

THE NEW ROLE OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

Tsveta Petrova

DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW | JUNE 2011

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

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Summary

The new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe are increasingly engaging in international democracy support, especially in the former Soviet Union and the Western Balkans. They have leveraged their membership in a number of Euro-Atlantic international organizations and used their bilateral diplomatic ties with democratization laggards to motivate and pressure them to observe democratic norms and practices. They are also been supplying small but growing amounts of democracy assistance.

The democracy promotion efforts of these countries—countries that are still grappling with some domestic democracy issues of their own—have been limited in scope and inconsistent, ad hoc, and given a low priority at times. Still, these countries have very recent, in fact ongoing experience with democratization that gives them valuable expertise and perspectives that other donors do not have, and therefore special credibility in the eyes of recipients. They also tend to tailor their efforts to the needs of their recipients and work primarily in their neighborhood, where they have considerable knowledge of local sociopolitical realities and where their own experiences are highly relevant.

The Eastern EU democracy promoters have also managed to keep the countries in the post-communist space that are not democratizing fast enough relatively high on the agenda of a number of Euro-Atlantic organizations. These efforts, however, have not yet produced the desired liberalization of neighboring autocracies. They have been important in inspiring and preparing prodemocratic forces in neighboring hybrid regimes to organize several electoral revolutions in the 2000s, but even such democratization has proven short-lived in many cases.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, supporting the diffusion of democratic norms and practices around the world has become a priority of many Western governmental and nongovernmental actors. Although democracy support began to encounter fatigue within Western policy circles in the last decade,¹ some of the new democracies in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia have started engaging in such work. These countries, which were previously recipients of democracy assistance, represent a new generation of international democracy supporters. Their own political transitions give them firsthand experience with democratization, and therefore credibility with new recipients, as well as valuable expertise that other donors of democracy assistance do not have. They tend to work in their own neighborhoods, where they have extensive knowledge of local sociopolitical realities and where their own experiences are highly relevant.

Recognizing these advantages of new democracies as democracy promoters, the U.S. policy community has encouraged, supported, and made use of their experience. Yet their activism has not been carefully assessed, an oversight that represents a missed opportunity for encouraging better cooperation. The focus here is on one group of such countries, the Eastern European members of the European Union (EU)—Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—and on the advantages and limitations of their efforts to date.

Some of these countries, such as Poland, Lithuania, and Slovakia, began investing in the democratization of their neighborhood almost immediately after their own democratic breakthroughs. Most of them started supporting democratization abroad within the first decade of beginning their own democratic transitions. Democracy promotion became a stated priority for most of them after their accession to NATO and especially to the EU.

The Eastern European members of the EU use bilateral diplomatic channels to pressure and persuade democratic laggards in the post-communist space (and beyond) to observe democratic norms and principles. They have further leveraged their membership into various Euro-Atlantic organizations to keep democracy promotion in the European neighborhood on the agenda of these organizations and shape its implementation. Most of them have transformed their fledgling development aid systems into platforms for democracy assistance. And some civic organizations from these countries are active players in democracy support.

It should be noted that Eastern EU democracy promotion has at times been inconsistent, ad hoc, and of only low priority. Often, violations of democracy and human rights abroad have been a concern more in rhetoric than in reality. Moreover, only the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia have become noteworthy democracy promoters and only in their neighborhood. The democracy promotion commitments of Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania have at times been somewhat feeble, limited in scope, or erratic. Bulgaria, Slovenia, and to a lesser degree Romania have shown little interest in assisting democratization outside their borders.

Pro-Democratic Diplomacy

Eastern European democracy promoters have made extensive use of their bilateral diplomatic channels to allow democratization laggards in the post-communist space a glimpse of what democracy looks like close to home and to give them encouragement and know-how to move forward with reforms. Elites from many of the Eastern EU countries have used various regional bilateral forums to discuss the political, social, and economic benefits of democracy; to persuade illiberal elites in the Balkans and the former USSR that democracy would be beneficial

Most of the post-communist democracy promoters have further used their bilateral contacts to quietly but more or less consistently exert peer pressure on counterparts in their region to keep up democratization reforms.

for them and for their nations; and to socialize representatives from these countries in the practices of democracy. Regular diplomatic interactions have also allowed Eastern EU leaders to share how they have solved transition problems similar to the ones facing democratization laggards in the European neighborhood and to demonstrate to them how democratic institutions are set up and how they function in the democratization leaders in Eastern Europe. Most of the post-communist democracy promoters have further used their bilateral contacts to quietly but more or less consistently exert peer pressure on counterparts in their region to keep up democratization reforms. Eastern EU diplomats have usually joined other actors in the international community in publicly criticizing regimes that perpetrate electoral fraud and grave violations of human rights.

In addition, the Eastern European democracy promoters have supported and, in some cases, sought to influence the democratization work of major Euro-Atlantic regional international organizations such as the EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, and NATO. Recognizing their own diplomatic limitations, many of the Eastern EU countries have sought to involve democratization laggards from their neighborhood in various Euro-Atlantic cooperation initiatives as a way to anchor them in the democratic community. At the same time, even as some Western governments and nongovernmental organizations began showing growing signs of

skepticism and fatigue over democracy promotion in recent years, a majority of the Eastern European governments worked to maintain support for the democratization of the post-communist region as a priority for these regional international organizations.

