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European approaches to democracy promotion

Democracy is the only system that guarantees people political and civil rights and the right to participation. No other form of government has proved to be so successful, so humane, and so conducive to development.

The international community too has recognized that social, economic, and environmental progress and broad-based growth can only be achieved and secured on a sustainable bases within a democratic political system based on the rule of law.¹

Europe's democracies have a pioneering record in promoting democracy and human rights outside their borders. Through government developmental agencies such as Britain's Department for International Development, Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the

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¹ Website of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, www.bmz.de.

Swedish International Development Agency, and similar organizations, much of Europe has long made development assistance a priority. While the bulk of development assistance addresses concerns such as poverty, hunger, and conflict, many European governments have incorporated democracy and human rights programming into foreign assistance.

This more traditional approach to democracy and human rights work as a part of broader development assistance has been accompanied by a strong commitment by European political parties and related institutions to democracy promotion. Beginning as early as the 1920s, European parties embarked on programs to support democratic development through a fairly consistent model. Germany's political party foundations, or *Stiftungen*, have long played a leading role in supporting foreign political parties with training, seminars, and other activities in developing democracies. Under the German model, foundations are established with links to the major political parties. In some cases, (such as in Great Britain), the parties themselves established international offices as part of the party structure. Funding is provided by the government, typically apportioned based on parties' relative strength in the national parliament (or a combination of national and regional parliamentary representation).

Particularly since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, many new players have followed Germany's lead and begun democracy and human rights work through party foundations. These new European foundations have largely followed the German example of establishing government-funded nongovernmental organizations linked to major political parties. As in Germany, many of these new party foundations combine domestic and international activities. But many of the newcomers to democracy promotion in Europe have also borrowed from the American model of establishing an independent (though state-funded) NGO to serve as a mechanism to channel resources to democracy-promotion activities to party foundations while maintaining an arm's-length distance from the government.

The European Union has also become a major player in democracy and human rights work, particularly since the expansion of the EU to include former communist nations in central and eastern Europe. As with Spain and Portugal in the 1970s, many of the new member states benefited from democracy promotion activities in the 1980s and 1990s. As full-fledged members of the European Union, countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have brought a renewed emphasis and supported increased funding from the EU for human rights and democracy work.

This article will survey the scope of democracy promotion activities in Europe, with an emphasis on two areas in which Europe's approach has been distinct: the party foundation model developed in Germany and used with modifications across the EU, and the unique role of the European Union itself as a transnational source of funding and support.

THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Former President George W. Bush made democracy promotion a central tenet of American foreign policy. During the Bush years, the US dramatically increased spending for democracy and human rights activities and created a host of new mechanisms to provide resources toward democracy promotion. Existing institutions like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) saw their budgets increased. Funding for grants from the State Department's bureau of democracy, human rights, and labor made the office an increasingly important source of resources. And new institutions like the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which sought to link foreign assistance to democratic, social, and economic progress, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative within the State Department further expanded funding. Much of the focus on democracy promotion was, of course, a reaction to the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, as the Bush administration searched for ways to promote change in the Muslim world. But the US emphasis on democracy and human rights promotion predates the Bush years and has had strong bipartisan support.

While critics charge that the Bush policies were overreaching, ineffective, and counterproductive, most observers expect the Obama administration to continue to provide support for democracy and human rights programming. Although some of the mechanisms will undoubtedly change, there has been a steady consensus on the importance of this work in Washington for decades.

There has been a cyclical pattern of democracy assistance in the United States over the course of the last century, with periods of prominence alternating with periods in which democracy and human rights took a back seat to other foreign policy goals. Woodrow Wilson's emphasis on national self-determination and democracy in the wake of World War I was focused primarily on Europe. The 1920s and 1930s saw many of the gains of the Wilson years erode as communist and fascist tyrannies came to power. After World War II, the United States and its wartime allies worked to reestablish democratic systems and restore independence to (West) Germany and

Japan, ultimately integrating them into the political and economic structures of the west. The Truman administration's Marshall plan provided essential economic support that allowed western Europe to begin the recovery from the war and create social stability to prevent extremists on the right and left from taking power.

