

A European Profile in Democracy Support?

Introduction meeting Transformation Thinkers
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by

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introduction

It is a privilege to be given an opportunity to introduce the theme of this lecture and engage in debate with the Transformation Thinkers on this subject. I like to thank the organizers for providing this opportunity.

I realize that you have had a full programme during the past days covering different important aspects in relation to democratic transitions. In my presentation this morning, I shall focus on the question if Europe has a distinct profile in democracy support? It is a question that – surprisingly – has not much been debated or considered in the past. However, the international context requires – in my view – a much more pro-active approach by Europe (= European Union) in providing democracy support.

The British historian and commentator Timothy Garton Ash asked in a recent article the question: “why does Europe not tell the story of building our common future in an expanding European Union through freedom and democracy”? ”Why do the Europeans let President Bush tell the story?”

President Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia commented earlier this year on the rigged elections in Belarus as follows: “The European Union has to be prepared to play the same decisive role it has played in Ukraine where it assured democracy. We demand from the EU nothing less than that it takes sides. Not against a country but for the *raison d’être* of Europe: democracy.”

the EU success story in applying the Copenhagen criteria for accession

The power of its free internal market and its security arrangements form a tremendous asset for bringing Europe’s neighbours into the democratic family of the EU. The successful accession and integration of Portugal, Spain and Greece, former dictatorships, and the more recent accession of the Central and Eastern European countries and their transformation to democratic political systems in accordance with the principles as spelled out in the Copenhagen Criteria¹ - that were adopted by the European Council in 1993 - is of great

¹ To join the EU, a new Member State must meet three criteria:

- political: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- economic: existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
- acceptance of the Community *acquis*: ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

historic significance. That strategy, however, is valid for those countries that are considered eligible for membership of the EU. With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria next year, bringing the membership at 27 countries with a population of about 500 million – half the size of India - their numbers are dwindling. Most countries with whom the EU maintains relations fall outside the category of potential future members. The EU has partnership agreements with almost all countries in the world and it is this group of countries that is taken as reference for this introduction. For the vast majority of countries outside the EU the *pull* is less significant as it is for potential new members and democracy support becomes more of a *push* using, what has been termed, the EU's soft power. This introduction will focus on the challenges the EU faces in relation to the wide outside world, not on the few remaining countries that qualify for the EU enlargement process.

complex international context for democracy support

When answering the question why there is surprisingly little public discourse within the EU about our profile on democracy support, we need to acknowledge that democracy support has become more complicated and I shall mention four adverse conditions out of a much longer list:

Firstly, 'regime change' has given democracy a bad name. The catastrophic war in Iraq, the pursuance of regime change by military means using the argument of spreading democracy, the unilateral approach by the Bush administration at the expense of the international law and the multilateral institutions, have put into question the sincerity with which the spread of democratic values is pursued. This has certainly clouded the debate on democracy promotion in many regions of the world. Yet, pursuing democracy through military means is an exception rather than the rule. The US overstretch in Iraq and the insecurity that has spread as a result, may sober up policy makers in Washington on the use of military means in pursuance of political objectives.

Secondly, the euphoria about the spread of democracy, as witnessed at the end of the last century, is over. Democracy has proven more difficult to achieve than many assumed. The initial steps towards democracy with the organization of competitive elections, as undertaken in many countries proved not to be enough to deliver on the high expectations among people for an improvement in their lives. Yet, eight out of ten citizens said in a worldwide Gallup poll in 2005, that despite its problems, democracy was the best system of government. Also, autocratic leaders have learned how to maintain their hold on power by introducing some market reforms while keeping the brakes on the democratic reform process. It implies that democracy support, if it is to be effective, has to adapt to these new realities and challenges and review its methods and approaches to counter and to overcome this backlash.

Thirdly, the expectations among ordinary people for democracy to deliver better living conditions have been very high and often not fulfilled. Transitions from autocratic rule to democracy mostly coincide with the liberalization of markets and a roll-back of the state. While it has increased civic liberties contributing to restoring peoples dignity, it has generally increased income inequalities, the spread of corruption and insecurity. Obviously, democracy is not established by the turn of the page and cannot change living conditions overnight, the persistent levels of poverty and unequal international trade patters, the uneven spread of the advantages of globalization, make people vulnerable for a return to populism or worse. The challenge is to guide the democratic reform process forward toward consolidated democracies

while ensuring that the benefits of economic development are spread fairly. Democracy and development are two sides of the same coin that need to be managed by an intelligent .