The post-communist members have argued for further EU and NATO enlargement to the east and southeast as well as for enhancing cooperation with these countries in the meantime. They have managed to accelerate the accession of the Western Balkans (mainly Croatia) and to create a special EU instrument for the Union's immediate eastern neighbors—the Eastern Partnership, which was launched in 2009.² The strongest advocates of the European integra-

tion of the Western Balkans have been Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, and to a lesser extent Romania and Bulgaria. Poland and the Baltic countries have also supported the EU's southeastern enlargement, albeit primarily to open the way for a next round of enlargement—this time to the east.³ Because the EU had grouped the European republics of the former USSR with other countries in Eurasia and the Mediterranean without membership prospective, some of the post-communist members argued for a special EU policy for the immediate Eastern EU neighbors. Even before it was an EU member, Poland circulated a proposal for such enhanced cooperation that reinforces the Union's support for the democratization and European integration of these countries; the proposal was endorsed and presented through the Visegrad group, actively supported by the Baltic states, and eventually introduced as a joint Polish-Swedish initiative.⁴ In addition, Poland and Lithuania played a leading role in steering the EU's response to the Ukrainian electoral revolution of 2004 and subsequently lobbied for offering Kiev the prospect of membership.⁵ It was not until after the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 that the Eastern Partnership was passed, however, and not until after the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine (seen by some as a step back in the country's democratization) that Kiev was offered a membership prospective.⁶ Whether other European Partnership countries such as Moldova would be put on an enlargement track and when Western Balkan countries such as Macedonia and Serbia will be accepted into the European Union still remain unclear. Moreover, despite the hopes and expectations of its supporters, the Eastern Partnership seems stillborn, as it offers too few strong and timely democratization incentives, too little democratization assistance, and not enough benefits to the transition front-runners while offering too many benefits to the transition laggards in the EU eastern periphery.⁷

To bring the eastern and southeastern post-communist neighbors of the EU closer to it, some of the Eastern EU countries have also lobbied with some

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success for such initiatives as trade and visa liberalization for Ukraine, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. The goal has been not only to give these democratization laggards incentives for further reform in the short term but also to advance the diffusion of democratic norms and practices in the long run. And given how onerous EU integration requirements are, many of the new Eastern European members have set up special cooperation mechanisms or programs to guide their partners' efforts to move closer to Brussels. For instance, there is a Ukrainian unit in the Polish committee for European integration devoted to assisting Kiev with political and administrative reforms and a similar annual program run by Bratislava called "Slovak Aid in the Implementation of the Action Plan EU-Ukraine."⁸

Additionally, many of the Eastern EU states have worked to strengthen the EU's response to undemocratic regimes in the immediate eastern neighborhood. Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have kept the

Belarusian question on the table.⁹ Moreover, these proponents of "critical dialogue" managed to persuade the EU to include Belarus in the Eastern Partnership. However, the brutal repressions after the 2010 presidential elections in Belarus signaled the failure of this approach and left the EU's policy toward Belarus "in complete shatters."¹⁰

Moreover, although the post-communist members have weakened the EU's "Russia first" approach toward the former USSR republics, they have been less successful in strengthening the EU's democratization agenda vis-à-vis Russia.¹¹ On the one hand, only Latvia, Lithuania, and

Poland, and to a lesser degree the Czech Republic have been actively advocating for a more critical EU engagement with Russia. Many of the other Eastern EU countries have tended to prioritize their political, economic, or energy needs above their concerns about the democratization record of Russia. On the other hand, even Eastern EU elites who have spoken up about violations of human rights and democratic norms in Russia have encountered much resistance from big Western EU powers such as France, Germany, and Italy, which have sought to maintain their "special" strategic relationship with Moscow.¹² Thus, the question of EU-Russian relations, which includes related issues such as the independence and democratization of Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, has deeply divided the EU.

In general, it has been difficult for the Eastern EU elites to advance their democracy promotion initiatives within the Union because of Western EU perceptions that the post-communist countries are closer to the United States than to Western EU countries in terms of their efforts to support democratization abroad as well as in terms of their overall foreign policy orientation. The Eastern European democracy promoters, much like the United States,

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have a more political approach to supporting democratization abroad than the Western EU countries, many of which share a more developmental approach.¹³ At the same time, the post-communist donors, again like Washington, are perceived to be more “idealistic,” that is, to accord higher diplomatic priority to democratization questions than many of their Western counterparts.¹⁴ In the mid-2000s, for example, when the EU discussed lifting sanctions against Cuba, there was strong principled opposition from a handful of member states, headed by the Czech Republic and supported by Poland. Likewise, some of the Eastern EU states similarly opposed the lifting of the arms embargo on China. Moreover, all of the Eastern European countries supported, directly or indirectly, the controversial “freedom agenda” of the Bush administration. Some Eastern European elites argued at home and at the EU level for participating in the U.S.-led coalition of the willing because of the repressiveness of Saddam Hussein’s regime.¹⁵ Their Western counterparts (and in some cases their domestic opponents as well) suspected, however, that the reason Eastern EU governments wanted to participate was strategic: namely, to support their primary partner in defense, security, and often in foreign policy—the United States.¹⁶ Western European sentiment toward this foreign policy decision of the Eastern EU members was captured in an infamous outburst by French President Jacques Chirac, who said the post-communist countries had missed an opportunity “to shut up.” Overall, the democracy promotion initiatives of the Eastern EU countries have sometimes suffered in the eyes of Western Europeans from their association with a broader pro-U.S. orientation.

Moreover, established donors, especially in Western Europe, have been further dismissive of the Eastern European democracy promotion initiatives because of both the democratization and the democracy promotion records of these countries. Romania, for instance, has been routinely criticized by the EU for its crippling governance and rule of law problems. Questions have also been raised about the democratic commitments of what were earlier seen as democratic success stories: Most recently, the Hungarian conservative government that came to power in 2010 has attracted serious criticism in Europe for implementing a controversial media law and constitutional reforms that observers consider “not compatible with European Union values.”¹⁷ Similarly, criticism of Russia’s human rights record by Baltic countries has been considerably weakened by the treatment of their own Russian minorities. Even in active democracy promoters, such as Slovakia, both democracy (human/minority rights in particular) and democracy promotion were in trouble during the rule of the nationalist and populist left from 2006 to 2010.

