares some of the same peripheral values. They do not necessarily have to share the same core belief systems, but they have to believe that advocating for a policy that would bring a change to the current state will advance the interests of all groups in the advocacy coalition.

5. Birkland, T.A. (2007). 'Agenda setting in public policy', in Fischer, F., Miller, G.J. & Sidney, M.J. (Ed.) Handbook of Public Policy Analysis – Theory, Politics, and Methods. Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 63-78.

Most of the participants agreed that their organisation's best allies are their own members and supporters. Although the media has been also identified as one of the greatest critics in the previous chapter, all the participants have identified it as the best ally as well. This shows how the media plays a crucial role in policymaking and the importance of having independent and free media that can analyze the development and impact of different policies. Other groups like citizens and citizen movements, academia, CSOs, and even coalition partners have also been acknowledged. (See quotations and *Figure 7*).

"
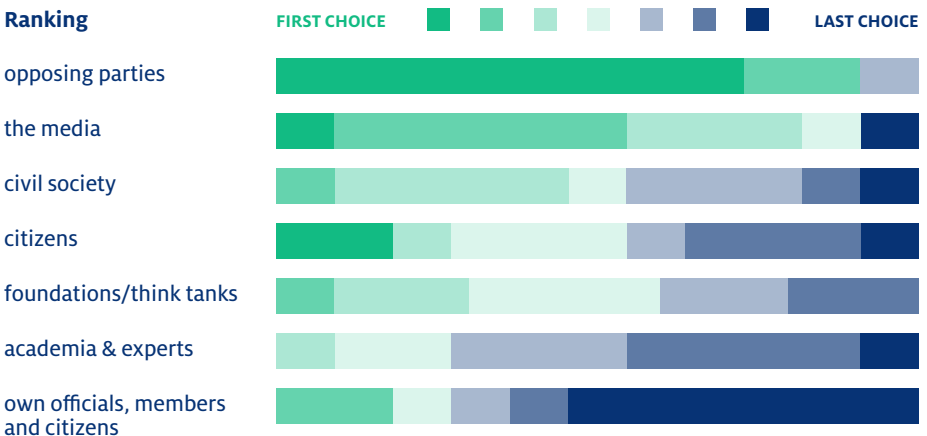**We work through our members; they are the voice of our decisions and positions.**

Due to the nature of the democratic crisis, where media has a huge weight, the academia remains an invisible shaper of policy locally.

Media are the most important, because of the influence they have on the public. This includes social media.

While opposing parties are the loudest critics, as a small party, we are also dependent on forming coalitions or making compromises with them.

Citizens have always been our best supporters.

Figure 7
Who are the best allies you can have when trying to adopt a policy proposal?

Ranking	FIRST CHOICE ... LAST CHOICE
opposing parties	
the media	
civil society	
citizens	
foundations/think tanks	
academia & experts	
own officials, members and citizens	

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

Some advice on advocacy:

1   Identify potential members of your advocacy coalition. They do not have to share all of your values, but they can be beneficiaries whose values do not clash gravely with the ones of your organisation.

2   Do not simply rely on the media support just because you have a policy idea; it is up to your organisation and your advocacy coalition to set the agenda and shift the attention of the public to your policy proposal. The media will follow.

3   Create and use public pressure to increase the chances of the process of lobbying for your policy proposal with decision-makers to be successful. This is what increases the chances of adopting and implementing a proposed policy the best.

Potential role of political foundations and think tanks in this stage:

Sharing resources, assisting with in-depth analyses of certain topics, and helping with agenda-setting; foundations and think tanks can sometimes have access to resources, experts, consultants, or other kinds of professionals, parties, and other political organisations that cannot be accessed easily.

Offering education on processes of agenda-setting, advocacy, and lobbying; foundations and think tanks are known to be very good in providing training, seminars, and other educational activities on different topics, so these are no exception.

Working as a link between political and less-political groups within an advocacy coalition; non-political groups within an advocacy coalition might be less inclined to deal with political parties than political foundations and think tanks.

A Question of Policy
Conclusion

It is expected that liberal policy developers in different liberal parties, associations, foundations, or think tanks, would prefer to develop an individualized approach towards policy development, and this is generally encouraged. The selection of advice and recommendations of our survey participants, summed up as the Do's & Don'ts (*Table 3*), can be used arbitrarily by policymakers in different situations.

When it comes to the potential role of political foundations and think tanks in the policymaking processes, the first thing one can assume is that not all foundations and think tanks have developed the same: [1] capacity to act as a clearinghouse, [2] involvement in advocacy ideas, [3] incorporation in domestic and transnational policy networks, or [4] specialized intellectual and scholarly base that can provide expertise on different policy issues. That being said, not all of them are involved in policymaking. Nevertheless, the potential of creating such a policy network and thus strengthening the position of foundations/think tanks in the liberal policy universe definitely exists.

The content of this booklet is supposed to guide the reader on how to find his own path. It is supposed to offer a sense of belonging to a larger liberal policy universe. Other than that, as far as the choice of methodology goes, it is entirely up to the policy developer. Thus, choose whichever suits you better.

