

Between Historical Legacies and the Promise of Western Integration: Democratic Conditionality after Communism

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Post-communist democracy promotion has been most important in “borderline” countries, which had less favorable structural conditions than the East-Central European frontrunners, but where a domestic democratic constituency nevertheless existed and could benefit from Western support. External democracy promotion efforts have ranged from “soft” diplomatic pressure to economic and military sanctions and have acted through a variety of channels: (1) promotion of democratic attitudes among citizens yearning for Western integration, (2) political incentives for elites (in government and in the opposition), (3) domestic power balance shifts in favor of democratic politicians, and (4) promotion of better democratic governance through incentives for public administration reform. The most effective approach to democracy promotion thus far, however, has been the combination of political conditionality with significant political/economic incentives, best exemplified by the European integration process. Furthermore, the success of any strategy hinges on its fit with the geopolitical and domestic environment of the country in question. In particular, external actors must be more sensitive to the national sovereignty implications of such interventions, which can be easily exploited by domestic antidemocratic actors to undermine democracy promotion efforts.

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I. Political conditionality and historical legacies

Post-communist democratization has been faster and less prone to reversals in the countries where for geographic, historical, cultural, and economic reasons the promise of deep Western integration (especially European Union and NATO membership) was the strongest at the outset of the transition. Meanwhile, in countries where deep integration prospects were remote or nonexistent, democratic progress has been much slower and inconsistent

despite a broad array of Western pressures (ranging from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] to the World Bank and international NGOs). However, the countries with the best a priori odds of EU and NATO membership were not only geographically and culturally closer to the West but also benefited from a host of much more favorable structural conditions, such as higher levels of modernization and economic development, fewer state and nation-building challenges, more developed civil societies, and greater historical exposure to democratic politics. As a consequence, it is highly likely that Poland or the Czech Republic would have democratized fairly successfully even in the absence of European integration incentives, whereas the Central Asian former Soviet republics would have probably faced an uphill democratization battle even in the presence of a credible deep integration promise. Therefore, this article focuses on the analytically and practically most interesting “borderline” countries, whose mixed initial democratization prospects were most likely to be affected by well-targeted external conditionality by producing a virtuous cycle of mutually reinforcing political reforms and Western integration. The second part of the article analyzes a few of the mechanisms through which Western interventions promoted the development of democracy in the Balkans (especially Romania and Bulgaria) as well as a few other post-communist countries such as Slovakia and Moldova. The third part of the article identifies a number of likely drawbacks of current policies and suggests some possible policy solutions for addressing these problems in future democracy promotion efforts, particularly in the western Balkans. The conclusion summarizes the policy recommendations based on the experience of post-communist democracy promotion to date.

II. Mechanisms and caveats

1. Creating democratic citizens

At the mass level, the powerful desire to adopt Western living standards created a strong association between democracy/capitalism and high living standards, thereby leading to a willingness

to put up with temporary costs/unpopular political measures (such as civil rights for various minorities) to achieve the golden goal of Western integration. These associations were further reinforced by domestic political elites eager to justify unpopular economic and political measures as a necessary evil imposed from the outside to minimize the short-term political consequences of these reforms. In the short run, this approach has facilitated the much faster adoption of Western standards in terms of formal rights and institutions than would have been the case in the absence of external incentives. These incentives are particularly important in the context of ethnically diverse countries in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, where the persistence of ethnic intolerance at the individual level¹ can be exploited by (usually antidemocratic) political entrepreneurs and in more extreme cases can lead to political violence, which in the case of the former Yugoslavia has significantly delayed democratization. In such environments, the prospect of European integration can be crucial not only due to the material benefits citizens expect in return for peaceful ethnic coexistence but also because the prospect of joining a “Europe of regions” reduces the centrality of the nation-state and thereby changes the zero-sum nature of ethnic politics in diverse societies.