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Additionally, Eastern EU diplomatic support for democratization abroad has often been ad hoc and inconsistent. Unless such support is championed by a prominent political figure or pushed hard by local civic democracy promoters, it can indeed be weak. Also, domestic political and personnel shifts and changing budget realities still undermine rather dramatically the consistency of the foreign policy priorities of some of the Eastern EU countries and consequently of their democracy promotion efforts as well. Furthermore, Eastern European support for the democratization and EU integration of the Union's post-communist neighbors has often been overshadowed by other foreign policy objectives such as maintaining good and friendly (and not least economic) relations with these recipients. Slovenia made the European perspective of the Western Balkans the centerpiece of its EU presidency in the first half of 2008, for example, yet it blocked Croatia's EU accession because of a border dispute.

The case of Croatia is a good example of another problem of Eastern European democracy promotion: unconditional support for certain enlargement favorites. Slovakia, among other Eastern EU countries, has actively supported Croatia's bid for EU membership, while many other EU countries blocked it because of Croatia's poor cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. Similarly, many Eastern EU leaders tend not to criticize in public the democratization record of their neighbors or countries with pro-Western governments, such as Ukraine under Viktor Yushchenko and Georgia under Mikheil Saakashvili. Moreover, Poland and the Baltic countries in particular have often actively lobbied against criticizing and sanctioning Ukraine and Belarus, openly and explicitly expressing concerns that "if we do not talk to them, Moscow will."¹⁸ In the same way, fervent and unconditional support of Georgia in the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 by Poland and the Baltic states, concerned about a resurgent Russia, was a deeply divisive issue within the EU.

Further from their backyard, such compromises have been even more shameless: Poland, for instance, recognized as free and fair some of Kazakhstan's elections that OSCE election monitors denounced (Kazakhstan is considered by Polish elites to be an important energy partner).¹⁹ Similarly, while Czech criticism of Beijing's human rights record and its support for the Dalai Lama have persisted despite losses in trade with China, Tibet was not included in the geographic priorities of the Czech Transition Promotion Department, and the Czech government has been happy to welcome Chinese trade delegations to Prague.²⁰ More recently, Prague advised the EU against "speaking out in favor of human rights in Libya" during the 2011 wave of anti-regime protests in the Middle East and North Africa.²¹

In general, despite the "idealist" reputation of the Eastern European democracy promoters and the expressions by Eastern European elites of personal and official solidarity with leaders in countries struggling with democracy, the post-communist capitals have defined and pursued democracy abroad primarily as

a practical approach to handling some of their main foreign policy objectives: They have seen it as an investment in improving the international environment for their own young democratic orders.²² Accordingly, when the implications of Eastern EU pro-democratic diplomacy have come into conflict with core foreign policy goals, the latter have usually taken precedence.

Some post-communist EU members have also participated actively in the debates about the EU's general democracy promotion initiatives, such as the 2006 reform of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the ongoing preparatory work for an EU-wide strategic framework to strengthen the Union's contribution to democracy building around the world—the so-called Consensus on Democracy. The Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia have been the most active on this front, at both the governmental and nongovernmental levels. Together with other Western EU members, they successfully lobbied for keeping a separate instrument for democracy and human rights programs and on making that instrument more flexible.²³

They were, however, unsuccessful in defending the UK proposal for the establishment of a European democracy assistance agency. Also, the Czech Republic prioritized the Consensus on Democracy initiative during its EU presidency in the first half of 2009 but failed to rally the Union behind it. This was in part because of the divisions among EU members on how democracy should be supported abroad and in part because of the domestic political crisis in the Czech Republic at the time of the Czech EU presidency, which undermined Prague's influence at the EU level.

Regardless of their shared commitment to supporting the democratization and EU integration of the Union's eastern and southeastern neighbors, the post-communist members have not done much to coordinate their democracy promotion efforts. Nor have the Eastern EU members coordinated their efforts with Western EU members interested in the Western Balkans and the former USSR. Despite some suggestions that the Visegrad forum and the V4+B3 platform (the Visegrad countries and the former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union) be used to coordinate the democracy promotion activities of participating countries, the consultation of democracy assistance policies, coordination of diplomatic activities, and exchange of information among the post-communist donors are not only rare but also still based mainly on personal contacts. This has led to gaps, overlaps, and inefficiencies in the Eastern European diplomatic support for democratization abroad. Moreover, Poland—the only middle power in the Eastern EU group of mostly small countries—has tended to look for partners among the big Western EU members and to take for granted the support of the other post-communist donors. In general, the Eastern European countries have had a poor record of trying to build coalitions within the EU.

The post-communist members have not done much to coordinate their democracy promotion efforts.

Democracy Assistance

Many of the Eastern EU members do not consider themselves new donors because they used to provide assistance to developing countries “on the road to socialism.” As they restructured their economies in the post-communist period and entered clubs such as the OECD and later the EU, they were required by these international organizations and increasingly encouraged by Western donors to once again provide development assistance. With support from the United Nations Development Program and a few established donors, some Eastern EU countries began setting up these new aid mechanisms in the late 1990s. By the

mid-2000s, they were already fully functional in all Eastern EU states except Bulgaria and Romania. Most have set up a department for development cooperation within their ministry of foreign affairs. Slovakia is the only country to also set up an independent agency responsible for project selection and management, while the Czech Republic is the only one to establish a special Human Rights and Transition Policy Department. Eastern European development aid, including democracy assistance, is implemented through projects proposed by non-state actors, businesses, and central and local state institutions. Moreover, a few Eastern European donors have also set up small grants funds within some of their embassies abroad and, as a result, provide additional democracy aid directly to state and non-state actors in partner countries.

Because most of the Eastern EU countries are relatively small, the total democracy aid they have provided amounts to “a tiny drop in the aid business.”²⁴ In 2006, for instance, these donors together supplied about €12 million (\$17.5 million) in democracy assistance; compare this to the estimated €340 million (\$500 million) given in the same year by Sweden alone.²⁵ Still, given the relative cost effectiveness of the post-communist democracy assistance programs, even such small amounts of Eastern EU funding have the potential to make a meaningful contribution.