During much of the Cold War, democracy and human rights concerns were sublimated to the conflict with the Soviet Union. Security concerns were a higher priority for the most part, and the US reputation was sullied by support for undemocratic but staunchly anticommunist regimes in countries like Iran, the Philippines, South Africa, and Spain. Most of Latin America was ruled by US-supported autocratic regimes in response to the challenge posed by Cuba's communist revolution. Democracy promotion was all but ignored during the realist years of the Nixon and Ford administrations.

President Jimmy Carter brought back some of the spirit of Wilsonian morality with his emphasis on human rights as a key plank of American foreign policy. His critics charged that his administration overemphasized human rights concerns in states considered to be traditional allies and underemphasized them in the USSR and its satellites. Under Ronald Reagan, the balance shifted dramatically. Reagan highlighted human rights abuses in the Soviet bloc, with the Cold War struggle muting criticism of similar problems in American allies. But Reagan echoed Carter in restoring democracy and human rights to a central position in US foreign policy rhetoric. Reagan adopted and embraced the effort of some congressional Democrats to create a mechanism to support democratic development overseas, resulting in the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy and its related institutions in 1983.²

2 For a comprehensive survey of the US record of democracy assistance, see Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004). The US congress designated four related institutes to work in partnership with the National Endowment for Democracy. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute were close to the Democratic and Republican parties, though legally independent of the parties, as required by tax law. They initially focused on political party development and have expanded into such areas as governance, civil society development, and civic participation. The Solidarity Center, originally the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, was established by the AFL-CIO labour union in 1997 and supports the development of free and independent trade unions. The Center for International Private Enterprise was created by the Chamber of Commerce in 1983 and supports private enterprise and market-oriented reforms as a tool to promote democratic development.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fledgling NED became an important new instrument for supporting the development of democratic political parties and civil society. The Clinton administration spearheaded efforts to ramp up democracy promotion within USAID, which had previously focused on traditional development goals.

While the United States has become an important—and indeed, the dominant—player in democracy promotion in recent years, it has also drawn much from the quieter efforts of European democracies to support democratic development. West Germany's political party foundations were an important source of inspiration for the establishment of the NED in the early 1980s. The German model of state-funded foundations or NGOs has been replicated with some differences across Europe and beyond.

While democracy and human rights have been central to US foreign policy for decades, the German experience of promoting democratic development and human rights proved to be instrumental in the transitions of Portugal and Spain to democracy in the 1970s and for the movement of much of Latin America away from authoritarianism and toward democracy. The creation of the NED and its related institutes in the United States drew heavily on the German experience.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN EUROPE

European governments have long been important contributors of development assistance. While the bulk of assistance has been dedicated to traditional development goals such as health and infrastructure, European development agencies have been devoting increasing attention and funding to human rights and democracy programming in recent years.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is illustrative of this shift. SIDA's stated overall goal is poverty reduction, accomplished through project grants and budget support to foreign governments. SIDA's work includes poverty reduction, education and health, natural resources and the environment, humanitarian aid, economic reform, and human rights and democracy. Human rights and democracy is a relatively small part of the total portfolio and projects are carried out either on a government-to-government basis (for example, with regard to parliamentary strengthening), or are subcontracted to Swedish NGOs (with regard to, for example, projects to empower women).

Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and related agencies such as the German Development Corporation

(GTZ) make democracy and human rights work a key pillar of their extensive activities. As a policy paper issued by the BMZ explains,

German development policy promotes democracy in its partner countries as a *value* and a *political system*. At the same time, it explicitly recognizes that democracy can take different forms depending on the historical and cultural foundations of the societies in question. Promotion is *not limited to a specific form of democracy* but rather involves implementing the *principles of democracy and the rule of law*. These include respecting human rights and the principles of empowerment, participation and non-discrimination, together with transparency and accountability. The right to development cannot in any case be achieved without the democratic rule of law. This is why promoting democracy is a goal in its own right for German foreign policy.³

The BMZ and GTZ place democracy assistance within the larger framework of German development policy (social justice, economic efficiency, political stability, and ecological sustainability), and view democratic governance as an essential tool in achieving these goals.⁴ Specifically, GTZ “helps its partners establish democratic systems. It promotes democratic elections and parliaments, equal rights for women and the protection of minorities. It also supports participation by civil society in government decision-making processes, and promotes free and independent media.”⁵ To these ends, the German government has supported projects to strengthen women’s political participation in Morocco, promote decentralization and civil society participation in Peru, and foster a more independent media in Serbia. Significantly, these spotlighted projects are implemented by partner organizations, including the Konrad Adenauer and Friedrich Ebert foundations in the Moroccan example.