2. Democracy incentives for post-communist elites

The political implications of the powerful material and psychological benefits of Western integration and support are arguably even more important at the elite level than for the average citizen. The vast majority of ex-communist countries embarked on the transition path from the unenviable position of weak economies, underdeveloped political institutions, and uncertain international standing in the aftermath of the conflict-ridden breakup of the region’s former multinational states. Their political leaders—whether anticommunist dissidents or former communist bureaucrats—had limited experience with designing and running democratic institutions and, therefore, had to rely heavily on Western institutional models and policy advice. Even though in the early post-communist debates some politicians

had called for original institutional solutions rooted in their respective countries' domestic realities,² it became clear rather quickly that the post-cold war international political environment placed rather tight constraints on what would qualify as genuine democratic institutions. As a consequence, the transition countries—and implicitly their political leaders—were increasingly “graded” on the basis of their convergence with Western political institutions. Because these “grades” largely determined a country's access to foreign aid, favorable terms of trade, and foreign loans, post-communist leaders faced strong economic incentives to comply with Western democratic standards. Democratic compliance also played an important role in obtaining membership in various international organizations (ranging from the Council of Europe to NATO) as well as a more general international respectability for which many of the region's newly established states were yearning. In countries whose sovereignty was threatened by powerful and potentially hostile neighbors, the international legitimacy associated with democratic compliance took on an important geopolitical dimension because it promised—and at least partially delivered—Western support in the case of outside threats. Democracy as geopolitical calculus may help explain the remarkably moderate minority policies of Macedonia and Moldova,³ as well as Mongolia's outlier democracy in a region dominated by authoritarian regimes. Moreover, obtaining a seal of approval from various Western institutions also represented an important source of domestic legitimacy, especially in countries like Romania and Bulgaria, where NATO and the European Union were consistently perceived by the population as much more trustworthy than domestic political institutions.

Even a brief survey of the results of Western democratic “persuasion” efforts reveals the great potential of this incentive-based strategy. Thus, the democratization process in Romania, which had started rather inauspiciously with ethnic clashes in March 1990 and government-incited miners' raids against prodemocracy students in June 1990, was undoubtedly helped along by the fact that President Iliescu and other ex-communist leaders experienced a gradual “democratic conversion” in response to the clear incentives of Euro-Atlantic integration. This Europeanization

process is also visible in Romania's improving ethnic relations climate, underlined by the choice of Iliescu's party (Social Democratic Party; PSD) of the Hungarian ethnic minority party (Hungarian Democratic Union; UDMR) as a coalition partner for the 2000 to 2004 government, a decision that stood in marked contrast to the reliance on a motley crew of nationalists and Communists from 1992 to 1996. Similarly, Western pressures and European integration incentives have helped moderate the authoritarian tendencies of Croatia's Tudjman and Slovakia's Meciar, as well as the Soviet nostalgia of the Moldovan Communists and the national-populist temptations of the former Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban.⁴ The role of Western conditionality becomes even clearer once we focus on specific policy areas: thus, minority rights for Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia were a cause of serious contention in the domestic politics of the two countries and in their bilateral relations with Hungary in the early to mid-1990s. In an effort to preempt a Yugoslav-style escalation of these tensions, Western political conditionality during this period exerted significant pressures on the Meciar and Iliescu governments to comply with international norms on minority rights, which arguably tempered their nationalist impulses even if it did not succeed in eliminating them altogether.⁵ While such pressures were occasionally met with rhetorical charges about Western threats to national sovereignty and territorial integrity, these charges, along with regional tensions, were deflated by parallel Western pressures on the Hungarian government to recognize existing borders and to moderate its claims on behalf of the Hungarian diasporas in neighboring countries. Similarly, Western pressures have been instrumental in promoting policy changes on a variety of issues, which governments would have otherwise been reluctant to tackle, such as the protection of Roma civil rights throughout the region, the fight against organized crime in Bulgaria, or the extradition of war criminals by Croatia and Serbia. However, it should be noted that the most dramatic policy reversals have occurred in the aftermath of a change in government, not only because the new elites were often more eager to embrace Western political norms (e.g., in Romania in 1996, Bulgaria in 1997, Slovakia in 1998, and Croatia in 2000) but also

because electoral defeats often precipitated internal reforms among the former governing parties and thereby ensured that when these parties eventually returned to power, their political agendas were more compatible with the tenets of Western liberal democracy. Since peaceful electoral change presupposes at least a minimal degree of prior democracy, such democratic “conversions” are much less likely to occur in the more hard-line authoritarian countries of the former Soviet Union.

