

ARTICLES

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EUROPEAN INTEGRATION – DEMOCRACY PROMOTION BY THE EU IN EASTERN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

There have been a few historical turning points in modern European history. The turning points of 1648, 1815, 1919 and 1945 had great impact on the developments of Europe. The last turning point of 1991 is not an exception to such record. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the liberalization and transition of the former Eastern Europe changed the balance of power and the European landscape. This article stresses the new role of the EU as a norm-provider in determining the future outlook of Europe. Such a new role led to the big bang enlargement in May 2004, which indicated that the Cold War was sent to the historical dustbin. It also shed light on the new role of the EU as the most important hegemonic actor in European politics.

1. BACKGROUND: THE POST-COLD WAR EUROPEAN ORDER

The Cold War European order was a result of the outcome of the World War II. The historical turning point of 1945 left Europe dominated and divided by the two victory powers, that is the Soviet Union and the U.S. These two superpowers laid out their interests in a war-thorn Europe and divided the region into interest zones in what came to be known as Western and Eastern Europe. The institutionalization of the Cold war and Western and Eastern Europe happened through military and economic organizations (Keohane & Nye 1993: 1–2; Huntington 1991: 92–93). The major changes in the late 1980s and forward opened for a new post-Cold War Europe

where European interests were allowed to take form. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of the main reason for U.S. presence in Europe, implied closer ties between the former Eastern and Western Europe. The reinstitutionalization process in Europe included the dissemination of Western norms and an international socialization by Western agents. The West provided teaching or nursing activities towards the former Eastern Europe. The most powerful agents were the EU and NATO. These organizations stood out as the community-building agents and wielded powerful and persuasive influence on the region by symbolizing security, political freedom and economic prosperity. However, there were also governments and NGO's involved as western socialisation agents (Ikenberry 2001: 3–49; Schimmel-fennig 2002: 6–9).

The end of the Cold War forced European organizations to adapt to a new European order. As the former Eastern European states aimed to integrate the West and rejoin Europe, pressure escalated towards the Western organizations to meet such demands. This process consisted of guidance and assistance from Western organizations, but also of an internal reformation of these organizations to meet the external demands (Schimmel-fennig 2002: 1).

2. THE EU AS A FOREIGN POLICY-MAKER

The developments of the EU¹ have had many reinforcing factors. The idea of economic integration, political structures of federalism, geopolitics and the U.S. pressure for integration are a few examples of factors behind the project. However, the EU was primarily born out of the danger of letting nationalism get free reins in European states. In the 1950s, issues of peace and stability were related to how to tackle the political distrust and open hostility between Germany and France. The first step towards the vision of integration was the formation of a customs union by the Benelux states in 1948. The plan for a further unified Europe developed in 1950 with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and was followed up by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 planning for a common market and a customs union, creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy (EURATOM). Later on, the Single European Act (1985), the Maastricht Treaty (1993), the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and the Nice Treaty (2000) established an ever-closer Union (Winn & Lord 2001: 1–8; Nuttall 2000: 14–31; McCormick 1999: 203–209).

¹ The EU is used to describe policies in the past and the present, disregarding other abbreviations such as EEC/EC/EU.

The European economic interdependence intensified after World War II with the enforcement of the Bretton Woods system. Supervised by the hegemonic power of the U.S., the economy was developed based on free trade, non-discrimination and stable exchange. At first, the principle of market economy developed in sharp contrast to the planned economies in the east. However, in the 1990s, the EU had become the richest single group of states in the world and with far developed ties to Eastern Europe.

Besides being a European economic power, the EU has also come to be a growing political power. The developments within the EU were enhanced by the European political harmonization emerging from the shadows of the World War II. One major political change in the 1970s was the fall of fascism in the Southern Europe. As a result, the EU accepted new members in Greece, Spain and Portugal. Decades of Cold War hindered further integration in Europe. However, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe symbolized a third process of political homogenization of Europe, enhancing integration of an Eastern-Western European dimension parallel to the earlier established Northern-Southern dimension (Hettne 1997: 43–44).