Germany and other major European donors draw heavily on the 2000 United Nations millennium development goals as a rationale for democracy

3 Kerstin Sieverdingbeck, “Promoting democracy in German foreign policy: Supporting political reform processes and popular participation—a BMZ position paper,” Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Berlin, 2004, 5, www.bmz.de. Emphasis in original.

4 *Ibid.*, 6.

5 German Development Corporation website, www.gtz.de.

and human rights work. The millennium declaration links poverty reduction to democracy and the rule of law, stating that member states “will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.”⁶

Europe’s new democracies have also taken up democracy promotion as a key plank of their foreign policies. In part, this reflects an appreciation for assistance they received in establishing and consolidating their own democracies after the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Czech Republic has taken a leading role in this area and former President Vaclav Havel is a noted and vocal advocate for the cause.

The Czech commitment goes far beyond rhetoric. The Czech government has made “transformation cooperation” one of the planks of its national development strategy, stating that “[i]n particular, it concerns experience in the field of nonviolent resistance to totalitarian systems and the subsequent process of social transformation, as...happened in the Czech Republic and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.”⁷ This assistance is focused on a number of transitional or pretransitional countries: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba, Georgia, Iraq, Moldova, Myanmar, Serbia, and Ukraine. The Czech Republic has placed a special emphasis on three “hard cases”—Cuba, Burma, and Belarus. In the case of Cuba, it has been advocating, albeit without much success, for a harder EU line against the communist regime in Brussels.

THE GERMAN MODEL AND EUROPEAN PARTY FOUNDATIONS

German political party foundations date back to 1925, when the Social Democratic party established the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The foundation was dissolved during the Nazi years and reestablished after the Second World War. The Christian Democratic Union formed its Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 1956, followed by the Free Democrats’ Friedrich Naumann Foundation in 1958 and the Christian Social Union’s Hanns-Seidel Foundation in 1967. The two newest major parties—the Greens (Heinrich Boll Foundation) and the Left (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation)—established their foundations in the 1990s.

6 United Nations millennium declaration, 2000, 6, www.un.org.

7 Nicol Adamcova, “International development of the Czech Republic,” Institute of International Relations, Prague, 2006, 26, www.rozvojevostredisko.cz.

The six party foundations are funded largely by the German federal government and to a lesser extent, the *Land* (state) governments. More than 97 percent of the funding of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation comes from government sources. The six *Stiftungen* are allocated both general support and project-related funds through a formula based on their parties' relative political strength in the federal and *Land* elections.⁸ The party foundations may also raise private funds, though this is a minor source of revenue.

The German foundations began their existence domestically, working to strengthen their respective political parties in the postwar environment. In Germany, they function as think tanks, generating policy papers, organizing seminars and classes, and so on. Beginning in the 1960s, the foundations began working internationally. Under the German model, the foundations provide support (although not direct funding) to likeminded political parties and institutions. This sister-party approach, where Christian democrats work with Christian democrats, social democrats with social democrats, and so on, has been adopted by most European countries engaging in democracy promotion work.

The major German foundations are rightly credited for playing an important role in the democratic transitions of Portugal, Spain, and countries throughout Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. The German *Stiftungen* provided support for political parties, civil society, labour unions, and the media as democracy was restored in Iberia. In Latin America, where they maintain a major presence to this day, the German foundations were active in helping parties to crystallize along ideological lines, among many other activities. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, for example, has committed significant resources to supporting the institutionalization of Christian democracy as a political force.

The collapse of communism and the fall of the Berlin wall in the late 1980s was an impetus to a major expansion of democracy support across Europe. A 2005 study by the Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations notes that 70 percent of European political foundations were formed after 1989 and have three common characteristics: a relationship with one or more political parties in their home country, a reliance on government sources for the bulk of their funding, and a particular focus on political parties in their democracy assistance activities.⁹

8 Konrad Adenauer Foundation website, www.kas.de.

9 Jos van Wersch and Jeroen de Zeeuw, "Mapping European democracy assistance: Tracing the activities and financial flows of political foundations," working paper 36, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague, 2005.

