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How can the international community assist democratization?

Introduction

First of all I like to thank the organizers for hosting this forum and on a topic of increasing significance because, firstly, the international context for democracy support has become much more difficult over the past years, and secondly, because the interrelationship between democracy, development and stability (defense) is more and more understood and poses enormous challenges for the way in which international assistance is provided. Since nobody has the final answers for these challenges, the reflection which this forum provides is more than welcome.

Thank you also for the opportunity to address you on a subject on which I have been working for the past 20 years. Following a career in development cooperation, I turned my professional interests towards democratic transitions by working as Secretary General of a European network that worked with the European Commission in providing assistance to the democratic movement in South Africa in the late 80s and early 90s leading to the end of apartheid and the beginning of democracy in 1994. Lessons learned during those years in *who* to support and *how* to support are proving to be still very relevant today because it involves some very simple principles. Principles which are proving difficult to adhere to in practice, and its failure requires some honest introspection among aid providers.

Following first hand experience in supporting the successful South African transition, I spent my next professional years as Programme Director at International IDEA, facilitating national dialogues for democratic consolidation and moved next to my current position at NIMD and the new EPD, recently launched to enhance the EU capacity in providing democracy support in partnership with countries and regional organizations at the other continents, including obviously, our Northern American colleagues across the Atlantic.

Democracy and development

Before dealing with the subject of my introduction proper, I like to briefly refer to some trends that provide the context in which our reflection takes place.

The *first* is the fact that the euphoria of the spread of democracy as existed at the end of the last century is over. That transitions to democracy and the consolidation of democracy are

complex processes which require long-term commitments and that it takes the willingness to take risks and to counter resistance to change.

The *second* trend is that with the changing international power balances of which the full implications - with reference to unfolding crises in the international financial markets - are yet to become clearer, new forms of authoritarian and/or populist governance have emerged that actively resist processes of democratization. The autocrats have learned their lessons on how to block democratic reforms, hence we are challenged to step up the quality of our support.

The *third* trend is the increasing awareness of the political dimension of development. The large number of failed and fragile states, of states bogged down in internal violent conflicts, has driven the point home that no sustainable development is possible unless the political system functions well and legitimately. People are not poor because they live in democracies, but they are poor because of lack of democracy.

The *fourth* trend is the awareness that whereas the vast majority of people anywhere in the world aspire to be governed democratically - as is repeatedly shown in opinion polls and demonstrated through popular movements for democracy in autocratically governed countries - that this trust erodes when democracy does not deliver social justice. Democracy has to deliver, which is another argument for the natural link between the democracy and development.

The *fifth*, and perhaps not a trend yet, is the increasing awareness that in the 'roller coaster' of new international relations and global interdependencies, the future of our own democracies may become stronger dependent on adherence to democratic principles in the rest of the world and in the conduct of international relations, or put negatively, our democracies could become under pressure because of lack of democracy elsewhere. Hence, support for democracy beyond our physical borders is directly linked to our self-interests.

All these trends require - in my view - that much more effort needs to be given to democracy support in our international assistance and to a review of how international aid is most effectively delivered to contribute to the mutual reinforcing objectives of democracy, development and stability. (The 3D approach of *Democracy, Development and Defense* as opposed to the current 3D approach of *Diplomacy, Development and Defense*).

In the remainder of this introduction I shall focus on some key gaps or missing links that I have identified in the EU international assistance and what methods and instruments can be introduced to address these. I apologize for focusing on the EU practice in particular, but trust that some of these observations have relevance for the North American practice as well. But first the gaps and missing links.

Identified perceived '*gaps*' or '*missing links*' in EU international cooperation?

1. **A more upfront, visible and strategic approach:** Despite clear inter-linkages, no coherent policy combining needed political reforms (support for democratization processes) and the economic reforms (support for achieving MDGs). In addition, the EU does not yet have a common concept of and policy on democracy support, neither an overall EU Democracy Support Consensus. This is something to work towards within the EU in the years to come and within the transatlantic cooperation with North America.

