



Democracy

Europe's Core Value?

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2007

Relations between state, civil society and private sector

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*Civil society has emerged as 'the most widely discussed aspect of democracy in recent years, drawing the interest of both the Right and the Left'*¹

The European provenance

The above observation, offered by the editors of the *Journal of Democracy* in the special, first issue of the twenty-first century, was prompted by 'one of the most penetrating, prescient, and comprehensive books on democracy ever written – Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*'. Tocqueville was a Frenchman, who also wrote about France. What is more, in the beginning the very idea of civil society was born and bred in Europe, and Europe has given it sustenance ever since; its rediscovery in the 1980s owes to developments taking place - on the ground - in Europe. Added to that, there is the deep historical reality of Europeans' long engagement with diverse forms of associational life in almost every part of the world – Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. History endows Europe with a special responsibility to share an understanding of the significance of civil society; it equips Europeans with certain advantages in doing so.

The European intellectual heritage of civil society is rich, diverse and multinational, ranging from the initial origins of the idea in the chilly north - in the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century - to *The Prison Notebooks* of Italy's Antonio Gramsci, in the much warmer south. It encompasses both 'old Europe' where the nineteenth century German philosopher Hegel gave the concept new prominence, and the 'new Europe' of countries like Poland, where the Solidarnosc' example in

the 1980s did so much to change the political landscape of Europe's decaying communist states. So, civil society of one form or another has been around a very long time in Europe, in thought about relations between society and politics and in the concrete socio-political reality. All this gives Europe an authentic voice in debates about what civil society means and its value. Europeans can speak with authority. That in European thought the term acquired multiple interpretations of its meaning and significance is well worth remembering in the present context, where especially US-led democracy assistance often seems to narrow civil society down to a very particular model - one that does not look out of place in the US. A common criticism is that these efforts exclude large and flourishing areas of associational life in many countries eyed as possible new democracies.

What is more, Europeans by virtue of their long and deep historical association with almost every corner of world - as colonisers, empire-builders, traders, missionaries - are well equipped to understand the complex and varied cultures, social life, norms, customs and conventions that make and shape associational life in foreign lands. In this, Europeans can learn from past involvements, including their mistakes. Now, they are as well placed as any to make a constructive engagement with civil societies in the interests of promoting democracy and liberal democratic values. Amy Hawthorne, of Washington's Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, makes the same point rather differently in a detailed assessment of US assistance to civil society in the Middle East. She says that if the US is to make progress there the policy-makers and aid providers must display a level of patience, flexibility, and knowledge of local history, language and culture that is typically lacking in U.S. democracy assistance.²

Europe's legacy

Europe in its recent past is home to competing ideas of democracy (social democracy, market democracy, and so on), and divergent traditions regarding the appropriate division of responsibilities between government, the market and the non-governmental sector, and between civil society and the state. The European experience has been a dynamic one, open to experimentation and prepared to change, as evidenced in

greater and lesser degrees of privatisation and deregulation and, most dramatically of all, the transformation from planned to market-led economies in Central East Europe.

Accordingly, Europe has a unique breadth of knowledge and experience to share with countries facing critical choices - as new states, states embarking on modernisation and industrial development, or simply states grappling with the challenges of globalisation and its discontents. Europe, through the variety of its own historic and more recent experience, is witness to the essential belief that there are choices; choice is possible. This and the absence of uniformity are distinguishing hallmarks of a European profile in democracy assistance.

European history is rich in diversity concerning the balance between society and the state, different models of public-private sector 'partnership' and the relations of both these sectors to quasi- and non-governmental organisations. The point extends even to the formal and informal institutional relationships that have emerged between the different categories of democracy promotion actors – government ministries and departments, non-governmental and semi-autonomous agencies, political parties and their foundations, and private sector consultants. There are varying degrees of attachment to ideas of subsidiarity, autonomy in programmatic and financial affairs, requirements to undertake performance evaluations, and so on. Europe can present different options to others by drawing on its own collective experience.