European governments and parties across western Europe adopted elements from both the German and American models. The new European party foundations were structured along party lines (though in most cases established as independent NGOs) and often engaged in domestic as well as international work. The preponderance of funding, as noted above, has been from government sources, and they have largely emulated the Germans' sister-party model when providing assistance abroad.

But a number of the new European participants also emulated the American model of establishing organizations along the lines of the National Endowment for Democracy. The NED is largely government-funded through annual grants but is organized as a nongovernmental organization. Under the NED structure, the four core interests (the Democratic and Republican parties, labour unions, and business) are represented on the organization's board, although the four institutes themselves have no say in the board's composition. The arms-length nature of the NED has proven to be a sound model over time, insulating grant-making from government policy.

The NED model of an independent organization was adapted in the Netherlands, for example, where seven major political parties established the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) in 2000.¹⁰ The NIMD board includes a representative from each of the political parties and an independent chair. In 2007, NIMD was working in 17 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, with more than 150 political parties. The NIMD has a high level of cooperation among the participating parties, in that it sponsors a number of joint projects among the parties, such as "centres for multiparty democracy." These projects are specifically designed to promote interparty dialogue and cooperation in developing democracies such as Bolivia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia. The emphasis is on consensus-building and tolerance, which is a reflection of a central Dutch value.

Given NIMD's origins as a project of the Dutch political parties, its goals and projects are naturally focused largely on party-building. Its goals are joint initiatives by parties to improve the democratic system; the institutional development of political parties; and relations among political parties, civil society, and the media. While programming varies from country to country, NIMD typically emphasizes projects that aim to improve the capacity

10 Christian Democratic Appeal, Christian Union Party, Democrats 66, Green Left, Labor Party, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy and State Reformed Party.

of political parties in areas such as organization, planning, and ideology; voter education and information; and, through its centres for multiparty democracy, consensus and compromise-building. In 2007, NIMD had an annual budget of over 10 million Euros.¹¹

Great Britain also adapted the independent foundation model when it established the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) in 1992. The WFD is an independent public body under the sponsorship of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Its board is composed of eight representatives from political parties represented in parliament, along with six non-party representatives appointed by the Foreign Office. WFD funding is split between directly funded projects and party programs. Each of the major British parties receives an allocation from WFD for specific projects, with funding apportioned by relative political strength. Annual core funding for WFD is a comparatively small £4.1 million, though in recent years the foundation has received additional funding from the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development.

Approximately 55 percent of WFD's total budget has gone to political-party-sponsored projects in recent years, with the Conservatives and Labour each receiving about 40 percent of the funds, 15 percent going to the Liberal Democrats, and the remaining percent divided among the Democratic Unionist party, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, and the Ulster Unionist party. The remaining funds have been disbursed directly by the WFD to partner organizations in areas such as civil society development, governance, and participation. For example, WFD projects have supported women's empowerment in Morocco, trade union development in Iraq, and parliamentary committee capacity-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The British parties receive project funding directly and not through party-related foundations as in Germany or the United States.¹²

Spain has more closely emulated the German model of party foundations, which combine the domestic think-tank and training centre functions with international programs. In 1977, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party established the Pablo Iglesias Foundation (FPI), and in 1989 the centre-right *Partido Popular* established the Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies (FAES). Both FPI and FAES concentrate on domestic Spanish

11 2007 annual report, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, www.nimd.org.

12 2007 annual report and accounts, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, www.wfd.org.

politics, issuing a variety of publications and organizing conferences and seminars, but both have also ventured into democracy-promotion work, organized on an ideological or sister-party basis. FPI has conducted seminars or trainings in Europe, Africa, and Latin America on topics such as leadership and political philosophy. FAES has worked with partner parties and organizations on seminars and training, with a strong emphasis on Latin America. In general, the Spanish party foundations' activities have focused on policy, theoretical, and ideological topics rather than on practical or skills-training work.