Moreover, the Eastern European rates of democracy assistance as a percentage of overall development aid are about average for the donor community. The second least generous Eastern European donor, Hungary, spends 0.7 percent of its official development assistance on democracy projects—the same share as France. The most generous democracy promoter (according to this measure), Estonia, contributes 8 percent of its official development assistance to democracy projects and thus compares favorably to the United States, the UK, and Germany; all of those influential democracy promoters contribute between 7 and 9 percent. The majority of post-communist democracy promoters spend about 2 percent, which is also the rate of the EU’s democracy

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assistance to development assistance. Still, the Eastern European donors lag behind some of the Nordic countries. The Netherlands spends 12 percent of its official development aid on assisting democracy abroad; Denmark contributes 13 percent; and Sweden, 24 percent.²⁶

In addition, even if democracy support is a small proportion of overall development aid, which includes mostly contributions to multilateral organizations and “tied aid,” it represents a high proportion of Eastern EU bilateral development assistance projects.²⁷ The majority of the Eastern European donors regularly sponsor bilateral democracy assistance projects that represent about 30 percent of all their bilateral development assistance projects.²⁸ For some countries, such as Latvia and Poland, this number is as high as 46 percent and 45 percent, respectively. Even the second least active donor, Hungary, funds bilateral democracy projects that are about a quarter of all its bilateral development projects. Unfortunately, similar data are not available for Western democracy promoters. Recipients of international democracy assistance in Ukraine and Belarus report that a larger share of the aid provided by the Eastern European donors goes to democracy than of the assistance offered by Western donors.²⁹

Most of the democracy assistance provided by the Eastern EU members is allocated to only a few recipients. As a result, Poland, for example, gave more democracy assistance to Ukraine in 2006 than did Sweden and the UK combined.³⁰ And another example: More Ukrainians receive scholarships funded by the Visegrad Four than by the rest of the EU put together.³¹

It is often not the amount of aid that matters but the quality of the projects through which it is distributed. Recipients of Eastern European aid have often remarked on the usefulness of this assistance.³² Just as important, the Eastern European development assistance systems have provided a framework and funding for cooperation between the Eastern EU governments and the nongovernmental organizations in their own countries that are also interested in supporting democratization abroad; many post-communist diplomats see such civic organizations as strategic partners with much expertise and potential for influence on the ground.

Still, as new donors in the democracy domain, Eastern European governments provide only very modest (if growing) funds. And much of this funding is usually absorbed by donor country actors rather than directly by the beneficiaries. Moreover, the Eastern EU administrative capacity to provide aid remains underdeveloped.

A majority of the Eastern EU member states do not even have independent aid agencies; their democracy assistance is provided through development cooperation departments within their foreign ministries. This is in part to maintain political control over the distribution of development aid. As a result, democracy assistance, much like diplomatic democracy promotion, has been vulnerable to the inconsistencies and shifts in the foreign policy priorities of

some of the Eastern EU countries. A few of these aid systems have even been rocked by corruption scandals, and many of them have become targets of local businesses interested in increasing the share of development aid that gives them work abroad and facilitates their international ventures.

Also, most of these aid departments have been set up only within the last five years and still support primarily a number of small projects. They do not systematically invest in multi-annual or multilateral programs. And while some of the Eastern European embassies do provide small grants, funds distributed through them have been reduced since 2008 because of a “lack of administrative capacity.”³³ Because international development is not yet a prestigious foreign service track in Eastern Europe and because there are still few diplomats from the region with experience in international development, some of the post-communist foreign ministries have found it difficult to recruit and retain high-quality aid officers. Many Eastern EU foreign ministries have sought to recruit local civic democracy promoters to work part time or full time in their development cooperation departments, which has improved their expertise but has also increased turnover and eroded institutional learning in some cases. And because of poor coordination of aid priorities and funds among these donors, there are both overlaps and gaps in the assistance provided by Eastern EU donors.

Following the general thrust of their foreign policies overall, the democracy aid efforts of the Eastern EU members are mostly directed at their eastern and southeastern neighborhoods. Although some are involved in the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, their contribution is limited to socioeconomic development assistance. An exception is the Czech Republic, which has made Iraq a democracy assistance priority. The Czech Republic again is the only post-communist donor with something of a global democracy promotion agenda. And while Hungary is the other country with a program outside Europe (reaching China and Vietnam), it remains a hesitant and somewhat reluctant aid provider. Most of these donors have no presence in Latin America, Africa, Asia, or the Middle East.

Even in their neighborhood, the Eastern EU donors usually pay attention to just a handful of recipients and most often prioritize just two or three. (For the priority recipients of the Eastern European democracy promotion efforts, see Table 1.³⁴) Moreover, most of the Eastern European democracy promoters have generally shied away from targeting the regional illiberal power—Russia. Only Poland and Lithuania give some minimal democracy assistance to civic actors there. Also, few of the Eastern European democracy promoters work in the southern Caucasus (outside of Georgia) and none in Central Asia. In fact, most of these donors target a subset of the same five recipients: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Serbia.³⁵ And while there has been little programmatic coordination or collaboration, there is something like a gentlemen’s agreement about a geographical division of labor among the Eastern European democracy

promoters: Poland has taken the lead on supporting the democratization of Ukraine both bilaterally and through the EU; Lithuania has taken the lead on Belarus; Estonia, on Georgia; Latvia (but more recently also Romania), on Moldova; Slovakia, on the Western Balkans (Serbia); and the Czech Republic, on Cuba.