The processes of economic and political integration have strengthened the EU in international affairs, (Smith 2002: 1–9). This development has opened for a debate on the EU as foreign-policy-maker. For instance, it has been argued that the EU is not a sovereign entity; the EU rather constitutes a hybrid of an international organization and a federation. Therefore, as long as the EU has not developed into a federation, there is no such thing as a EU foreign policy. The counter-argument has stressed that states are also heterogeneous with multiple of interests in the government, opposition, political parties and regional and municipal interests that all in one way or another are promoting interests. Therefore, disagreement within EU and heterogeneous interests do not undermine the role of EU as a foreign policy maker. Another argument has stressed that the EU lacks essential means to actually implement foreign policy. This debate has referred to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the lack of edge in EU foreign policy making (see discussion in Winn & Lord 2001: 15–16). There have, however, been counter-arguments stressing the unique foreign policy role of the EU as an economic and political magnet in European affairs. The EU, as a civilian power, has come to use trade, aid and diplomatic means toward third states, besides the more recent development of a military rapid reaction force.

How do we then evaluate the role of the EU in European and international affairs? Some scholars have preferred to write about the EU in terms of presence in different policy areas of the international system (Sjöstedt 1977; Hill 1993). The EU is an entity with more or less foreign

policy capability depending on what area we focus on. When we focus on democracy promotion, we know that the EU has become the main pole of attraction for most democratizing states in Eastern Europe due to the embodiment of economic and political progress. We also know that the EU is a global symbol of deep regionalism, compared to other regional arrangements in the world, and has come to have a great magnet effect beyond Europe. In short, “Peripheral countries have been centripetally attracted to the European centre, not to driven away from it” (Rosecrance 1998: 16).

3. THE EU AS A DEMOCRACY PROMOTER

The historical overview of Western democracy promotion shows asymmetrical patterns. It is the most powerful actors that have been able to dictate the conditions for democracy promotion as well as the nature of the democracy promoted. The most powerful democracy promoters have been relatively stable states with democratic governance and market economies, while the targeted states have lacked democratic patterns and been quite unstable and economic less successful. This has made the targeted states dependent on the promoter by adopting the political and economic structures and values of the promoter.

The issue of democracy promotion gained importance out of the ashes of World War II and the defeat of totalitarian systems such as Nazism and Fascism. Democracy was further promoted during the Cold War against Communism. The overall promotion of democracy was viewed as a vaccine for a better world (Whitehead 1996: 8–15). For instance, the Western post-World War II democracy promotion appeared through President Roosevelt, but also through Prime-Minister Churchill which both in the Atlantic Charter advocated “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live” (in Whitehead 1986: 5). The Truman Doctrine further expressed democratic principles as a strategy against communist expansion and which was institutionalized in the NATO Treaty of 1949 where the U.S. with Western European states committed to “safeguard the freedom founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law” (in Whitehead 1986: 5). President Carter also promoted democracy and human rights in late 1970s that included human rights issues as a guideline for U.S. foreign policy. (Whitehead 1986)².

² It is, however, important to remember that official statements did not always lead to actual implementation of such standards. Instead, in many time’s practical obstacles or other foreign policy interests undermined for the promotion of democracy (Whitehead 1986: p. 5–7, 14).

4. THE POLICY

The asymmetrical relation between the democracy promoter and the targeted state has also been obvious in European politics of the 1990s and then foremost between the EU and nonmember states. The democracy promotion by the EU has been based on the activities of the OSCE, UN and the Council of Europe. The main root has been the Universal Declaration of 1948 and the development of the International Covenants of 1966. The EU adopted the universal principles stressed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and complementary documents in International Covenant on Civil and Political and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, the first political step towards developing an official democratic criteria for better relations and potential membership were developed in the 1970s towards Southern European states (Kubicek 2003: 8). The democratic principle was stressed in article 237 of the Rome Treaty and further specified in the 1962 Birkelbach Report of the political committee of the European Parliament. The EU stressed that integration to the Union required certain political conditions. The actual test of the democratic principle occurred when Greece changed regime through the coup of 1967; this appeared when Greece had association status with EU. However, such association was frozen and EU declared that integration could not take place with dictatorial regimes. Greece came to join the EU in 1981 followed by Portugal and Spain in 1986 after years of political converging. The Southern European democratization indicated how the EU had the role of being an alternative model to the authoritarian regimes (see Pridham 1991).