6. Stone, D. (2007). 'Public Policy Analysis and Think Tanks', in Fischer, F., Miller, G.J. & Sidney, M.J. (ed.) Handbook of Public Policy Analysis – Theory, Politics, and Methods. Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 149-160.

Table 3

The do's and don'ts in attempting policy implementation

Do's	Dont's
Follow all the developments regarding your policy	Don't think you are always the smartest person in the room
Use focus groups and other methods of examining the public opinion	Don't always work with the same team; engage different people and open up to new ideas
Stay in contact with relevant experts, CSOs, and other stakeholders all the time	Don't get into fights with relevant experts and CSOs just because they disagree with you
Always plan follow-up activities, even if most of your policy proposal has been implemented	Don't abandon a policy just because its implementation didn't work out immediately after adoption
Always look for new allies inside and outside of your comfort zone	Don't say 'yes' to all ideas; be brave enough to say 'no' even to powerful people
Always communicate with citizens; communicate clearly – straight & simple!	Don't use false and unproven data
Always make sure you have the support within your political organisation	Don't forget you need political support for your ideas
Do assessments on a regular basis	Never stop lobbying
Always listen to critique, even if you do not plan to accept it	Never abandon your liberal values

Source: ELF Policy Development Survey

About the Author
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Jasmina Mršo is a policy developer and international officer of Nasa Stranka, the social-liberal party from Bosnia and Herzegovina. She describes herself as a '*liberal policy nerd, with a formal educational background in pharmacy and a passion for storytelling*'.

For almost two years, she was the coordinator of Nasa Stranka's Health-care Committee and a member of the Party's Policy and Research Department. She was an elected municipal councillor in Sarajevo and is currently the vice-president of her party's local branch. Jasmina is also a local and international capacity building trainer. Her special interests include: health policy development, gender equality, Bosnian and European politics, and especially EU's enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans.

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Regional Policy Network

Regional Policy Network (RPN) is a project of the European Liberal Forum which is supported by International Educational Center, D66 International/ Stichting IDI, VVD International/Haya van Someren Stichting, the Boris Divković Foundation and Project Polska. The project provides a comprehensive capacity building programme designed to train and empower policy advisors, parliamentary assistants and experts in Central and Southeast Europe. The RPN comprehensively equips its participants with skills in policy development, lobbying and communications. The project also creates a platform for a discussion and exchange of ideas on salient issues in Europe today as well as collaborative space which allows for participant-led projects such as the booklet '*A Question of Policy: About Journeys of Liberal Ideas*'.

Organisations

European Liberal Forum (ELF)
The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 46 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European.

We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.
liberalforum.eu

International Educational Center
International Educational Center (IEC) is a liberal foundation (NGO) that provides political education and training opportunities to citizens and organizations. The IEC organizes political education programmes and provides training and capacity building assistance to liberal organization in the region. The IEC is a member organization of the European Liberal Forum and the European Network of Political Foundations.
internationaleducenter.com

D66 International / Stichting IDI
D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI is an independent yet integrated pillar of the international work of the Dutch progressive liberal party D66. D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI is committed to contribute to working for more sustainable, democratic and open international societies. To this end, D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI works mainly on political trainings and academies, the development of liberal social thought and best-practice sharing. Respect for human rights and minorities, promotion of inclusive institutions and practice of sustainability are key elements of the projects.
internationaal.d66.nl

VVD International / Haya van Someren Stichting

VVD International is responsible for the international activities and relations of the Dutch Liberal Party VVD. VVD International is based at the headquarters of the VVD in The Hague, The Netherlands. Over the past 25 years VVD International has successfully supported liberal political parties abroad, through the deployment of VVD's best trainers and experts, whom provide trainings in field of communication, volunteer management, coalition building, manifesto drafting, running a campaign and much more. VVD International works on a demand-driven basis and organises and contributes to over more than 150 programmes a year. Through capacity building projects VVD International contributes to the emergence of capable, viable and professional liberal (future) politicians and parties. Projects have been successfully implemented in Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Egypt, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Tunisia and Ukraine.

vvdinternational.vvd.nl

Boris Divković Foundation

Boris Divković Foundation (BDF) has been established in 2013 with an aim of improving policy practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and currently in the region. The Foundation promotes responsible politics, which will serve all citizens and act on the principles of equality, coexistence and solidarity. The focus of BDF is policymaking, lobbying and advocacy for progressive policies, based on principles of democracy, equality and inclusion. Therefore, one of the strongest segments of BDF is Research and Development Department, which produces custom made policy solutions with the strongest emphasizes on areas of education, social and economic development.

bdf.ba

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A Question of Policy
Colophon

A Question of Policy: About Journeys of Liberal Ideas
This booklet offers a unique perspective on how policies are being developed within different kinds of liberal organizations, from different corners of Europe. All recommendations, advice, and messages found in the booklet have been derived from the experiences of ten liberal political parties, from nine European countries, one liberal pan-European party, one international liberal youth organization, and three liberal political foundations/think tanks. The reader will have the opportunity to understand and relate to their experiences, and hopefully find advice on how to approach policy-making. The content of this booklet is supposed to guide the reader on how to find his own path in policy development, whilst offering a sense of belonging to a larger liberal policy universe.

About the Author
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