Table 1. Geographical Democracy Assistance Priorities by Donor Country

RECIPIENT		DONOR COUNTRY								
		Poland	Estonia	Lithuania	Latvia	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Hungary ^a	Slovenia ^b	Romania ^c
Eastern Europe	Russia	*		*						
	Ukraine	**	*	*	*	*	**	**		*
	Belarus	**		**	*	**	*			
	Moldova	*	*	*	**	*		*	*	**
South Caucasus	Georgia	*	**	**	**	*				*
	Armenia			*						
	Azerbaijan			*						
Western Balkans	Serbia (& Montenegro)					*	**	**	**	*
	Bosnia-Herzegovina							*	**	
	Macedonia								**	
	Albania								*	
Middle East Americas Asia	Iraq					**				
	Cuba					**				
	Burma					*				
	China							*		
	Vietnam							*		

Note: * Democracy Assistance Recipient (at least one project a year on average);

** Democracy Assistance Priority for the Donor.

- a Hungary has not made public the complete list of its development assistance projects. Moreover, the recipient countries eligible for such assistance have changed somewhat over time. In 2003, Budapest declared its development assistance recipients as Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Vietnam, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Palestinian Authority, Ethiopia, Yemen, Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In 2008 they were Serbia, Belarus, Moldova, Albania, Cuba, Palestinian Authority, and North Korea. Budapest’s diplomatic democracy promotion priorities have been Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova, but in the late 2000s, Hungary also maintained a human rights dialogue with China and with Vietnam. The analysis here is based on a combination of the diplomatic and assistance priorities of Hungary. Áron Horváth, “Hungary’s Democracy Assistance Policies and Priorities,” in Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt, eds., *Democracy’s New Champions: European Democracy Assistance after EU Enlargement* (Prague: PASOS, 2008), 51–80.
- b Slovenia has not published a list of projects, so the analysis here is based on the year in which a development cooperation partnership agreement was concluded with each country: Serbia and Montenegro in 2003, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia in 2005, Moldova in 2007, and Albania in 2008. See www.mzz.gov.si/si/zunanja_politika/mednarodno_razvojno_sodelovanje_in_humanitarna_pomoc/
- c Romania’s priorities here are derived by cross-referencing the list of declared future development assistance recipients and the list of actual diplomatic democracy promotion targets.

The Civic Side

Another element of Eastern European democracy support is the work of various post-communist civic organizations that have developed international democracy aid efforts, what I call the post-communist civic democracy promoters. People in Need in the Czech Republic, the Stefan Batory Foundation and the East European Democratic Center in Poland, and the Pontis Foundation in Slovakia are some of the most active Eastern EU civic democracy promoters. Their initiatives reflect solidarity with and an impulse to respond to demands

While the Eastern EU civic democracy promoters have much to offer, their future successes in the field will depend on how they manage the challenges they face, especially their still-limited capacity to do international work and their dependence on external funding.

from pro-democratic activists in neighboring countries to the east and south as well as beyond. (For the geographical priorities of the major NGOs supporting democratization abroad in the top three Eastern European democracy promoters, see table 2.) Much of their work is funded by Western donors—as a result of U.S. foundations’ support for some of these NGOs and also their capacity to win support from the EU and other Western European donors. As they started withdrawing from Central and Eastern Europe, many Western donors invited some of their major NGO recipients to become regranters of aid and to serve as consultants or subcontractors in Western-funded projects to the east and southeast. Meanwhile, as Eastern EU development aid systems have been set up, funds for this civic democracy aid work have started becoming available from within Eastern European countries themselves. These new aid systems have further increased the number and diversity of the Eastern EU nongovernmental organizations involved in supporting democracy abroad (by funding groups beyond those that regularly win Western grants).

Most Eastern European civic democracy promoters primarily provide technical assistance. They develop projects through which they can share their experiences with the political, economic, and societal transformations in their own countries: training, conferences, and the publication of manuals or of research summarizing their transition experiences as well as some experiential activities, such as inviting recipients to observe or participate in ongoing projects at home or to visit the Eastern EU members to study how different democratic institutions (such as civil society, local governments, independent media, and parliaments) work in practice. The Eastern European civic democracy promoters tend to work mostly with civic recipients. To the extent that they target state institutions abroad, they usually work with individual politicians.

Some Eastern European NGOs have also been engaging in more political activities such as educating, lobbying, and monitoring their own diplomats, the EU, and recipient governments as well as raising awareness at home and abroad about democracy and human rights violations around the globe. Given the international recognition of their work and their domestic reputation, the

Eastern European civic democracy promoters have had the ear of policy makers at the domestic and EU level.³⁶ They tend to formally or informally advise their governments about these countries' development, including democracy, assistance laws, strategies, and annual programs and also about these EU member states' general foreign policy in democracy-promotion priority countries. The umbrella group of Polish development NGOs, for example, advises and monitors the development policy of the Polish foreign ministry; additionally, an informal group of experts from NGOs working in the post-communist region meets several times a year with representatives from different state institutions to discuss Poland's and the EU's eastern neighborhood policy, including democracy promotion within it. In another example, some of the biggest Slovak civic democracy promoters (the Institute of Public Affairs, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, People in Peril, and the Pontis Foundation) work

Table 2. Geographical Democracy Promotion Priorities of the Members of the Polish, Czech, and Slovak National Development NGO Platforms

Percent of NGOs Providing Democracy Assistance to Recipient Country

INTERNATIONAL PARTNER COUNTRY	POLAND	CZECH REPUBLIC	SLOVAKIA
Ukraine	92.6	18.7	71.4
Belarus	77.8	20.5	57.1
Russia	70.4	12.5	21.0
Moldova	55.6	37.5	35.7
Georgia	48.1	20.5	21.0
Azerbaijan	40.7	18.7	21.4
Armenia	25.9	12.5	14.2
Kyrgyzstan	29.6	6.2	14.2
Kazakhstan	22.2	12.5	21.4
Tajikistan	22.2	6.2	14.2
Uzbekistan	18.5	6.2	21.4
Turkmenistan	11.1	0	0
Mongolia	0	13.5	0
Serbia	25.9	37.5	85.7
Croatia	22.2	18.7	14.2
Bosnia-Herzegovina	18.5	6.2	35.7
Macedonia	29.6	6.2	35.7
Kosovo	14.8	6.2	42.8
Albania	25.9	24.0	7.1
Asia	22.2	25.0	14.2
Africa	22.2	31.3	0
Middle East	18.5	12.5	35.7
Central America	11.1	6.2	21.4
Latin America	7.4	18.7	0

with the Slovak foreign ministry, the Slovak representation to the EU, and the European Partnership for Democracy to shape the democracy promotion and neighborhood policy agendas of Slovakia and the EU.