3. Changing the domestic power balance

In addition to changing the preferences of less democratically committed elite segments, Western democracy promotion can affect the power balance between authoritarian regimes and democratic challengers in several significant ways.⁶ First, in poor countries and during the early stages of democratization, outside financial and logistical support for prodemocracy civil society organizations and opposition parties is important for helping them overcome their pronounced economic resources deficit compared to the incumbents, since the latter were usually capable of mobilizing significant economic and political support through their control of the state apparatus and state-owned enterprises. Moreover, Western initiatives to promote independent media or provide alternative sources of information have played an important role in mitigating the often heavy-handed government control of official media outlets. Such support arguably played an important role in strengthening democratic challengers in the recent electoral revolutions (e.g., Serbia 1999 to 2000, Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2004)⁷ and is likely to continue to be necessary in the region’s democratic laggards ranging from Belarus to Central Asia.

The second major channel through which democratic conditionality can affect the domestic power balance is by creating an explicit link between the policies pursued by rival political actors and the prospects of Western aid and/or integration. As long as the signals sent by international actors are sufficiently clear and consistent, prodemocracy forces stand to benefit significantly from the greater political legitimacy associated with this international

endorsement. Moreover, in countries with fragmented opposition forces such as Slovakia, Croatia, and Romania, the overarching goal of European integration can provide the much-needed “glue” to hold together the otherwise heterogeneous interests of political forces opposing the incumbent government, especially when international actors express clear preferences for a united opposition. A telling example in this sense is the case of Slovakia, where, prior to the 1998 and 2002 parliamentary elections, a variety of Western officials (ranging from the U.S. State Department to NATO and the European Union) indicated that the country’s Western integration prospects would be affected by the election outcome. While these statements—many of which were made by diplomats who declined to be named—generally stopped short of outright endorsements of the opposition parties, their prominent press coverage and their eager embrace by the opposition campaigns undoubtedly sent a clear message to the Slovak electorate about the likely negative consequences for Slovakia’s Western integration prospects of a renewed mandate for the former prime minister, Vladimir Meciar. Since a large majority of Slovak voters were in favor of EU integration prior to both elections, it is highly likely that the implicit Western endorsement gave the prodemocracy forces an important electoral boost and—given the fairly small victory margins in the two elections—may have even decided the election in favor of the reformers. As such, Slovakia’s substantial democratic consolidation process in the past seven years can be credited at least in part to Western political signals at critical electoral junctures. Similar concerns about the international implications of election outcomes also help explain the weak electoral support in the second-round presidential elections in Romania for Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the extreme-right candidate whose surprisingly strong first-round showing had raised serious concerns in Western media and policy circles.

When diplomatic pressures and other “soft” democracy promotion efforts fail to produce the desired results, outside actors can resort to more extreme economic and/or military sanctions. In economic terms, governments who find themselves cut off from foreign aid and face trade or investment embargoes are likely to

experience a substantial decline in the material resources required to buy popular acquiescence and the support of crucial segments of the state apparatus. An even faster and more straightforward method of promoting democratization and human rights is through direct military interventions, ranging from all-out efforts to overthrow authoritarian governments (as in Afghanistan and Iraq) to more targeted campaigns to end egregious human rights violations (e.g., in Kosovo) or to end civil wars and promote post-conflict democracy and reconstruction (e.g., Bosnia).

4. Promoting institutional reforms for better democratic governance

For obvious reasons, most of the efforts (especially through the OSCE) in the realm of democracy promotion have been focused on ensuring free and fair elections and combating serious violations of basic rights and freedoms. Nonetheless, fledgling democracies require more than free elections and basic rights to function properly, namely, a set of state institutions that translate popular policy preferences (as reflected in electoral outcomes) into actual policies with reasonable expedience and accuracy. To fulfill this requirement, transition countries have to engage in a long and difficult process of administrative reforms to transform their communist-era bureaucracies (designed for hierarchical control by the Communist Party) into a modern public administration apparatus geared toward democratic responsiveness and professionalism. Needless to say, this process has been fraught with difficulties, leading to widespread corruption and poor governance in most ex-communist countries, especially in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. While popular discontent with post-communist governance may have contributed to the recent electoral revolutions in Georgia and the Ukraine, it has also undermined the popularity of many democratic governments and, implicitly, popular support for democracy.