Austria's party foundations were established in 1972 and are mostly funded by the state. The Social Democratic Party of Austria's Dr. Karl Renner Institute and the Political Academy of the Austrian People's Party combine domestic and international functions. Domestically, they produce policy papers, reports, and other publications; organize seminars and conferences; and provide training for political activists, organizers, and candidates. Internationally, the Renner Institute and the Political Academy provide training and support to sister parties, primarily in post-communist Europe and the former Soviet Union.

THE EXPANDING ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

In 2005, the European Council adopted a resolution concerning development assistance, specifically that the new member states—Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—would “strive to contribute at least 0.17 percent of gross national income to development assistance by 2010, increasing to 0.33 percent by 2015.”¹³ While this is a relatively modest start (Denmark contributed 0.85 percent of gross national income to official development assistance in 2004, followed by Luxembourg at 0.83 percent, Sweden at 0.78 percent, and the Netherlands at 0.73 percent), it does speak to the growing power and influence of the European Union in the area of foreign assistance. While these figures reflect general foreign assistance, several of the new member states have placed an emphasis on democracy and human rights work as a core of their foreign assistance. Indeed, under the leadership of European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, the EU has increased funding for democracy assistance and introduced new

13 Nicol Adamcova, “International development of the Czech republic,” Institute of International Relations, Prague, 2006, 26, 10, www.rozvojevostredisko.cz.

mechanisms and institutions to deliver it. The European Union, together with its member states, is the largest foreign aid donor in the world.

EuropeAid, under the auspices of the Commission, is the primary instrument for EU foreign assistance. Democracy assistance is expressly part of EuropeAid's mandate and its mission is described as follows:

The Commission's support to democratization pursues both a top-down and bottom-up approach. This includes democratic institution building, such as capacity building of parliaments and local governments, electoral support and observation, reform and training of the judiciary, and anti-corruption measures. It also covers civil society programs, including projects supporting non-state actors in their advocacy, information and education activities in the areas of human rights and democracy, as well as lobbying to secure political change or to monitor the actions of public institutions.¹⁴

EU assistance focuses on four main areas: improving election processes, strengthening parliaments, supporting independent media, and promoting pluralistic political systems. The EU has taken a leading role in organizing election observation missions in recent years, averaging eight national elections annually. The European Union is also a major source of funding for electoral assistance. For 2003-08, EU funding in this area totalled more than 300 million euros.¹⁵

The primary instrument for EU assistance is the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, which has an average annual budget of 140 million euros.¹⁶ Its funding is directed primarily at civil society organizations on projects to foster greater human rights and democracy, without host government consent. In addition to NGO support, funding also supports the EU's election monitoring missions. Other important areas of emphasis include abolishing capital punishment and torture, support for the International Criminal Court, and support for international organizations such as the African Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

¹⁴ <http://ec.europa.ed>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ "The European Union: Furthering human rights and democracy across the globe," office for official publications of the European communities, Luxembourg, 2007, 3, <http://ec.europa.eu>.

And as at the national level, the European transnational parties are also engaging in democracy promotion work. The Party of European Socialists, the main grouping of centre-left and social democratic parties, is affiliated with the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, which aims to support social democratic parties in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. More recently, the European People's Party, the centre-right grouping of Christian democrats and conservatives, has established the Centre for European Studies, a new EU-level initiative launched in 2007.

CONCLUSION

Europe's experience in democracy promotion shows that there is no one "right" approach to the field. Throughout Europe, we see that governments have adopted a variety of mechanisms. In most of the European cases, governments have chosen a formula that allows for some distance between the state treasury and the disbursement of funds. Typically, civil society organizations, including political parties, play an important role in the design and execution of programming. The US has borrowed elements of Germany's pioneering work, but at the same time has taken a different approach. In fact, given that there are multiple US government sources of funding (USAID, NED, State Department, etc.), one could say that Washington has chosen several approaches simultaneously. Other actors elsewhere in the world, including Australia and Taiwan, have developed their own unique strategies and mechanisms. As countries sketch out their roles in democracy assistance, they should draw on the strengths of their own democratic institutions and traditions, borrowing as appropriate from the work of other democracies around the world. The varied European approaches to democracy assistance provide a wealth of experience to consider.