At the same time, many of these NGOs still do most of their democratization work at home and, as a result, have limited financial and personnel resources to devote to their international activity. Additionally, some of the leading Eastern EU nongovernmental organizations working abroad have lost some of their most experienced activists to the local foreign ministry and other European institutions doing democracy promotion work. Most of these NGOs also tend to work with recipient organizations with which they already have ties, which further restricts their geographical reach. Moreover, instead of striving to innovate, many NGOs frequently export their most successful domestic programs. In addition to such limitations of scope and repertoire, most of the Eastern EU civic democracy promoters have no independent sources of funding. As a result, they remain dependent on external funding for their international work and still allocate most of their project funding for project implementation rather than their own institutional development.³⁷ Thus, while the Eastern EU civic democracy promoters have much to offer, their future successes in the field will depend on how they manage the challenges they face, especially their still-limited capacity to do international work and their dependence on external funding.

Advantages in Practice

The recent democratization experience of the Eastern European democracy promoters provides them with tried “recipes” for a number of transition challenges—a set of steps to follow to defeat authoritarians (breakthrough) or achieve particular reform objectives (consolidation). In fact, the post-communist donors are very consciously and purposefully passing along best practices and lessons they have learned about what worked at home and what did not on the road to market democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration.³⁸ These successes give the Eastern European activists credibility to advise, inspire, and motivate those fighting for and struggling with their own transition to democracy. Of all the best practices they can share, the Eastern European democracy promoters have tended to tailor their efforts to the democratization needs of the individual recipients.³⁹ They have also tended to work in their neighborhood and especially in countries with which they have historical and political ties.

Consequently, there has often been a better fit between recipient countries and the practices exported by the Eastern donors than the fit between the same recipient conditions and the practices promoted by Western donors. Additionally, the Eastern European democracy promoters frequently know their counterparts better and have much more knowledge about their cultural

traditions, authoritarian practices or legacies, and local power relations than do many of the Western donors working in the same countries.

Western and Ukrainian political actors involved in responding to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, for example, note that Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski “was the most active of the mediators” and “made the most creative contributions” because of his “relationships with key Ukrainian players,” “his knowledge of the situation on the ground,” and the fact that he “was best prepared” and “could draw upon his own experience as a participant in the 1989 Polish roundtable negotiations.”⁴⁰ Also, while the institutional presence of the European Union “carried great weight,” preexisting personal relationships appear to have nonetheless been “more important” to the credibility of the mediators: According to Western and Ukrainian observers, Kwasniewski’s success as a moderator seems to have been based on the fact that he sought to speak for and involve the EU and, much more important, that the two camps “knew” and had “confidence” in him personally.⁴¹

Because of such local knowledge and personal relationships, the Eastern European players have not been afraid to fund and partner with small and sometimes unknown NGOs and some NGOs outside the capital city.⁴² Similarly, because of their previous “trust-based dialogue” with recipients, the Eastern European activists have been able to broach “areas that can be very tricky for post-Soviet societies, such as combating corruption or engaging NGOs in the policy-making process.”⁴³ What is more, criticism coming from the Eastern European actors has been felt more like peer pressure and has thus been accepted “much more patiently” in countries in transition in the neighborhood than if it were coming from Brussels or other EU-15 capitals.⁴⁴ Especially at the civic level, recipient NGOs report feeling “ownership” as they were able to help shape the “objectives, activities, target audience” of projects as equals to their Eastern European partners, thus also ensuring that assistance reflects better the needs of beneficiaries.⁴⁵

Since they are borrowing from their own transition experience, each of the Eastern EU countries has developed a particular area of expertise, which has produced distinctive national thematic investments and unique preferences for particular policy instruments. Hungary, for instance, prefers to implement democracy assistance projects with the consent of the host government and has emphasized human rights and especially minority rights.⁴⁶ Czech diplomats believe in the power of international condemnation of oppressive regimes, and Slovakia has uniquely invested in the development of groups to monitor media and elections.⁴⁷

At the same time, except for a few innovative practices—such as Slovak attention to think tanks in Belarus, Polish scholarships for the Ukrainian

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youth, or Hungary’s human rights dialogue in China—the democracy promotion priorities of the Eastern European actors do not differ much from those of Western players. Moreover, some of the transition lessons the Eastern European democracy promoters are passing along include best practices that were passed along to them from Western democracy donors. In supporting the development of independent media in Belarus, for example, Polish democracy promoters took a page from the work of U.S. democracy promoters who provided technical and financial assistance to the Polish underground media in the 1980s. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that many Western donors have seen post-communist democracy promotion as a continuation of their own work and further diffusion of their values.⁴⁸ In fact, one of the comparative advantages the post-communist donors claim to have is that they have all learned from both the EU and the U.S. school of democracy promotion and can thus build on and complement the work of Western donors.⁴⁹

Conclusion: Making a Difference?