In Europe the theoretical proposition that a strong state, strong private sector and strong civil society can go together and have mutual benefits is neither a new discovery nor an alien idea. It was a European - Czechoslovakia's first President, Tomas Masaryk, who said³, 'Genuine democracy will be economic and social as well as political'. And it is another European, Norway's Stein Ringen⁴, who has recently restated the case that even affluent democracies must try harder to protect their political democracy from the increasing concentrations of private economic power and negative political effects of economic globalisation. Not by overthrowing capitalism or building enormous state bureaucracies, but by persuading the middle classes to 'empower persons' through new commitments to improvements like a progressive tax regime and appro-

appropriate welfare policies. The variety of Western Europe's own useable heritage ranges from social democracy and corporatist-style arrangements embodying degrees of economic and social democracy, institutionalised in various ways, through to a more transatlantic Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism and corporate power similar to the United States. Europe is uniquely well placed to avoid the 'one-size-fits-all' mentality that is commented on so often in standard approaches to international development – political development as well as economic development. That variety matters in social and political organisation is something we ignore at our peril. The virtues claimed for such 'individuality' are both a philosophical statement and a practical lesson, as revealed in that other classic liberal text of the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*,⁵ which, compared to De Tocqueville's text, goes unremarked in the vast contemporary literature on democratisation perhaps only because it was not written about America.

Civil society in democracy assistance: choices for Europe

If a European profile warrants difference from the way Europe has provided assistance up until now, or from the way other international actors behave, then Europe has to address some important choices of its own. In which respect does being distinctive matter most? Is it in regard to a geographical concentration of resources? In the choice of 'partners'? In the sort of relationship it aspires to have with its 'partners'? In the kind of activities Europe is willing to support? In the principal object of the endeavour - just civic associations, or something more, namely civil society? Or in respect of the conception of civil society that it sees fit to promote?

The limited resources available for democracy assistance to civil society suggests there must be some more rational alternative to a 'scattershot' approach, some rationing principle, in short, prioritisation. But there is no single orienting principle. What is more, Europe could be bolder in respect of the choice of partners it engages with. There are political risks in doing this, but there are risks in only offering support that will have as its consequence the maintenance of the political status quo. Where should Europe place the emphasis in its practical efforts to support civil society?

One possibility is to combine a global outreach with specific regional or country emphases. Examples are regions where 'Europe' has distinct political, security or other interests, i.e. the European Union's 'near abroad', sometimes called its near neighbourhood (the east and south of the EU's own shifting borders); or, alternatively, where close ties in the past provide special grounds for obligation or for empathy (Indonesia and much of Africa, for instance).

A second possibility is to trade on Europe's own experience of building peace, harmony and integration after centuries of violent conflict - the construction of the European Union after the Second World War, and overcoming the Cold War between East and West Europe. That would mean Europe targeting democracy assistance on some of the most difficult - and potentially most rewarding - cases, namely societies in conflict or those hoping to emerge from violence. Some of such societies are part of the EU's 'near abroad', in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, which strengthens the cases for giving priority to these regions. Civil societies (and political parties too) have a crucial role to play in making peace work, in building post-conflict reconciliation and social and political integration. Europe is distinctive in being able to share its own experience, offering a showcase of examples and, perhaps more valuable, a source of inspiration. We know that the EU as a model of economic integration has inspired would-be replicas in other parts of the world. Just as noteworthy can be its record of developing an (increasingly transnational) civil society, reflecting private not-for-profit organisations, interest groups and cause groups (pressure groups), in place of the uncivil associations that have been present throughout Europe at one time or another. By working together like-minded democracy assistance actors in Europe can reinforce the message. By building on the examples of cooperation already present in various countries, Europe would offer a distinguishing feature of its democracy assistance profile in its own right. A further variant of this possible orienting principle would be to focus on societies where an increase of violent conflict is anticipated and seek to promote the development of democracy as a strategy for conflict-prevention. As a general rule conflict prevention makes good sense in terms of cost-effectiveness.

Even so, we cannot forget that examples of uncivil society are still present in Europe too (as in Ulster, Spain's Basque region, and numerous associational vehicles for sexism, racism and xenophobia). For Europe, a mutual awareness that civil society work abroad and comparable work inside Europe must go hand in hand should lubricate the potential for shared understanding and equal respect that any meaningful sense of 'partnership' outside Europe must demand. That democratisation still remains 'work in progress' in Europe (especially at the EU level) and that the transformation from uncivil to civil society is not yet complete should be turned into assets, then. Rather than just engaging in dialogue among themselves and hoping to facilitate dialogue abroad, Europeans can be openly receptive to relevant lessons they could bring back from working with their partners abroad and then applying these lessons closer to home. Both the credibility and the legitimacy of Europeans' democracy assistance will be enhanced accordingly.