The Cold War context was, however, an obstacle for the EU as democracy promoter. The EU was less developed and less coherent in its external relations, which was also an obstacle for a determined democracy promotion strategy towards Southern Europe. The impact on Eastern Europe of the 1990s has been stronger compared to towards Southern Europe of the 1970s. With the collapse of communism and the ideological victory of the West, the end of the Cold War served western ideas (Pridham 1994: 24–25). However, the end of the Cold War also challenged the EU by the growing attraction the Union received from surrounding states. Instead of dealing with internal deepening, the EU was asked to enlarge the Union and put an end to the historical detour of communism (Smith 2002: 15). The EU stood out as a political and economic giant in Europe and a symbol of Western prosperity and democratic freedom, which most of the postcommunist societies longed for. It was the EU more than the single member states that the postcommunist states were interested in improving their relations to.

The first reaction from the EU after the transformations in Eastern Europe was caution and introspection. However, as the frustration rose among the new democracies, the EU began the process of meeting the demands from the East. From 1992–1993 and forward, the EU came to promote its interests by building an expanded norm-community. It was stated that an enlargement would reintegrate Eastern Europe to Western European standards of democracy and market economy (Cremona 2003: 1–2; Smith & Timmins 1999).

In 1992, in a report to the Lisbon European Council, the Commission restated three conditions for membership to the EU; a European identity, a democratic government and protection of human rights. The Commission also stressed that any new member state had to include and implement the Community system. These conditions were discussed and officially stated in June 1993 at the Copenhagen European Council. In a time of disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the EU stated that widening of the Union had to reinforce the deepening of the Union. If each and every Member State firmly institutionalized the fundamental principles of the Union, enlargement would not endanger the norm-community. At the Copenhagen Summit by the European Council in 1993, it was officially stated that EU membership required: a) stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, b) the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union and c) the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The Maastricht Treaty of November 1st, 1993 also stressed human rights and democratic principles as main objectives of the external relations. The Maastricht Treaty of 1993 set out the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law as essential part of the official development policy. New budget lines were established and these were placed under the Initiative for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights, managed by the Commission in 1994. Over the 1990s, the EU worked hard on mainstreaming the objectives of democracy and human rights protection into all external and internal activities. For instance, in 1995 a new democracy clause was agreed upon stressing the suspension of aid and trade provisions in countries with democratic falls. This democracy clause included all third state agreements. The Commission Communication of 1995 (216) on the Inclusion of Respect for Democratic Principles and Human Rights in Agreements between the Community and Third Countries stated

A commitment to respect, promote and protect human rights and democratic principles is a key element of the European Community's relations with third countries. These issues have been gradually incorporated into the Community's activities over a period of time through a series of commitments culminating in the insertion of explicit references to human rights and democratic principles in the body of the Union Treaty (1995, (216): 1).

The Amsterdam Treaty also recognized democracy as a fundamental condition for membership by updating Article 237 of the Rome Treaty. Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty reaffirmed that the EU “is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the member States”. It was further argued in Article 7 that serious and persistent breaches of human rights by EU member states would be met by sanctions. This mechanism of sanctions was further stressed in the Treaty of Nice in December 2000.

5. THE ORGANIZATION

The responsibility for democracy promotion has been divided between the intergovernmental and supranational structures of the EU; between pillar one and pillar two. The Commission, supported by the European Parliament, has under the first pillar included democratic principles and human rights in all agreements with third states. Also, under the second pillar, the CFSP has stressed the promotion of democracy, rule of law and protection of human rights as part of the foreign policy goals of the Union. The coordination of policies, between the Council, Parliament and Commission, was highlighted in 1995 and resulted in a series of Communications from the Commission to the Council and Parliament (Sacristan-Sanchez 2001: 70–71).