Eastern European countries might not be democracy promotion “heavy hitters,” but they have already helped secure some democratization gains in the post-communist space. They have developed and maintained relatively extensive transnational networks, facilitating the diffusion of democratic norms

Countries that are not free appear to be less sensitive than partially free countries to democratic diffusion and external democratization support.

and practices. These networks link the Eastern European democracy promoters to the political and civic elites of a number of autocracies and hybrid democracies and also to various civic multipliers in those countries. These networks have been particularly important in shaping the expectations of elites in target countries about what is possible and beneficial for them and their nations when it comes to further reform. Moreover, such networks were crucial in inspiring and preparing pro-democratic forces in the European neighborhood to push their countries in a decidedly democratic direction through the electoral revolutions in the 2000s.⁵⁰ Western donors have acknowledged that the Eastern European actors “have had the ear” of their partners in the neighborhood and have made at least some difference in many of these cases.⁵¹ Similarly, recipients have assessed the “overall impact” of the Eastern European democracy promoters as “important,” “considerable,” “tremendous,” and “crucial” in strengthening democratic forces and/or pushing for political reforms in the European post-communist space as well as in bringing these countries closer to the EU.⁵²

Moreover, the Eastern European democracy promoters have sought to influence Western support for the democratization of their five priority recipient countries. These leadership ambitions of the Eastern EU democracy promoters

have faced some competition from big Western European players such as Germany and the UK that are interested in the east and southeast and from ardent democracy promoters such as the Nordic countries. Much more important, these ambitions have developed at a time of waning Western enthusiasm for democracy promotion. So the Eastern European efforts to increase involvement by the EU and NATO in the European neighborhood have encountered additional resistance from Western European capitals. However, despite such challenges, the expertise and zeal of the Eastern Europeans have helped make their voices heard.⁵³ The Eastern EU democracy promoters have managed to keep the democratization laggards in the post-communist space high on the agenda of a number of Euro-Atlantic organizations. This has been crucial to creating a generally congenial environment for democratization in that region. The appeal of Euro-Atlantic membership, for example, is believed to have been important to the success of the electoral revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.⁵⁴ And by regranting Western aid and serving as consultants or subcontractors in Western projects, the Eastern European activists have influenced how Western assistance has been implemented at the operational level as well.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is in the hybrid democracies in the European space that the post-communist donors have had the most impact. It should be noted, however, that some of these breakthroughs have proven to be rather short-lived. The modest but positive trend toward democratization after the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 was reversed by the revolution's organizers in 2007; after the Georgian-Russian conflict in 2008, the Georgian regime became increasingly illiberal. The democratization gains in the aftermath of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004 were also reversed in just five years. When power was turned over to the unreformed successors of the pre-2004 illiberal regime as a result of the 2010 elections, the country started moving down an authoritarian path.

The post-communist EU donors have had even less success with autocracies in the post-communist space. On the one hand, the Eastern EU democracy promoters have not paid much attention to the illiberal regimes ruling Eurasia. On the other hand, even though many of the post-communist donors have prioritized the Belarusian question and have demonstrated a long-term commitment and a dynamic and evolving approach to resolving it, their efforts have been to no avail. This is perhaps not surprising because countries that are not free appear to be less sensitive than partially free countries to democratic diffusion and external democratization support.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it has deeply concerned and disappointed these donors, which have been fairly confident that most democracy promotion endeavors could be as successful elsewhere as they were in their home countries.

Notes

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- 1 For the United States, see, for example, Thomas Carothers, “The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 55–68; and for Western Europe, see Richard Youngs, “Is European Democracy Promotion on the Wane?” Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS) Working Document no. 292 (May 2008).
- 2 The former USSR republics participating in the Eastern Partnership are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.
- 3 Open Society Institute, *Not Your Grandfather’s Eastern Bloc: The EU New Member States as Agenda Setters in the Enlarged European Union*, European Policies Initiative, April 2009.
- 4 The Visegrad Group is a regional alliance of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Romania also put forward its own proposal for EU cooperation with the Union’s eastern neighbors, which focused more on the so-called Black Sea region and which lost to the Eastern Partnership.
- 5 Centre for Eastern Studies, *The Orange Ribbon: A Calendar of the Political Crisis in Ukraine, Autumn 2004* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2005).
- 6 Andreas Umland, “EU Risks Losing Ukraine,” *EUobserver*, <http://euobserver.com/15/29831> (accessed April 2010).
- 7 See, for example, Natalia Shapovalova, *The EU’s Eastern Partnership: Still-born?* Policy Brief, FRIDE, May 20, 2009.
- 8 The Ukrainian prime minister at the time, Viktor Yanukovich, shared: “Several countries offered assistance to Ukraine in implementing the Action Plan. The proposal of Slovakia is the best, though.” H. Tretcekyj, “V Jevropu – razem iz Slovaccynoju” [Towards Europe together with Slovakia], *Den* 18, February 2006.

- 9 Interview with K. R., March 6, 2009.
- 10 Judy Dempsey, “European Engagement With Belarus Takes a Blow,” *New York Times*, December 22, 2010.
- 11 Still, when Eastern European officials have not succeeded at the European Council level, Eastern European members of the European Parliament, especially from the Baltic countries, Poland, and the Czech Republic, have sought to make up with active involvement in questions relating to Russia and the Russian-EU mutual neighbors. Grzegorz Gromadzki, Raimundas Lopata, and Kristi Raik, *Friends or Family? Finnish, Lithuanian and Polish Perspectives on the EU’s Policy Towards Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, FIIA Report no. 12 (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2005).
- 12 Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2007).
- 13 On these two approaches and the fact that they are both present in different institutions in different countries, see Thomas Carothers, “Democracy Assistance: Political vs. Developmental?” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 5–19.
- 14 The exceptions here are the UK and the Nordic countries.
- 15 David Král, *Enlarging EU Foreign Policy: The Role of New EU Member States and Candidate Countries* (Prague: EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, June 2005).
- 16 Open Society Institute, *Not Your Grandfather’s Eastern Bloc*. The Eastern EU members have been criticized by their Western counterparts for being more “Atlanticist” than “European” and even for being “Trojan horses of the United States in Europe.” However, even if there is a general pro-American consensus in the Baltic countries and Poland, there are deep divisions across the political spectrum on the issue in the other Eastern EU countries. Moreover, recent surveys show that in many ways, the citizens of all new member states are not necessarily more Atlanticist than the old members. See Král, *Enlarging EU Foreign Policy: The Role of New EU Member States and Candidate Countries*.
- 17 Leigh Phillips, “Germany to Hungary: New Constitution Breaches EU Values,” *EUobserver*, April 19, 2011.
- 18 Balazs Jarabik and Vitali Silitski, “Belarus,” in Richard Youngs, ed., *Is the European Union Supporting Democracy in Its Neighbourhood?* (Madrid: FRIDE, 2008), 101–20.
- 19 Interview with M. P., October 8, 2008.
- 20 John Galante and Andres Schipani-Aduriz, “Exporting Dissent: Made in the Czech Republic,” *Transitions Online*, January 10, 2006.
- 21 Leigh Phillips, “Italy and Czech Republic Back Gaddafi Despite Bloodbath,” *EUobserver*, February 21, 2011.
- 22 The exception to the strategic logic behind Eastern European democracy promotion is that while there has been some strategic Czech investment in the European post-communist neighborhood (Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova), there is also some principled support for upholding human rights in countries where they are regularly and gravely violated (Belarus, Cuba, Burma, and Iraq).
- 23 Vera Rihackova, “An Assessment of the Reform of the EU’s External Assistance Instruments” in *Democracy’s New Champions: European Democracy Assistance After EU Enlargement*, edited by Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt (Prague: PASOS, 2008).

