

## **A MORE PLURALIST APPROACH TO EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY SUPPORT**

**RICHARD YOUNGS AND KATERYNA PISHCHIKOVA**

European support for democracy is at a crucial juncture. Just as the eurozone crisis complicates the European Union's (EU's) efforts to support democratic reform around the world, new forms of political transition are confounding the EU's traditional approach to democracy building. The EU must embrace a wider variety of tactics, models, actors, and strategies, or it risks losing credibility and traction in the field of democracy support.

### **Challenges Facing the EU**

- The EU's approach to democracy support still relies heavily on exporting its own technical rules.
- The eurozone crisis, which has not been managed very democratically, has dented the EU's external image. This undermines the appeal of the EU's brand of democracy.
- Today's political transitions are diverse, making it even more difficult for the EU to apply the same strategies to all regimes.
- Governments attempting to hold on to power have become more adept at restricting outside support for democratic reform, and EU governments have not developed tactics to get around regime clampdowns.
- The EU focuses on elite-led reform and has not adequately adapted to new types of grassroots activism.
- European democracy-promotion efforts are further stymied because the strategies of member states and EU-level institutions are not well coordinated.
- The transatlantic community needs the support of rising democracies for its policies; at present, those states tend to be more concerned with respecting sovereignty than promoting democracy.

### **Next Steps for Europe**

**Stop primarily relying on technical rules to promote democracy.** European policies must address states' internal political weaknesses that impede democratic reform.

**Push back against regimes' restrictions on civil society support.** To neutralize accusations that democracy supporters are meddling in countries' internal political affairs, EU institutions and member states should be transparent, inclusive, and impartial when working with civil society.

**Ensure policies reflect local contexts.** EU institutions and member states must partner with a wider range of civic actors and social movements, and better appreciate the eclectic dynamics of political change.

**Learn the lessons of the eurozone crisis.** Efforts to improve the poor health of democracy within Europe must be dovetailed with external democracy support.

**Better synchronize member-state and EU-level initiatives.** Member-state actions should not undercut or compete with common European democracy support objectives. All actors should coordinate their policies and harness national initiatives more creatively and dynamically.

**Cooperate more systematically with rising democracies.** Europeans should take advice from these states about promoting democratic values.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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