Fourthly, international development cooperation is mostly packaged in an a-political approach, looking for technical solutions for problems that are inherently political. The concept of good governance, originating from the World Bank, is an explicit example. Fortunately, UNDP today is referring to ‘democratic governance’, but the means to implement the approaches are still highly technocratic. Democracy is not yet part of the vocabulary within the main international development cooperation instruments. It is like – for example - trying to improve road safety without targeting the drivers. If good governance is supposed to be political, why not speak straight language and refer to democracy which includes governance, human rights, rule of law, anti-corruption etc.? In going about building democracy in technocratic or disguised approaches, we end up disempowering the people who are responsible for providing political leadership to build their nations. It also implies that accountability is reversed towards the international community. There will be no political stability unless accountability of the leadership rests with the people which the leadership serves. That requires democratic systems of government. A fundamental review is needed about how the international community delivers its governance assistance.

why a more pro-active European approach necessary?

1. The democratic advantage:

The Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen was one of the first to change the old paradigm that countries have to develop economically first before they become fit *for* democracy into the new paradigm that countries become fit (economically speaking) *through* democracy. Some high ranking policy makers within the European Union are taking this new paradigm at heart and that shall have substantial implications in future I expect.

For example, the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Mrs Agnes van Ardenne, only last week cited a number of academic studies that show that democracies and democratizing countries outperformed their authoritarian counterparts on the full range of development indicators. There is no evidence of an authoritarian advantage when it comes to economic growth. Democracies have a 30% edge. Of course, it is not just the rate of growth that matters, but also its stability, especially for the poor. When sudden, sharp dips occur, the poor have no choice but to sell what few assets they have to stay alive. Poor democracies have been much better at avoiding economic disasters. Twice as often, poor autocracies have experienced drops of ten per cent or more in annual national income. The Pinochet regime in Chile is often cited as a dictatorship that brought economic success. What most people fail to see is that under Pinochet Chile suffered two economic crises that wiped away much of the growth that had been achieved. His iron fist led the country from boom to bust. Of all the countries below the poverty line, it is the democracies that are most likely to cross the finishing line of the MDG targets by 2015. Their citizens live a decade longer. Fifty per cent fewer of their children die before their fifth birthday. Twice as many children attend secondary school. And agricultural productivity is a third higher in poor democracies.

Also, the British Minister for International Development, Mr Hilary Benn, responsible for DFID, in a speech on October 23rd acknowledged that politics matters. Politics changes things. And it is democracy that makes politics possible. The implications will be profound he mentioned as we will take a more complete view of governance.

2. democratic peace proposition

Peace is another important condition for a successful society. Countries in conflict do not prosper. Often, dictatorships are said to maintain stability by repressing tribal, ethnic or political dissent. This is incorrect. Of the forty-nine poor countries embroiled in civil conflict in the 1990s, forty-one were dictatorships. Democracies appear to be especially good at managing ethnic diversity – they use ballots instead of bullets. In dictatorships, ethnic diversity reduces growth by up to three percentage points, while it has no adverse effects on economic growth in democracies. A democratic deficit contributed to many cases of state failure in the second half of the twentieth century. And there is a powerful pattern of “democratic peace” – democracies rarely go to war with each other.

3. linking democracy, development and defense (security)

Today, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU focuses mainly on *defense and security issues*, with the EU developing its capacity in the area of international conflict prevention and on *development cooperation*. The Council secretariat has produced last July the very first paper on democracy support under the title: ‘The EU approach to democracy promotion in external relations: Food for Thought’. This is new territory for the EU and the paper has no formal status yet nor are any policy decisions taken. With reference to the earlier arguments for the positive effects of democracy on development and on peace, there exists a strong case to advocate the EU to make democracy core business in its external policies. In my view, these policies should be based on the 3 D’s: Democracy, Development and Defense and to be effective these three dimensions need to be fully integrated in EU external policies.