A third possible approach to the issue of geographical emphasis would identify places where America's difficulties are Europe's opportunities; Europe gains by not being the United States. Where democratisation is confused with overbearing American power the outlook for democracy suffers. For instance US civil society assistance in the Middle East cannot be separated from the broader context of US relations with the Arab world. Such relations, though never close, have only grown more volatile since Washington launched the new policy of promoting democracy in the region'.⁶ That Europe's foreign policy agenda is less clear, or more confused, than the superpower's is perhaps an advantage. It may privilege European access to some corners of civil society or elicit a more favourable response in Russia, say, or China, Cuba, or Iran. Note that this is not a call to rivalry or competition with the US. Instead, it is a suggestion that support for democratic progress around the world will be optimised by allowing the US to be 'lead actor' in some places but not necessarily everywhere. The point is what works best for the cause of promoting democracy, not how to set US and Europe in opposition to one another.

So although as a general principle international co-ordination is a good idea - and the more systematic the better - there may be situations where collaboration with US democracy assistance agencies is sub-optimal for

(European) democracy promotion. In those scenarios, being distinctive means being separate (although working with other non-American partners, for example Canadians or Australians should not be so problematic). The point applies especially to places where an American presence unwittingly provokes opposition to democratic progress by strengthening the uncivil elements in society. Europe can try to compensate for that effect if constructive elements in civil society feel more comfortable engaging with Europe.

The scope for choices includes focusing on providing support for capacity building among carefully chosen groups of civil society organisations, such as through providing core funding. Alternatively, concentrating on supporting selected activities or selected projects of a larger set of organisations. This might have a very specific objective, for instance helping to build bridges and construct networks between civil society actors within and across different societies or, even more vital, encouraging constructive relations between civic associations and society on the one side and the state on the other. Whichever approach is preferred, there can be multi-year commitments or arrangements of a more ad hoc, short term nature.

A clear choice would be to concentrate on promoting a more favourable legal and political environment for civil society and hope that associational life will develop of its own volition. This means working with the authorities to devise and then honour in practice a suitably favourable framework of rights and a sympathetic regulatory regime. Ensuring that the state is open and accessible to civil society is as important as making sure that civil society organisations themselves connect with society generally: both of these achievements count for far, far more than just the multiplication of new civic associations.

Finally, Europe could choose to be conspicuously bold in respect of the kind of associations that it is prepared to 'do business with', and on whose behalf it is willing to cajole the authorities to allow political space. By way of illustration, authoritative American commentators on US democracy assistance to civil society often note its fairly narrow concentration on advocacy groups that lobby for policy change (examples include business representatives calling for neo-liberal economic

policies) – a familiar feature of both the domestic political landscape in the US and service-delivery NGOs. These partners appear to be chosen because they are politically safe. As such they are unlikely to pose a significant challenge to the overall distribution of political power or impact on the key political questions of who gets what. Yet if significant progress towards democracy is to be made in some illiberal places, then political conflict must figure among the means. That can take the form of non-violent action by popular movements, such as by mass street protests and demonstrations. Similarly European support for civil society organisation in North Africa and the Middle East has also been found to be very unadventurous by Youngs,⁷ who argues that Europe should explore the possibilities of working more with moderate Islamist groups.

So, Europe can choose to be more inclusive in its approach by extending its 'partnership' to organisations that do not all offer a comfortable mirror image of counterparts in the West and yet which may be politically quite strong and have wide or deep social roots. It means a willingness to work with action-oriented organisations and certain individuals - 'dissidents' - with explicit agendas of broad systemic political change, especially where the political regimes are only willing to allow very limited political liberalisation, not liberal democracy. Of course there are political risks in doing this. But there are also risks in offering the kind of civil society assistance that has the consequence of maintaining the status quo. Most dangerous of all - both to Europe's reputation and to democratisation – would be inconsistency: first, encourage a wider body of associational life in an energetic quest for meaningful political change, and then back off when the political temperature rises, leaving 'partners' at the mercy of political repression. Europe must not turn into 'perfidious Albion' writ large. A willingness to exert pressure on the authorities must go along with lending support to those civic actors who are prepared to 'make waves', as complementary features of a European profile. There is recent evidence of an increasing willingness to think in terms that are politically bolder in at least one notable respect - by engaging more closely with party political life.

