

Supporting regime change - democracy assistance or intervention?

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1) INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for giving me the floor at this important occasion. A profound thank you as well to the Swedish colleagues for pulling this meeting together at the impressive and historic seat of democracy in Sweden. This gathering provides an important opportunity to meet with sister organizations and to discuss possibilities for co-operation in order to enhance the impact of our work. I hope we can establish a firmer basis for jointly influencing the international debate on the promotion of democracy.

The last gathering of this platform was hosted on 20 and 21 March 2003 by the French colleagues of the Jean Jaures and Robert Schumann Foundations. This Paris meeting coincided with the start of operation Iraqi Freedom by the Bush and Blair administrations. The official goal of the operation was first to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction and when that objective proved to lack any substance, it subsequently became to bring democracy and freedom to Iraq for which no substantial prior contingencies and planning had been made.

Walking back from the conference venue to the hotel through the Paris' streets we encountered many anti-war protesters, and it made the European colleagues attending the conference wonder about our own role and responsibilities in advancing democracy in this world. We realized at that moment that invading other countries without adequate multilateral legitimacy under the pretext of bringing democracy would have negative implications for the perception of democracy promotion work around the world.

I recall a late-night meeting back at the hotel in Paris with 4 or 5 representatives of European Foundations worrying about the serious deficiencies in Europe's profile in providing democracy assistance. It resulted in initiatives to build a stronger European network of democracy promotion agencies and a common agenda to strengthen our cooperation. The agenda has gradually emerged at meetings in Berlin, The Hague and Brussels whereas a structured dialogue has commenced with the European Commission through the new European Network for Democracy Support Foundations. The European Parliament initiated a democracy caucus and issued an assignment for a study into enhancing the EU instruments in democracy promotion. I am happy to announce that this study will be presented to the European Parliament in Strasburg on September 5th, 2005 and shall hopefully result in new initiatives within the EU to give democracy support a more central position in external policies and assistance.

2) REGIME CHANGE: DEMOCRATIC ASSISTANCE OR INTERVENTION?

Current definitions of regime change are strongly influenced by the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The online encyclopedia **Wikipedia**, for example, defines regime change as *the overthrow of a government (or regime) considered illegitimate by an external force (usually military), and its **replacement** with a new government according to the ideas and/or interests promoted by that force.*

When we talk of regime change in terms of the above definition formed by the new internet speak that has become the lingo of our globalized communications, it is the result of the militarization of foreign policy, specifically the foreign policy of the Bush administration. We need to be aware that when we adopt and use this language we adopt a culture that – in my opinion - is not consistent with democracy and that it may even erode the essential tenets and foundations of democracy itself. The military logic can not be the primary incentive for democratic reform processes and should not cloud the lasting perspective for expanding an international system based on the rule of law, including necessary enforcement mechanisms.

Of course, there is the unfortunate need in a number of cases for military intervention when governments abuse their people and deny them the fundamental human rights. But such intervention can only be legitimate when based on internationally agreed rule of law through multilateral institutions. The UN lacks the instruments to do so effectively today, and we need to join efforts – and the organizations present at this meeting have a specific responsibility to do so - to ensure UN reforms (or the establishment of a more adequate international system) that can deliver the protection to people endangered by their governments and provide the freedoms guaranteed under democratic governance. Intervention of states outside internationally agreed institutional frameworks shall always be open for questioning of the ulterior motives of that specific state.

As a rule, one does not support democratic reform processes by threatening countries with invading them. From experience I believe foreign assistance can be helpful to move democratization processes forward provided a number of lessons are applied and those, like the organizations present at this conference, muster the leadership to look beyond their institutional interests and harmonize approaches and operations.