- 24 Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt, eds., *Democracy's New Champions: European Democracy Assistance after EU Enlargement* (Prague: PASOS, 2008).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Data on Western democracy promoters from Richard Youngs, "Is European Democracy Promotion on the Wane?"
- 27 Most of the Eastern EU democracy assistance is usually provided through such bilateral development assistance projects, which are, however, still only a small fraction of the official development assistance budgets of these countries. These projects are only the second largest official development assistance appropriation by the post-communist foreign ministries; most of the official development assistance funds distributed by the Eastern EU foreign ministries are usually in the form of contributions to multilateral organizations with development goals, such as the EU and United Nations. The small remainder of official development assistance funds managed directly by the post-communist foreign ministries goes to humanitarian assistance and the small grants programs run by some Eastern EU embassies. However, most of the official development assistance distributed by a majority of post-communist donors is not at the disposal of their foreign ministries but of the education, economic, interior, and other ministries; this assistance goes mostly toward "tied aid," such as preferential trade credits and debt relief, and to a much lesser extent toward other aid, such as scholarships and refugee support.
- 28 The remaining 70 percent includes various infrastructural, social, cultural, and economic projects.
- 29 Natalia Shapovalova and Olga Shumylo, "Ukraine: Supporting Elusive Consolidation," in Kucharczyk and Lovitt, eds., *Democracy's New Champions*: 267–95.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Kucharczyk and Lovitt, *Democracy's New Champions*.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Shapovalova and Shumylo, "Ukraine."
- 34 Bulgaria and Romania's development assistance systems have not yet been set up, so the priorities listed in this table are based on these countries' diplomatic initiatives and declared development assistance priorities. However, because Bulgaria's diplomatic efforts have also been minimal, determining Sofia's democracy promotion priorities is very difficult.
- 35 Although it does not qualify for development assistance, Croatia has received much diplomatic support from Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic.
- 36 Interview with R. P., October 19, 2008.
- 37 There are, of course, exceptions. For instance, some of the leading Eastern EU civic democracy promoters, such as the Polish Batory Foundation, the Slovak Pontis Foundation, the Lithuanian Eastern Europe Studies Center, and the Polish East European Democratic Center, have increasingly invested in capacity building of various civic, media, and local democracy institutions abroad.
- 38 Interview with V. H., October 30, 2008; interview with B. S., November 28, 2008; interview with K. M., November 5, 2008; and interview with T. I., November 28, 2008.

- 39 That is why differences exist in the approach between the practices of individual donors when they target hybrid regimes and when they target autocracies. For instance, Polish activists working in authoritarian Belarus propose tactics they understand to have worked in the years when communist Poland was under martial law, whereas the activists working in the more democratic Ukraine (especially from 2004 to 2010) have suggested practices that come from Poland's post-1989 transition and Euro-Atlantic integration experience.
- 40 Interview with S. P., June 20, 2007.
- 41 Interview with S. P., June 20, 2007. Among the mediators, Kwasniewski had the closest relationship with Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine's president at the time, having known him since 1996. He had also dealt previously with both Yushchenko and Yanukovich.
- 42 Kucharczyk and Lovitt, *Democracy's New Champions*: 267–95.
- 43 Shapovalova and Shumylo, "Ukraine."
- 44 Interview with S. P., June 20, 2007; interview with U. U., March 18, 2009.
- 45 Shapovalova and Shumylo, "Ukraine."
- 46 Áron Horváth, "Hungary's Democracy Assistance Policies and Priorities," in Kucharczyk and Lovitt, eds., *Democracy's New Champions*: 51–80.
- 47 Vladimír Bartovic, "The Czech Republic's Democracy Assistance Policies and Priorities," in Kucharczyk and Lovitt, eds., *Democracy's New Champions*: 29–50.
- 48 Interview with M. G., April 12, 2009, and interview with B. H., April 18, 2009.
- 49 Kucharczyk and Lovitt, *Democracy's New Champions*.
- 50 Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions," *Communist and Postcommunist Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 2006): 283–304.
- 51 Interview with R. P., October 19, 2008; interview with L. M., April 1, 2010; interview with L. L., June 18, 2010; interview with K. S., August 18, 2010; interview with C. T. and A. C., August 13, 2010.
- 52 Kucharczyk and Lovitt, *Democracy's New Champions*: 284, 205, 268, and 274, respectively.
- 53 Interview with E. M.-S., February 16, 2009; interview with C. O.-A., March 7, 2009; and interview with J. M. W., March 18, 2009.
- 54 Joshua Tucker, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3 (September 2007): 535–51.
- 55 Harvey Starr and Christina Lindborg, "Democratic Dominoes Revisited: The Hazards of Governmental Transitions, 1974–1996," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 4 (August 2003): 490–519.

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