The complexity of the Union has had consequences on the issue of democracy promotion. As the EU constitutes a unique regional union, it has also developed a unique structure of institutions and practices, which have had impact on the capacity to promote democracy. Over the 1990s, democratic assistance developed rapidly. However, it was obvious that there was no overreaching unit that evaluated the consequences of the given democracy aid or calculated on the amounts spent on different projects. The Commission notified the unstructured democracy assistance and decided to set up a human rights and democratisation unit. At first, however, its authority was strictly limited and few methods could be taken to organize the different projects going on within the different geographical units within the Commission itself as well as between the Commission and the Member States. In the mid 1990s there was a growing tension between the efforts made by the Commission and by the single Member States on democracy assistance where the Commission was questioned on its legal basis. However, in 1999, the Commission received legal basis through the decision to introduce two new resolutions. This was followed by an internal debate and evaluation of the lack of organization and efficiency that surrounded the work on democratic assistance.

The reconstruction of the Commission in 1999 and forward resulted in a new department that was supposed to oversee and coordinate the work on democratic assistance by receiving all authority on these issues from the geographical units. The democracy and human rights unit aimed at injecting democratic principles and human rights into the daily work done by the Commission towards regions and single states. It also aimed at increasing the transparency of the work done and to develop a coherent approach to issues of democracy and human rights.

By looking at the organizational structure of the EU under the command of the Commission, several different Directorate General have been developed aiming at expanding and guaranteeing a significant important role of the EU in world and European affairs. The Directorate-General for External Relations functions as coordinator of all external relations activities of the Commission. The main mission has been to develop coherent approaches in external activities towards non-EU members in Europe. The DG is also coordinating all other relations with North America, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia as well as with other international organizations. Such work occurs through participation in the CFSP, but also through administrating more than 120 Commission Delegations as External services. The Directorate-General for Development formulates development cooperation policies for developing countries in the world; in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific states. The main mission of the DG Development is to foster sustainable development and fighting poverty through economic integration. The Directorate-General for Enlargement has been responsible for the enlargement of the Union. This meant handling the pre-accession process, accession negotiations and supervises all bilateral relations with candidate countries. The Directorate-General for Trade has had the mission to maximize the EU and member state influence in international trade and to formulate common trade policy aiming at harmonization of world trade, progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and lowering of customs barriers. It is in the massive work done by the EU and the different DG's that the democratic criterion has become an essential mandatory clause for targeted states.

6. THE EU AND POSTCOMMUNIST STATES

The collapse of communism and the Soviet Union in the early 1990s was of historical change. In 1989, over 20 states were defined as communist regimes in the world. Five years later, only five communist regimes existed and none of these were located in Europe (China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam) (Holmes 1997: 3–4). The former communist states in Europe

had turned away from communism into something new and unexplored; what often been referred to as the status of postcommunism. The postcommunist states faced multiple transitions in democratization and marketization, as well as the development of a civil society. Overall, it is fair to say that the postcommunist states faced a more troublesome transformation than what was seen in the 1970s among the right-winged authoritarian systems (Rupnik 1999: 57–62).

The postcommunist states met many specific obstacles in their democratization process of the 1990s and forward. These were transition problems that the transit from a dictatorial system into a democratic system. These problems concerned how to reconstruct political life in accordance with democratic principles and how to deal with the excommunist structures and actors. There were also contextual problems surrounding the political life in economic depression and social inequalities as well as religious and ethnical challenges. Finally, the postcommunist systems faced more general systematic problems that also exist in consolidated democracies. Such problems included the inability to make decisions, ill economic performances and administrative over-kill (Huntington 1991: 208–210). Some prominent experts on Eastern Europe have pinned down what they find as the most challenging obstacles for the postcommunist states to overcome. They have argued that the obstacles for further democratization have been decades of authoritarian legacy, party and political fragmentation with extreme multipartyism, xenophobia and nationalism with right-wing radicalism, legal arbitrariness, weak civil society, political illegitimacy, economic crisis, uneven economic and social developments within and between states, stagnation of the physical environment, wars, ethnical heterogeneity and tension over minority rights (Berghlund, Aarebrot, Vogt & Karasimeonov 2001; Karvonen 1997; Zhelyu 1996; Rupnik 1999).