There exist significant differences within the EU about the value of democracy support and how to provide it¹. Working on greater cohesiveness and strategic approaches will enhance the overall impact of EU international assistance.

2. **Importance of political society needs recognition:** Aid policies are mostly aimed at the state and civil society while neglecting political society. Yet, it is political society that determines whether there is stability or conflict within countries with the later dominant in a sizable number of EU third partner countries. Many countries proclaim to be new democracies but behind the official façade find themselves in a grey zone with many autocratic tendencies and practices still dominant and the deepening of democracy in recession². It makes many developing countries inherently instable or fragile. Without concerted effort to strengthen the democratic quality of political systems stability and sustainability of development efforts will continue to be adversely affected.
3. **Impartiality of EU assistance:** The EU has to respect the sovereignty of its partners and can not work with all stakeholders within political society. Yet, by supporting the state and channeling the bulk of the resources through the state, the party in power - which has often annexed the state itself - is supported. Because of the prevailing 'winner-takes-all syndrome' in many young democracies, the lack of trust among the political elites (quote former president Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania) and the questionable or limited legitimacy of many governments in the absence of 'free and fair' elections, assistance is sometimes perceived as 'choosing sides' by contestants in internal political disputes.
4. **Reversed accountability:** EU assistance - like assistance by other international aid providers - tends to make receiving governments accountable to the EU and other international partners and potentially undermines the needed accountability between governments and their citizens, thereby becoming a hindrance for democratization. Budget support without a rebalancing of the powers between the executive, the legislative and judiciary and between national and local authorities, results in a de facto strengthening of the ruling elite without strengthening the accountability instruments and mechanisms between the state and its citizens.
5. **Disempowering technocratic approaches:** Although politics matters, the political challenges are often approached in a technocratic fashion under the heading of 'governance'. It results in investing in the hardware but has failed to address core political matters which often arise out of the software (lack of trust, winner-takes-all syndrome, unfinished processes of nation building, etc). The technocratic approaches and the heavy external consultancy input tend to disempower political elites who buy-in because of the financial incentives that come with accepting advice but who have neither internalized nor indigenized external advise.
6. **Balancing state, civil society, private sector and political society support:** Stable democracies require a well functioning state, a pluriform and vibrant civil society, a dynamic private sector and a legitimate and representative political society. In young democracies, the relations between the various components are often acrimonious and roles confused. The manner in which international assistance is provided may, unwillingly, contribute to the inherent instability and animosity within young, fragile democracies. It is important that assistance is inclusive and contributes to constructive

¹ See CEPS paper by Richard Youngs *Is European Democracy promotion on the wane?* May 2008

² Reference to Larry Diamond's *The Spirit of Democracy* and recent publications of Tom Carothers

relations between the essential components that make up a state. It is not so much the choice for either - or, but for and - and.

What *methods* and/or *instruments* can be used to address these perceived 'gaps' and 'missing links'?

The EU's achievement of widening democracy through the application of the Copenhagen Criteria in the accession process has been labeled the biggest success story in history. Accession is not an option, however, for most if not all of the EU third partner countries. New approaches need to be explored and implemented while adhering to the golden rule of European democracy assistance that: *while democracy can not be exported nor imported but it can be supported and Europe has a lot to offer in this regard.*