Fitting in the parties: more choices for Europe

It is time to think about ways to connect the promotion of civil society and political parties'.⁸

Involvement in building effective and sustainable parties is a logical corollary of any serious commitment to promoting democratisation, even though it poses a delicate political challenge. The substantial international efforts already under way to make governance more effective and to enhance market operations make party strengthening an imperative, as one more leg of the table. The parties must be fit to provide effective government; and there must be parties that can hold government to account. On some definitions political parties are a component of civil society anyway; and almost all analysts see viable parties and competitive party systems as central to representative liberal democracy.

Europe has a wealth of experience in building parties, operating diverse electoral systems and demonstrating their consequences for the party system, and in experimenting with different approaches to party political funding, all of which can be put at the service of political institutional design in new democracies. Europe should claim a comparative advantage in providing comparative political advice based on the solid evidence of its own varied and substantial experience.

Historically, parties in Europe have strong links with (in some notable cases born out of) concrete associations like religious communities and labour movements. There is a temptation to act as a marriage broker between the two. But in new democracies Europe should not try to supervise arranged marriages between new parties and their associational look-alikes. Any marriage of convenience needs shared local ownership – preferably local authorship - if it is to acquire the degree of legitimacy that will sustain it in the long run. In short, Europeans should know when and where to keep a respectable distance.

The view that by ignoring political parties and focusing on civil society Europe can avoid being political and yet still be instrumental in bringing about fundamental political change is probably false on two counts. First, for civil society to make a difference it must play a political role. External support should recognise that. Supporting mainly associations

that confirm the broad contours of the political status quo is not unpolitical, but instead exerts its own political bias. Second, there are limits to what any civil society can achieve for democracy, especially democratic consolidation. Parties are central to representative democracy; a meaningful strategy for democracy must address the party deficit. Moreover the many international efforts to (re)build states, improve the effectiveness of governance and enhance markets now make support for party development that much more essential. If democracy is not to turn into personal rule, or rule by the bureaucracy/technocracy, then the parties must become fit to exercise public power. Equally there needs to be parties in opposition who can offer an alternative to those in office and who are capable of holding governments to account.

Europe can enjoy no monopoly on party work. The US looks set to significantly increase its efforts in party support. But Europe, especially in the form of the German Stiftungen, with field offices in over 100 countries, has considerable experience of working with party politicians, especially among the political opposition.⁹ More recently the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's modest funding of multi-party activities and, in particular, the cross-party work of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, have gained some attention outside Europe. Europe possesses a wealth of distinctive experience and has registered some achievements inside Europe, in at least two respects.

First, in demonstrating in Western Europe that parties genuinely of the left are entirely compatible with liberal democracy. This should convey insights into where and how some former Soviet bloc ruling parties or their successors must learn to change further if they are to make a successful transition to democracy.

Secondly, from the 1970s on there has been a growth in transnational party cooperation across Europe, first with the southern European parties and then in the former communist states, operating through the established western parties and their party foundations, party federations and the party internationals. Researched by Pridham,¹⁰ this cooperation appears to have played a not insignificant, if low-profile, part in the democratisation process at the level of party development, even though the effects have been confined mainly to the level of party elites.

Of course the pressure exerted by the EU's ability to impose political conditionalities in return for the possibility of EU accession has provided exceptional support, which might be repeated in a few more cases yet (Romania; Bulgaria; Turkey; the Balkan states). In fact Pridham found that party leaders in Central East Europe came to view the transnational party organisations as non-official channels to facilitate their lobbying for support for EU membership. Certainly Europe has been unique in its ability to pursue a democratisation agenda through (offering to) incorporate countries into the EU subject to certain political conditions – and arguably this has been its most effective contribution to democracy promotion anywhere to date. But instead of viewing that as exceptional, Europe now should profit from its experience and apply the insights into what works (and why) in locations further afield. Europe should be confident about approaching party support elsewhere.