In fact, foreign assistance to democratization processes is very much needed. As people in countries that underwent transitions to democracy readily testify, support to democratic forces under dictatorship and for the transition to and consolidation of democracy is of the greatest importance to them. But that is not to say that democracy assistance as it is provided today either necessarily meets the expectations of those looking for it or that it necessarily makes the impact that is sometimes suggested. **The key question is not so much if foreign assistance is useful but rather how this assistance is provided.**

If you allow me I like to introduce a number of observations and challenges from hands-on experience working in the democracy promotion field over the last twenty years, starting with my involvement with the peaceful South African transition process until my current position at the Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD).

We have all learned that democratic reform processes are far more complex than supporting free and fair elections, which themselves have proven to be multifaceted and sensitive exercises. Democracy reform processes are different from country to country, ranging from overcoming dictatorships in countries such as Belarus, Burma, Cuba and Zimbabwe; meeting the new challenges in the Arab world; avoiding backtracking of democracy in Latin America and deepen the democratization processes at that continent; nurturing the dominant party ruled young democracies to accept peaceful alternations of government and preparing opposition parties to assume responsibilities in many Sub-Saharan countries. Other categories of democratic challenges can be identified that pose specific challenges. **In short, in democracy support there are no easy cases, each country poses its own specific challenges.**

The challenges and observations I like to share at this conference have in common that they are - in my view - generically applicable and constitute an outline for a forward agenda that can inform our future cooperation.

3) OBSERVATIONS AND CHALLENGES

3.1 Integrating agendas

Long-term human security can not be provided without democracy, whereas democracy is a condition for sustainable development and poverty reduction. In today's world, security, development and democracy are interlinked, which democracy understood the organizing political system guaranteeing human rights. The challenge is to adjust our operations to this reality to achieve the impact we claim in pursuing our objectives in foreign policy and international relations. Promoting democracy should become part of **core business** of foreign policy and the promotion of democracy **an obligation** for consolidated democracies. Democracy promotion is still too much of an add-on in foreign policy or a window-dressing exercise for other interests. We need to elevate democracy to become center-stage.

3.2 Overcoming the paradox between national interest and international responsibility

In pursuing this integrated approach one runs into the paradox of a world organized on the principle of national sovereignty – as expressed in the UN Charter – and our international responsibility to manage the global goods. One of these global goods is the protection of people from crimes against humanity. There is a persistent need to reform the multilateral system and invest in strong multilateral and regional governmental and non-governmental institutions to constrain possible abuse by governments.

(Possible example of the dilemma we face – reference the recent report of Anna Tibaijuka, Kofi Anan's Special Envoy for Human Settlement in Zimbabwe, on the results of Operation Murambatsvina – popularly referred to as Operation Tsunami – that robbed 700.000 poor Zimbabweans families of their livelihood and shelter, affecting an estimated 2.1 million people. The report does not link this latest man-made disaster to the fact that a full quarter of the Zimbabwean population of originally 12 million people, an estimated 3,5 million people, have been driven to leave the country, neither that another 5,1 million have to survive on food aid. Although the report clearly puts the blame with the ZANU(PF) government violating both national and international law in pursuing operation Murambatsvina, it ironically calls on the international community to come to the rescue and to cooperate with the ZANU (PF) government in providing assistance to the affected people, the very government that is responsible for creating all the misery in the first place. The report also calls on the Zimbabwean government to prosecute those responsible for this operation, but how can anyone expect a government responsible for a crime the prosecute itself? How can we take our international responsibility seriously if we continue to limit our horizons to the inviolability of the sovereignty of nation states? Our responsibility for the well-being of humanity requires that we improve the international instruments to respond pro-actively where governments fail to serve their people and not wait until images on our tv-screens require humanitarian interventions.)

3.3 Making the stakeholders the subjects of reform rather than the objects in international assistance

Democratization is essentially the process of building trust (increasing social capital) and political will to engage in reform processes, something which is not necessarily part of human nature. There is nothing natural in persons in positions of power to give up those positions unless those persons are convinced that their future is secure and that by serving the common good the personal interests are served at the same time.