As President Saakashvili correctly stated: democracy is the *raison d’être* of Europe. We thank our peace and prosperity on our democratic political systems. Would it not be consistent if this is reflected in the EU’s foreign policy as well? Engaging in democracy support has the added benefit that it will feed-back into the debate about democracy within the EU itself. It will help to clarify what the European Union stands for in a globalised world, to sharpen its identity and values, and to engage in further search to strengthen the democratic foundations of the European Union in the constantly evolving political and socio-economic international environment.

what is democracy support about?

Democracy does not come by itself and it cannot be imported from abroad, let alone be implanted by military means. It has to grow from within countries, step by step institutionalizing the political process along the values which are intrinsic to democracy. As Ghandi once said: “..the spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It must come from within”. Democratic transformation takes practice and time to be internalized and to be consolidated. This process of learning to practice democracy in often still autocratic environments that resist change, in countries with weak states that provide insufficient security for their citizens, and in countries with poorly or skewed developed economies, is bound to meet tremendous obstacles.

Lord Dahrendorf qualified the road to democracy as ‘a voyage through a valley of tears’.

And we know from respected academics such as Tom Carothers, that voyage is never a straight one. The focus on elections, on civil society, on judicial reform, all important by themselves, was not sufficient to produce political systems that could live up to the expectations of the people and the international commitment to reduce poverty as laid down in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Democracy is not only a set of institutions, but also a set of values that needs to be brought into practice and internalized in a continuous process of interaction and dialogue.

Getting to the core of democratic development, as Daniel Brumberg defined it in the excellent recent book “Uncharted Journey promoting democracy in the Middle East” (edited by Tom Carothers and Marina Ottaway), involves:

1. Political parties that speak for organized constituencies;
2. parliaments that have the constitutional authority to speak on behalf of the electorate; and
3. constitutions that impose limits on executive authority.

It implies engaging political society, including political parties, which are the pillars within democratic political dispensations and whose leaders hold the keys of peace and conflict. Political society - defined as those strata of political institutions that form the link between citizens and civil society on one hand and the state or executive on the other – has been the missing link in official international cooperation for too long but is gradually discovered and recognized. Political parties and their leaders are a key constituency – are the drivers that you need to target if you want to improve road safety.

Recognizing that democracy can not be exported, that its development takes place in a very political and sensitive environment and that it is foremost a political process, we need to acknowledge that ad hoc project to project support may not be adequate to make any substantial impact (although the project itself may have been successfully implemented). The essence is to empower people in positions to implement reforms to analyse the democracy gaps in their political system, to develop reform agendas and to form coalitions for a peaceful implementation of needed reforms. The EU can facilitate this process by engaging in dialogue to share experiences and to provide assistance with the implementation of the reform agendas. To ensure that support is helpful, comprehensive agendas need to be developed by the stakeholders themselves (ownership) for which longer-term assistance should be provided in partnership relations.

My own organization – the Institute for Multiparty Democracy (nIMD), a coalition of the main political parties in the Netherlands, funded by the Dutch government, is - for example - facilitating longer-term strategic programmes that are drafted by the political parties jointly in our programme countries to reach substantial agreement about necessary reforms in the political systems. Some of this work is done in cooperation with UNDP, with the OSCE and with the European Commission. We hope that it will result in national Democratic Consolidation Strategy Papers (DCSP's) to compliment the PRSP's and the EU's Country Strategy Papers (CPSs).

what has Europe on offer for an effective democracy support?

The European Union has succeeded in bringing a diversity of nations together under a wide umbrella that assures peace and prosperity for its peoples. After centuries of violent conflict, Europe has built a new supranational construct that regulates conflicts of interest peacefully and that facilitates integration. It has a long and diversified tradition of civic engagement,

public-private dialogue and parliamentary supervision. These processes continue to be under construction, it is very much work in progress. Democracy requires permanent maintenance, and this is an experience assumed valuable for sharing with partners elsewhere in the world.

Former Czech president Vaclav Havel once noted in one of his rich speeches that “if I don’t know who I am, who I want to be, what I want to achieve, where I want to begin, where I am, my relations with those around me and the rest of the world will inevitably be tense’. To be an effective and a relevant player in the world, the European Union needs to know who she is and what she want to achieve. And if the European Union is the political apex of the European member states, the same questions should be asked to civil society organizations and the private sector that together constitute the Europe Union’s polity.