In terms of its own experience of party politics there is no single European model; there are models from Europe, instead. This adds strength to Europe's ability to relate to the challenge of developing parties and party systems in new democracies. No single approach to party-building based on the annals of party development in Europe can realistically apply to very different countries, with their own peculiar social structures, making their own trajectory and subject to typically modern-day pressures and forces. Indeed, one of the principal findings from studying parties in southern and Central East Europe is that it is Western Europe's experience of the emergence of parties as movements of society rather than as agents of the state that increasingly looks like the exception rather than the rule.¹¹ This adds to the case for European party assistance to invest in dialogue over the values, policies and programmes relevant to the needs and aspirations of the people, as befits the full range of ideologies compatible with liberal democracy. Parties must be encouraged to (re)connect with society. This is because the trend for parties in new democracies to function largely as the vehicles for personal ambition of their leaders offers very limited potential to become institutions that can stabilise and serve democratic consolidation in the long run. Put differently, although supplies of free computers can be put to worthwhile use, and training sessions in how to make television commercials may be fashionable, they comprise no silver bullet and might be better left to democracy assisters with big budgets and a faith

in technological solutions. Once again, then, there are choices in party assistance that mirror the options about civil society enumerated in the previous section. The fact that there are several reasons why party politics is important to representative democracy means that in the presence of fragile parties or weak party systems a clear order of priorities must be established. An unusually reflective way for Europeans to tackle questions about how to proceed would be to invert the ladder of democracy assistance that has characterised much international party work to date. A familiar approach has been to focus attention on the parties. Then to see what consequences emerge at the systemic level - the party system being a function of the number and variety of parties and the relations between them. Finally, the impact on democracy might be inferred (although hard to evaluate scientifically) from examining the democracy's performance. However, Europeans could choose to turn the ladder on its head. Begin by identifying what society's pro-democratic actors want or need most from their new democracy, by first establishing why and how they value democracy. Next, assess what their idea of democracy requires most from party politics if that is to have a chance of meeting the people's expectations. In other words, arrange priorities among the several different functions that party politics are supposed to perform (but which in reality often fall short even in the 'mature democracies'). These are the functions of aggregating and articulating interests, providing political leadership, initiating policy agendas, holding government to account and, in deeply divided societies, forging the social and political integration or nation-building that are required. Having considered the priorities, it should then be possible to envisage the shape of the party system that is required and proceeding from that, to construct a picture of the kind of party(ies) that are needed and, finally, to ascertain what Europe can do to help put these building blocks in place. By proceeding in this way a European programme of support would be strategic and well focused: grounded in a democratising society's own democratic values; not wasting resources like a 'scattershot' approach; and not overburdening the partners' political absorptive capacity to receive support. It would recognise that there are limited resources available for carrying out this work and avoid some of the drawbacks of a purely 'hit and miss' approach.

Finally, the frequently observed mistrust between parties and civil society organisations within emerging democracies – fuelled in some instances by competition for recognition, resources and support from the international community - sends a siren call that is hard to resist. However, strong relations based on trust between kindred spirits in the parties and in the civic associations, and lasting partnerships between the two sectors - based on recognition of shared mutual interests - must grow organically from within the society. While there will be places where outside agents might usefully provide a dating service, that is as far as they can go. Ownership (preferably authorship) by the local actors is essential to gaining the legitimacy on which the prospects for sustainability in the long run will rest. Europe might hope to be present at the start of some strange liaisons, but wise outside actors will appreciate their own limitations; a happy outcome lies in knowing when to keep a respectable distance.

That said, the approach to civil society including parties must be coherent. That means continual dialogue between Europeans involved in assisting civil society and Europeans who are assisting party development, in the aggregate as well as at a specific country level. Information about current practice as well as past institutional memories can be shared: in principle mutual encouragement and the prevention of avoidable mistakes should follow. However, while everyone routinely acknowledges that a highly interventionist approach to assistance can be counter-productive, Europeans should note that by being alert to the importance of partnership and ownership, they may inadvertently load the dice further in favour of the relatively strong, to the detriment of the weak.