Democratization is building this culture of trust through dialogue amongst the principal stakeholders while building the institutions needed for a dynamic democratic political system that creates stability and security for sustainable economic development (and meeting the MDGs).

By definition, building trust and developing political will cannot be enforced from the outside, it has to be developed by and amongst the stakeholders themselves. The outside world can create a friendly, encouraging environment with specific incentives, or it can contribute to divisions within already polarized societies with limited degree of internal cohesion therefore increasing the risks of internal conflict.

It also means that if we want to promote democratization processes we cannot leave out the principle stakeholders which is the political leadership, both government and opposition, in the countries concerned. That's precisely the role of the democracy supporting foundations. The specific niche of those foundations, which in various ways are linked to political parties, is the intimate experience they embody of the intricacies of political processes. Whereas international organizations consider political parties as too political and often work only with the parties in government, no stable democratization process can be expected if the process is not inclusive and the process does not entice sufficient levels of trust amongst all the stakeholders to engage in the peaceful resolutions of conflicts of interests.

3.4 Linking assistance to Democracy Consolidation Strategy Papers

The implication of the previous challenges is to avoid piecemeal or ad hoc interventions. Interventions should be linked to national negotiated reform agendas between the principle national stakeholders in the driving seat. If we take democracy serious, why not invite countries to produce, through inclusive dialogue processes, democracy consolidation strategy papers like we request countries to produce poverty reduction strategy papers? IMD has invited a number of its partners (joint operations of parties in government and in opposition) to initiate such processes and we see some initial encouraging results. These processes are expected to enhance the political will and consensus for needed reforms to address the democracy gaps.

3.5 Harmonizing democracy assistance

Within development cooperation the major international agencies have taken important initiatives to harmonize assistance in order to enhance impact and to reduce transaction costs to beneficiaries overburdened with all those foreign agencies putting demands on them. Should the agencies in the democracy field not start discussing how to complement each other to maximize strategic impact in response to agencies developed by the local stakeholders?

3.6 Providing moral, political and financial support to the democracy activists and their families

As we learned from the early democracy struggles in Portugal, Spain en Greece, the struggle for democracy and against apartheid in South Africa, and the struggles in the former communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, support for democracy activists and their families under dictatorial regimes is an essential element in overcoming the strategies of the oppressors. One of the techniques used to suppress activists is to ruin them and their families of their livelihoods by various ways. Could we as democracy promotion agencies not consider establishing an international aid and defense fund to support democracy activists who are in the forefront of the struggles for democracy?

3.7 Introducing peer reviews and external evaluations

If we aspire to increase the impact of our work, should we not seriously consider to introduce peer reviews amongst ourselves as a way to learn from each other but also for encourage reforms within our own operations? Should it not be obvious that working in the democracy promotion field our organizations apply the highest professional standards of transparency, accountability and democratic practice ourselves? Should this professional ambition not include scrutiny of our performance through regular external evaluations?

3.8 Institutionalizing our cooperation to become an effective voice within the international system moving beyond our national horizons

A final challenge I like to put to our meeting is the need to voice our opinions as democracy promotion agencies within the international system. Next months the Special UN meeting will consider the reform of the UN system that includes, amongst others, the establishment of a Democracy Fund. Where are we as interested agencies to help shape the future international system or do we believe that we are more effective as we speak each for ourselves? Although we can each influence decisions within our respective political parties and/or at national level our voice as professional agencies in the democracy promotion field is not consistently heard as yet within the international arena. I would challenge ourselves to give this matter serious attention.

In concluding, I like to observe that having a platform like this meeting to share ideas and experiences is valuable indeed. However, at the same time I like to express my expectation and aspiration that the international context would even be better served if a gathering like this world meeting will result in coherent assistance strategies for the countries at which we focus our programmes and, secondly, that the meeting will result in a stronger international voice for advocating democracy as a core and fully integrated dimension of international relations.