It is for these reason to encourage building a more explicit European profile on democracy support. That should in my view be built on seven distinct features that can serve as reference points (points of departure or guiding principles) for an emerging identity in this field:

1. *variety in social and political organization*

The absence of uniformity and the rich diversity in institutions and procedures is an important asset in democracy assistance. The EU is an umbrella of 25 different political systems, all democratic, all the result of unique processes of each of the countries individually. Variety in social and political organization matters in furthering democracy. A European approach can therefore be distinctive in sharing a range of experiences and by being relatively inclusive. Because of its unique position, it can avoid ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches or solutions.

2. *democracy – social justice nexus*

The European experience in linking the evolution of democracy with social justice is relevant beyond Europe’s border together with the experience obtained in addressing the new challenges that globalization poses to this linkage. Economic liberalization has to be shaped to lead to economically, ecologically and socially sustainable development and prosperity in order to strengthen and consolidate young democracies and to make democratization of authoritarian regimes more likely.

3. *democracy is work in progress*

The paradox or enigma of the European Union is the habit of moving forward while continuously questioning the rationale of its existence. This has resulted in pursuing democracy as a concept and an institutional framework that is continuously under scrutiny and remains under construction.

4. *peaceful transition through dialogue*

The peaceful and successful transition in the former East and Central European countries is a further asset in European approaches, strengthened by the recent accession of the new EU member states. Democratic outcomes have been achieved through the application of multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue.

5. *human rights and the rule of law*

The European profile in democracy assistance is significantly shaped by a strong focus on the human rights component as well as by the importance of the rule of law in protecting these rights. The EU’s profile is characterized by four specific features that should be further enhanced in designing democracy assistance policies: a) the multilateral or

internationalist role conception; b) integration of economic and social rights; and c) the emphasis on gender equality; and d) the principle of non-discrimination with regard to minorities.

6. democracy assistance preferred over conditionality.

The European approach favours positive support to countries engaging in democratic reforms rather than the imposition of political conditionality. However, the EU is and should be prepared to apply subtle forms of conditionality when required or to suspend cooperation agreements if human rights have been violated or democracies interrupted. Dialogue, however, is the mechanism favoured to resolve such occurrences.

7. regional context and supra-national institutions

In pursuing and consolidating democracy, the importance of the regional context is taken into account, recognizing the importance of adherence to the rule of law and the use of supra-national institutions to effectively apply the rule of law.

four concrete steps forward:

Earlier this year, Vaclav Havel issued a statement during a visit to Brussels in which he called on the occasion of the forthcoming 50th anniversary of the European Union in March 2007, which coincides with the German EU Presidency by the way, for the establishment of a European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership as a new instrument to answer the call for a more pro-active European profile in democracy support. The European foundation should respond to the call of democracy activists outside Europe for dialogue and for facilitating national democracy reform agendas. This is a very necessary and important initiative that will hopefully also find support in Germany and elsewhere.

Secondly, there is great need for a harmonization of democracy support by the multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental organizations that engage in various forms of democracy support in third partner countries. The locally formulated national agendas may serve as reference points for such needed harmonization of efforts, much like the PRSP's serve that function on the development cooperation front.

Thirdly, the new EU instruments should indeed recognize that democracy is not only an end, or a set of institutions, but a process as well that requires long-term commitments and flexibility to respond to a moving target. Over the past year, there has been much debate about improving the EU instruments for External Policies in the context of the new EU Financial Perspectives 2007 – 2013 and some progress is made in this regard. What has not yet happened, is the fact that the three EU pillars continue to consider the European civil society organization as sub-contractors for the implementation of its policies rather than partners in furthering the main objectives of the EU's external policies, the three D's as I referred to earlier. At EU level, the governmental institutions should practice subsidiarity in partnering with agencies of European civil society that add value in delivering the democracy support objectives. At bi-lateral level, as I noted in this introduction, significant recognition is forthcoming at the highest political levels of the need to entrench democracy in order to advance peace and to reach the MDGs.

Fourthly, democracy support is not yet the third D in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The debate has recently begun at a modest level. It needs, with the help of the

European Parliament, much more public discourse in order to move center-stage in the years to come. This meeting is a welcome platform for this needed public debate.

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