Just responding may not be enough

Partnership and ownership are the new watchwords. But local ownership should be considered more as a foundation stone of partnership than as something that can be transferred or manipulated into being through offers of partnership. However, there may be times when being proactive is essential, rather than being just responsive or reactive to demand, if the voiceless are to gain a voice, if absent stakeholders are to be mobilised into political life. The dilemma is how to reconcile the need for such benign forms of intervention with a proper rejection of interventionism as a primary mode.

'If two parties meet on equal terms to discuss and agree on a set of mutual rights and obligations on issues of mutual concern, the combined interaction of the process and the (agreed) outcome can legitimately be described as building a partnership'.¹²

Although the idea of partnership is very fashionable, like the ideas of democracy or civil society it can mean different things to different people; the reasons why it is valued are variable too. There are multiple combinations of 'partnership' – between the similar democracy agencies in different European countries, between official and non-official organisations, between the supporting and the supported entities. Different categories of partners could merit different models of partnership, so making it easier to reconcile a goal of partnerships for all. However it is good to remember that perceptions more than intentions take part in constructing the reality. Thus the EU's 'partners' in development cooperation in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions can be forgiven if they express scepticism now. The EU-ACP's Lomé Conventions were for many years very unusual: the aid-receiving governments set the objectives, and the EU was bound in to making guaranteed funding for several years ahead. That made EU cooperation special. But those days are gone. Ironically, the special relationship became a casualty of the EU's growing interest in the political, governance and human rights standards within the ACP countries and an increased willingness to introduce aid conditionalities, like other major donors. Partnership is a fragile commodity. Therein lies a cautionary tale.

Apart from scepticism there are two further critical responses to the idea of partnership. First, there is the vulgar objection to any 'softly softly' approach that says it is a recipe for being ineffectual; power (backed by lots of money) speaks louder than merely being diplomatic. Second – and no less worrying – 'partnership' might perhaps lead Europe to neglect the gaps. The democracy assistance bodies, as stakeholders in the growth of democracy as well as in the success of democracy promotion, need to be concerned about that possibility. A reactive or responsive stance towards civil society organisations and parties – one that looks to associations and parties within prospective or emerging democracies to set the agendas and make the running – leans in the direction

of ownership. But at the same time this stance can let down the most vulnerable members of society – those that are too weak, too oppressed or too easily misled to speak up, to organise and to present. This has always been a problem with international aid for pro-poor development projects and programmes directed through non-governmental channels: the ultra-poor, being unable to give effective expression to their demand, fall through the net. Something very similar can happen with respect to democracy aid and the most disempowered people, for example indigenous minority groups and women with a particular profile such as the heads of families in remote rural areas. A large number of new parties can be typical of an emerging democracy, but that does not necessarily address the point: namely, the failure of an emerging civil society or party system to reflect or represent the entire spectrum of wants, needs and aspirations in society. What Britain's Prime Minister Blair calls 'the big conversation' simply passes them by. Even established democracies in Europe struggle with this problem at home, which is accentuated by the distorting effects of economic marketisation and now the pressures associated with the new security agendas.

The inferences for a prospective European profile in democracy assistance are well rehearsed. For instance Kees Biekart,¹³ apart from usefully suggesting a step-by-step approach to civil society strengthening that corresponds to the existing level or stage of political change, emphasises the distinctive properties that membership/popular organisations can bring to civil society's democratic potential. He notes the importance of including the most vulnerable and the under-organised. Thus the promotion of civil society may legitimately benefit business lobby groups, chambers of commerce and free market think-tanks whose aims will include securing the economy from unwarranted state interference. This can be helpful to democratic political change. But such actors are neither a precondition nor a sufficient condition for democratic progress. Although in many poor countries a substantial entrepreneurial or property-owning middle class does not yet exist, civil society must help government protect society from the unbridled power of capital (including foreign capital) too. Edwards,¹⁴ another European scholar-practitioner (at the Ford Foundation), makes a similar point: civil society is neither a substitute for the state nor a slave to the market, but should serve to make both of these accountable to the people. Very similar reasoning

