

The Challenges and Successes of EU Democracy Promotion Policies

Written by Joshua Gray

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The European Union (EU) has a variety of methods to promote democracy beyond its borders. It is the contention of this paper that EU democracy-promotion policies are more significant in the context of a pre-accession conditionality. The success of EU democracy promotion is contingent upon the degree of bargaining power the EU possesses *vis-à-vis* 'third countries' (third countries being those which seek EU membership, and are prepared to make the necessary political and economic reforms). In the context of pre-accession conditionality the EU possesses significant bargaining power, making adherence to the norms of the Copenhagen criteria (political and economic conditions necessary for EU accession) the only viable option for states seeking accession to the EU. By contrast, democracy-promotion policies appear more limited when the 'carrot' of accession is not available to the EU, evident in the case of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). When the EU has a paucity of bargaining power (lack of 'carrot' and invariably a lack of 'stick'), the success of democracy-promotion is notably nuanced. Democracy promotion comprises all direct, non-violent activities that are intended to support democracy in third countries. First, this short paper will outline the literature on democracy promotion. The paper will then use a multiplicity of case-studies to substantiate the above contentions.

The EU's *modus operandi* for democracy-promotion is multifaceted. Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig (2011) posit that the EU uses a tripartite framework for democracy-promotion, through a process of 'linkage' (support for democrats and civil-society in third countries), leverage (political reforms through membership conditionality) and governance (pp.890-894). Some scholars contend that the EU is shifting from conditionality to a 'governance-mode' of democracy promotion in which institutional cooperation between third countries and the EU facilitates the transfer of democratic norms. Peter Kotzian et al. (2011) identify three mechanisms the EU uses for democracy promotion: 'bottom-up' methods facilitated through the European Instrument for Democracy & Human-Rights (e.g. funding civil-society organisations), agreements containing Human Rights clauses and the use of sanctions on third countries (pp.1003-1004). However, there is significant variation in the success of these mechanisms.

In the case of EU Eastern-Enlargement (EUEE) the EU used a mechanism of pre-accession conditionality. Conditionality implies a bargaining process in which the EU uses selective incentives in order to change the behaviour of political elites in a third country. These targeted political elites are assumed to have weighted the benefits they derive from democratic reform against the costs and comply with the EU's Copenhagen criteria (economic and political reform; e.g. adherence with the rules and obligations of *acquis*) if the benefits exceed the costs (Ethier, 2003, p.102). This 'top-down' or 'leverage' mechanism was significant as there were notable successes in the 1990s-2000s. For example, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia complied with the conditions stipulated in the Copenhagen criteria and Accession Partnerships, joining the EU in 2004 (Pace, 2009, p.40). The significance of conditionality was due to the bargaining power possessed by the EU. For example, EUEE states sought membership following the demise of the Soviet Union, and therefore exhibited active adherence with the Copenhagen criteria as a process to prevent authoritarian regression and to consolidate their nascent economies. For these reasons pre-accession conditionality was successful in EUEE, as accession (the 'carrot') was sought by the candidate states, whilst lack of adherence with the Copenhagen criteria meant the EU would deny EUEE states accession (the 'stick'). The policy of pre-accession conditionality was significant as it is attributable for democratic reform in EUEE states.

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For the Balkans the EU adopted a conditionality approach, similar to that of the EUEE. However, its impact was much more limited. In 1999 candidate status was offered to Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, contingent on complying with the Copenhagen criteria (Borzal, Risse, 2009, p.42). However, with the exception of Croatia (2013), none of the above states exhibited cohesion with the Copenhagen criteria. The limited success of the EU's democracy promotion policies in the Balkans was largely due to domestic conditions within the various polities compounded by major wars (Borzal, Risse, 2009, p.42). Subsequently, democracy promotion in the Balkans reached a political impasse due to the *sui generis* nature of post-conflict institutions and politics, which presented the states with significant challenges when attempting reform. Due to the turbulent domestic conditions of these states, and lack of adhesion with the Copenhagen criteria, the EU's 'stick' of denying accession was utilized. Contemporaneously, democracy promotion is facilitated in this region through the granting of candidate status, part of the Stabilisation and Association process, to *inter alia*, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia, states which have exhibited some democratic reform appertaining to the Copenhagen criteria. By contrast, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been denied candidate status due to a lack of democratic reform, remaining a 'Potential Candidate', unless further reform takes place (EC, 2014).

The EU's enlargement strategy, through the process of accession conditionality, has proved significant as a democracy promotion tool. Third countries seek accession, *inter alia*, for access to EU markets and to augment their political standing. However, accession is contingent upon adhesion to the Copenhagen criteria, which stipulates democratic reforms as a prerequisite for EU membership. In the case of Turkey, ongoing accession negotiations have failed to accede it to membership due to failure to comply with EU norms. For example, in the 35 policy areas of the Copenhagen criteria, Turkey has only implemented 14 (BBC, 2014). Conditionality is significant as a democracy-promotion tool as it propels candidate states towards democratic reform. Due to the EU's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* Turkey, in the case of non-compliance with democratic political reform, the EU can evoke punitive measures (Karakas, 2013); namely, through denying Turkey's accession, prompting Turkey's leaders to make further democratic reforms in line with the Copenhagen criteria.

Although EU policies of conditionality proved successful in the former communist Eastern Europe, democracy promotion in the South Mediterranean has been more limited. The ENP uses a legal framework asserting democratic governance, rule of law and the advancement of human rights through various assistance programmes with third countries which are ruled out from accession. This is facilitated through 'human rights clauses' that are incorporated in nearly all EU agreements with third countries as an 'essential element' (Lavenenex, Schimmelfennig, 2011, p.889). However, the degree of success of the ENP in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region has been limited. In the case of non-compliance the EU's action is restrained by a lack of bargaining power. For example, the EU has no 'stick' to enforce its conditions of cooperation and is offering no accession 'carrot' as incentive for democratic change. To compound matters further, the EU is reliant upon close cooperation with, for example, Morocco and Egypt to protect vital economic (energy resources) and security (counterterrorism) interests, which some scholars (Lavenenex, Schimmelfennig, 2011) contend is the motivating factor behind the ENP.

To refer back to the title, limitations of EU democracy promotion derive from the EU's chosen method. In the case of the ENP, the EU has no 'stick' to enforce the democratic norms stipulated in the Copenhagen criteria. Subsequently, bargaining power is gravitated in favour of the third country, evident in the limitations of democracy promotion in the MENA. Democracy-promotion policies appear, *prima facie*, more significant when implemented with an accession incentive (Ethier, 2003, p.102). In the case of pre-accession conditionality, the EU possesses significant bargaining power *vis-à-vis* candidate third countries due to the ability to deny accession (Pace, 2009, p.40). The promise of EU membership and the political and economic access for those states fortunate enough to gain accession equates to significant incentive to adhere to the Copenhagen criteria and the democratic reform this entails. In sum, the ENP as a democracy promotion policy is of limited effectiveness, whereas the policy of conditionality has a significant degree of impact. This paper posits that if the EU wishes to diffuse its democratic norms globally, and bring more states into the democratic-fold, then a democracy promotion policy of accession conditionality is the means to this 'normative' end, although further research in this field is needed.

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