1. **Facilitation of national political reform agendas:** Poverty Strategy Papers need to be complemented by Democratic Consolidation Strategy Papers (CDSP) as produced in Ghana, for example. This is not a process to be owned by the big international development institutions but by the key political stakeholders in consultation with civil society within countries in question themselves. Democracy can only become sustainable when it is developed from within. That process can be facilitated by specialized democracy support institutions within the EU that have spectrum-wide trust of the political and civil society within EU third partners countries. The inclusive facilitation should contribute in higher levels of trust amongst the political and civil society elites and in consensus about a national agenda for political reform aimed at entrenching democracy and political stability.
2. **Ownership and analysis are key ingredients:** Appropriate and context specific democracy assistance is based on a thorough and locally owned analysis resulting in reform proposals by the national stakeholders across political divides. Specific actions should only follow from such a comprehensive process. Ad hoc interventions, such as support for parliaments (there are parliaments today with more agencies supporting them than there are members of parliament) or for electoral commission for example, without the overall picture of how the political dispensation works and power is distributed, are likely to miss their targets. Much well intended assistance is provided without a broadly supported overall national analysis of the needs to democratize the political system.
3. **Harmonization of democracy assistance:** In addition to enhancing local ownership, nationally agreed agendas offer the opportunity for the EU and other international partners to harmonize their assistance for political reform processes in the spirit of the Paris Declaration. At the same time, these national agendas provide the yardsticks for the progress that is made in implementing the agreed actions offering the opportunity to monitor the progress and to attach incentives for the good performers.
4. **Facilitation of processes on basis of long-term democracy support commitment:** Through the facilitation of inclusive processes the necessary trust is developed which feeds the commitment to pursue needed reforms. Democracy is not built overnight and, hence, needs a longer-term time perspective in the delivery of support. At the same time, the instruments to deliver the support need to operate with the required flexibility to respond to changing opportunities and challenges in a trajectory that is by definition

non-linear. A longer term investment policy would enable democratization trajectories to root and become sustainable. Critics have argued that the EIDHR has failed to have real impact, given its support to ad-hoc and project-based initiatives³. By default, 18 months to 3 years projects without any follow-up can not generate the desired impact of lasting democratic reform.

5. **Review of constitutions and electoral systems:** Spectrum-wide cooperation within political society often leads to a return to the design table of the constitution as the apex at which relations between the state and its citizens are arranged and how power is distributed within the state. Good examples today are offered by Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia and to a lesser extent Malawi, Tanzania, Bolivia and Ecuador. For the longer term stability within young democracies, successful constitutional review processes and review of the electoral systems are essential for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the state and for nation-building. These processes are facilitated by specialized institutions within the EU without a formal link with the official EU aid assistance to ensure the integrity of the processes and prevent double-agenda interventions.
6. **Mix of positive and negative measures towards hard core dictatorships:** The above applies to countries in the 'grey zone'. Countries governed by hard-core anti-democratic elites such as Zimbabwe, Burma or Belarus, for example, require a similar approach, only one that is by definition and out of necessity less inclusive while aiming at facilitating consensus among the democratic opposition and civil society in preparation of a peaceful transition to a democratic dispensation. This approach should be applied in tandem with appropriate negative measures within the EU foreign policy instruments. This balanced approach was successfully applied by the EU in the final days of apartheid and during the peaceful transition towards democracy in South Africa.
7. **Use of democracy audits:** There is scope to make the delivery of aid focused on meeting the MDGs more conducive for building democracy. 'Democracy audits' of aid flows may help to identify opportunities for improving the instrumentality of aid for advancing democracy and the practice of a democratic culture in recipient countries.

Conclusions

- Adherence to the ownership principle and recognition that democracy has to grow from within and not from without requires a thorough review of how international support for democratization processes is delivered.
- Development assistance is not the same as democracy support, yet the way development assistance is delivered may either contribute to strengthening autocratic tendencies or democratization processes. Again, a thorough review of whether or not international development assistance contributes or undermines **accountability** of governments towards their citizens has significant potential of improving delivery methods that strengthen democratization processes.
- A EU Democracy Support Consensus shall be a major step in creating a common lexicon on what democracy support is about, what instruments are available and how the

³ *No peace and prosperity without democracy and human rights*, Youngs, Bossuyt and Von Meijenfeldt, rapport written for European Parliament under auspices of NIMD, 2005.

assistance is delivered. To prepare such a future consensus an **EU expert task force**, combining governmental and non-governmental expertise in democracy support and including expertise on development cooperation, human rights and governance support to assure coherency, should be established to prepare input in the future decision-making on the proposed Democracy Support Consensus.

- The proposed EU expert task force could work in tandem with North American counterparts or, alternatively, a joint **transatlantic task force** with joined governmental and non-governmental participation could be established as outcome of the next US - EU Summit.

The Hague
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