applies to the parties and party systems. Increasingly, it is the power of international capital and the accumulation of powers in institutions of global and regional governance that constitute a major challenge to (as well as providing some opportunities for) democracy in states. Indeed, one option for a very distinctive European profile in democracy assistance is to give special emphasis to building transnational civil society among democracies both new and old, so as to check the power that is increasingly wielded by non-state actors and supranational institutions – institutions that in the past have occasionally bolstered authoritarian rule and rulers. After all, European Union members well understand how a democratic deficit in institutions of regional governance can detract from democracy in the nation state and they recognise that supra-territorial cooperation among parties and civic actors can – must - contribute to an appropriate pro-democracy response.

The message for Europe, then, is stay focused on what should be the main rationale for promoting civil society, namely to contribute to (liberal) democracy and not simply to the more efficient operation of economic markets. After all, market enhancement at both the national and supra-national levels is being pursued by other means, in other ways and by other, powerful actors. It is for democracy promoters especially to pay attention to the interface where democracy and market potentially come into conflict and to ensure that societies recognise the trade-offs and understand where they can and must exercise a choice. On that score it seems the EU democracy assistance could do better. In Youngs'¹⁵ words, 'there is little evidence of deliberation on the kind of complex issues relating to how shifting domestic coalitions and the re-constitution of patterns of control over economic resources mediate the path-dependent relationship between economic and political reform'. Put bluntly, EU economic support and technical assistance sometimes undermines democratic objectives. The moral, then, is twofold. First, just as party work should not concentrate exclusively on opposition parties and ignore the parties in power, so approaches to civil society should not just support elements that are quite visible and their governments feel most comfortable with. Secondly, Europe could set about devising a strategy that goes beyond a responsive or demand-led mode, by taking account of the 'non-parties' and 'non-associations'. These are the absent stakeholders that even a flourishing civil society and a very vocal

party debate might neglect, intentionally or through some systemic bias and accidental design. To devise a way of remedying this situation but without at the same time acquiring a reputation for being unacceptably interventionist would make Europe a true pioneer.

Concluding observations

Civil society as the source of influence and control of representative political institutions is the heart of a liberal democracy'.¹⁶

There are many ways in which Europe could develop a distinctive profile, one that is different from current practice or from what others are doing already – in regard to relations between state, civil society and private sector. But being distinctive is not the same as being different; there is no point in being different just for the sake of it. Even the superior size that can come with large dollar budgets may have limitations if we follow the reasoning of Ernest Schumacher, an influential voice from European civil society, in *Small is Beautiful*.¹⁷ Simply substitute the word society, or politics, in his book's sub- title: *a study of economics as if people mattered*.

It is better for Europe to face up to the need to make choices and to make them consciously and self-reflectively than to aspire to do everything, everywhere. More sensible than weighing a democracy assistance profile by the sheer volume of resources awarded to it is a strategy of identifying Europe's strengths and weaknesses, its comparative advantages and disadvantages, and then pursuing a good match with what needs to be done and the pattern of worthwhile opportunities. There need be no one single European model or approach, let alone one Euro-democracy agency. Instead a European profile can be distinctive in offering alternatives and by being relatively inclusive. Europe's own wealth of experience at home forms an appropriate basis for Europeans to relate to the very varied situations in prospective and emerging new democracies and have something relevant to offer. Europe must make choices for instance, taking bolder initiatives in support of a wider range of agents of desirable political change, while being aware of constituencies that may be incapable of becoming agents of change if left to themselves. There are no ready-made answers to the question of what

should Europe do in situations where its attempts to facilitate change meet either no or a distinctly patchy response. This is an area where much more thought, and probably some very imaginative solutions, are called for. All things considered, Europe could do much worse than hold firm to the conviction that even substantial assortments of civic associations and parties do not make a democracy. That what matters more is the composition and the relations among the members - whether the civic associations make up an (inclusive) civil society and whether the parties comprise a sustainable (and fully representative) party system - and how they construct their wider relationships with state and society. And increasingly in a globalising world, it could be that civic and political relations at the transnational level must be fostered - and lead by example - if there is to be an effective response to the obstacles and threats posed to democracy from outside as well as from within individual nations and states.