Thank you very much.

ANNEX

LESSONS LEARNED IN DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE FROM A EUROPEAN ANGLE

1. Democracy cannot be exported. To achieve sustainable results democratic reform processes need to be defined and owned by national stakeholders. Since the EU is a union of 25 different democracies, the EU is well placed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge for encouraging local stakeholders to design and build the most suitable institutional framework without exporting any particular model. Democracy has to be home-grown and assistance provided has to be context specific;
2. To achieve peaceful transitions to democracy, the facilitation of inclusive dialogue processes amongst the widest possible group of stakeholders is crucial for achieving substantive consensus on the legitimacy of the outcome of the process. Again, recent EU experience with the successful transitions of the latest group of accession countries is an asset for future EU democracy assistance;
3. Democracy is not an event but a process. Elections are a key moment in the democratic process but do not make democracy work. Democracy is not about form, but substance. The hardware does not function without proper software. Too much EU democracy support has been delivered through short term projects rather than in the form of assistance to long-term processes supported on a continuous basis. Piecemeal approaches do not generally impact lastingly on democratic reform processes. Stakeholders within partner countries should be invited to develop longer-term democratic transition or consolidation agendas through national dialogues and strategy papers to which international support can be attached (like the sector support approach in development cooperation);
4. Democratic reforms, poverty reduction strategies and conflict prevention strategies are interrelated and require a coherent response. The interdependencies of different global issues are better understood than ever before. This has resulted in the politicization of international cooperation and a shift in understandings of the concept of sovereignty. To remain relevant for addressing global concerns requires from human rights and democracy support more integrated and strategic approaches consistent with universally shared values as expressed in international law;
5. Democratic reform processes do not follow a straight line from A to B. Many processes go through a 'valley of tears' before positive breakthroughs are reached. This requires consistent and persistent support with an in-built flexibility to respond to unexpected opportunities. Often the external response is short-lived, whereas the really difficult challenge of moving from a transition to transformation follows in the long aftermath of democratic 'revolutions'. New administrative and procedural modalities will need to be introduced to allow for flexible responses within overall strategic and longer-term responses;

6. Democracy support has generally been directed at elections, at strengthening the rule of law and of civil society. Political society has by and large been neglected in EU democracy assistance policies. Political parties in particular have been the missing link. Yet, they are essential institutions in political society - that set of institutions and procedures that is distinct from either the state, civil society or the market. Political parties are the institutions that select leadership; aggregate the interests of citizens in formulating policies and programmes; are instrumental in the organization of elections; provide the electorate with choices; and form governments and hold these accountable through opposition. At the same time, it is also acknowledged that political parties the world over are generally perceived not to be performing well. To make democracy work, support for political parties, and for the development of the political systems that regulate their existence and functioning, is of critical importance. This omission will have to be addressed in any future democracy assistance policy;

7. Building and consolidating democracy is not the exclusive responsibility of governments. It is as much the responsibility of civil society and the private sector. While this is in theory recognized, it is not a principle that has been maximized in the actual delivery of EU support. The pursuit of EU external assistance policies remains today very much the prerogative of inter-institutional cooperation within the EU institutions themselves. It has benefited only to a limited extent from experience and expertise within European civil society. Application of the subsidiarity principle and public-private cooperation in the implementation of democracy assistance policies - as successfully practiced in a number of EU member states - should also be introduced at the European level;

8. European partners have a genuine interest in cooperation with European agencies when it comes to assistance towards the politically sensitive issues of reform processes. There appears to be a much wider demand for democracy assistance provided the European - 'soft power' - way, ideally through the facilitation of processes rather than through the export of products, than is currently provided by the EU or its relevant agencies within civil society. Both EU organizations and democrats in partner countries have repeatedly called for EU institutions to adopt a more high profile and transparent policy of human rights and democracy support - often arguing that the EU is ideally placed as a promoter of such values.

(source: IMD working paper)