In 2001 (ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union) it was possible to see how the postcommunist states had tackled such obstacles with different outcomes. The former Soviet republics were less democratized than the former satellite states of Eastern Europe. The Freedom House Surveys of 2001 (and forward), in *Nations in Transit 2001*, showed how the gap had widened between the Eastern European states and the former Soviet Republics (except the Baltic States) in the average democratization rate. By 2001, the average democratization scores for the Eastern European countries were 2.82 (partly free) and in the former Soviet republics 5.29 (not free) (Karatenycky 2001: 15–17). In other words, the consolidation process was far more developed in Eastern Europe than in the post-Soviet territory with the exception of the Baltic States. Such democratic gap has continued to exist which was recently symbolized by the enlargement process of the EU including Eastern European states.

The end of the Cold War led to multiple EU relations in the postcommunist region. Until the 1980s, the overall relation between the communist states and Western Europe had been quite weak. The Soviet Union refused to recognize the EU and the EU was unwilling to recognize the hegemonic role of the Soviet Union in the area. A major shift in relations came with the policies by Gorbachev who stressed the importance of better relations to Western Europe and the right of each and every communist state to set up business relations to the West. This resulted in the recognition of the diplomatic status of COMECON and the EU as well as in trade relations with most of the Eastern European countries. The reaction from the EU to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was met by satisfaction. This satisfaction was obvious in the G7 summit in Paris in 1989 when Western leaders decided to implement a technical assistance program, coordinated by the EU Commission. The Phare program focused on Poland and Hungary, but was soon extended to other states. This laid out the foundation for further relations between the EU and the Eastern European countries.

7. SUCCESSFUL CONDITIONAL COOPERATION

As the most institutionalised democracy promoter in Europe, the EU has come to develop relations to all subregions and states in Europe. Based on the idea of enlarging the EU and the democratic zone in Europe, the EU has used the mechanism of conditional cooperation to influence postcommunist states. The mechanism of conditional cooperation has included membership of the EU if there is a domestic implementation of democratic governance. Those remaining states that seek another political path than the democratic one, is therefore most likely to also be excluded from the norm-community.

The enlargement of the EU in May 2004 included 10 new Member States and symbolized the success of the new member states in their internal political transformation. However, it also symbolized the success of the EU to internally adapt to a new era of European politics and spread the democratic norm-community eastward in Europe. The latest big bang enlargement should be seen as a recipe on the work done within the EU to become the main norm-provider in European politics. Such new role has been based on an internal reformation leading to an external policy within the area of democracy promotion. The role of the EU has come to be not only to consolidate an existing norm-community, but also to promote democratization eastward. The up-coming challenges for the EU exist in the less democratized subregions of former Soviet territory and on the Balkans.

These regions are severe challenges to the idea of European integration and the expansion of the EU as a norm-community. However, efforts have been taken and the 1990s has taught us that integration is possible through the democracy promoted by the EU. We can see how the EU has developed external relations to post-Soviet territory in Europe in for instance the Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova as well as to the states in the Balkans stressing the implementation of democratic governance in these regions. Based on the newly expanded EU, there is also a greater chance of future enlargement processes that include new democracies in the remaining non-EU regions of Europe.

FINAL REMARKS

This article set out the changing post-Cold War European landscape and stressed the growing importance of the EU in determining the future outlook of Europe. The collapse of the bipolar structures in international relations opened for the EU as the new norm-provider in Europe. Such new role was also facilitated by the interest from postcommunist states in Eastern Europe to join the political and economic Union and rejoin Europe. These demands from the East made the EU reorganize its external relations in policy and organization. As a consequence, the EU became an even stronger democracy promoter in European affairs. The enlargement process of May 2004, with 10 new member states, was a great symbol of the transformation done within the EU and its role as democracy promoter in the new Europe. The on-going process of European integration has taken the EU towards the task of working for future enlargements, including post-Soviet territory in the East and the Balkans in the Southeast.

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