So far, the most important impetus for improved democratic governance has come from the EU accession process, which has required candidate countries to adopt a series of judicial reforms,

anticorruption measures, and higher public administration standards.⁸ To the extent that this complicated process is successful—and the Balkan countries, in particular, still have a long way to go—the process of European integration will have made a significant and lasting contribution not only to the quality of East European democracy but also to democratic consolidation. Even though international financial institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), have also increasingly emphasized the importance of better governance,⁹ progress with public administration reform has been significantly slower in countries without tangible European integration prospects, since their leaders had much weaker incentives to adopt reforms that were usually at odds with the immediate economic and political self-interest.

II. Caveats and possible fixes

Despite their important achievements in the past sixteen years, Western democracy promotion efforts have also suffered from a number of problems, which will be briefly discussed in this section. An important drawback of an incentive-based approach to democratization is that democracy (or at least some of its components, such as minority rights) may become devalued in the eyes of both elites and citizens because its tenets are adopted not as an end but as a means to an end. As a consequence, the actual popular acceptance of democratic norms is likely to lag behind the development of formal institutions and thereby undermine their proper functioning. Even more important, it is uncertain whether the instrumental democratic conversion of many post-communist politicians can really breed genuine and stable democracy that would persist even in the absence of continuous external monitoring. In a sense, this becomes a question of whether the early hopes of the transitology literature are fulfilled, namely, whether even by merely going along with democratic procedures political actors would become accustomed to them and would eventually internalize democratic norms.¹⁰ Even if we believe that it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks, however, one can hope that as long as these incentives do not disappear

overnight, the old guard will gradually be replaced by a new generation of post-communist politicians with a firmer commitment to democratic norms, as seems to have been the case with the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) after Tudjman's death, or more recently in the Romanian PSD.

Despite its short-term expedience, the long-term implications of the link between democracy and prosperity are likely to be problematic in most ex-communist countries. Among the countries with modest integration progress and (generally) poor economic performance, large parts of the population continue to experience serious economic deprivation and are likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future, thereby undermining the future credibility of "democratic prosperity" promises. Along with the continued poor governance in large parts of the ex-communist bloc, these frustrations help explain the widespread popular dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the region, which in 2004 ranged from 55 percent in Slovenia to 83 percent in Poland even among the first-tier EU candidate countries.¹¹ The same disenchantment with post-communist governance is also responsible for the rise in recent elections across Eastern Europe of a broad range of antisystemic political parties, whose main common denominator is their rejection of the mainstream elites in charge of the first decade of transition.¹²

Ironically, the effectiveness of conditionality may also decline in the more successful transition countries once they have achieved the long-desired goal of Western integration. In economic terms, any absolute gains in living standards are likely to be overshadowed by the frustrations inherent in the increasingly salient comparison to Western living standards. Politically, once an applicant country joins the European Union, the scope of future conditionality is substantially reduced despite the possibility of diplomatic pressures by other EU members (as happened with Austria following Haider's electoral victory). Since EU membership revocation is highly unlikely, domestic leaders may take the opportunity to "compensate" for past acquiescence to Western conditionality, a possibility confirmed by the electoral victories of populist parties and candidates in the recent Polish and Slovak elections.

Another important caveat about the effectiveness of democratic conditionality at the mass level is the need to avoid the perception that the West applies double standards in its political demands to ex-communist and other developing countries. This perception comes from two main sources: first, as illustrated by the recent violent street protests in France against the widespread anti-immigrant discrimination, and by the controversy about the use of torture in secret detention centers by the U.S. military, Western countries often do not live up to the democratic standards they expect of new democracies.¹³ Second, democratic standards have not been applied evenly and consistently across different countries: thus, the NATO intervention in Kosovo lost much of its legitimacy among citizens of neighboring countries because of the glaring contrast to Western tolerance of similar (or worse) treatment of Chechen autonomy claims by the Russian government. In this respect, one of the crucial questions is the fate of Turkey's EU application, which in many respects represents a litmus test about whether Western integration is driven primarily by a norm-based commitment to liberalism¹⁴ or rather by narrower economic and geopolitical interests parading as democratic idealism. Nor are the future prospects in this respect particularly promising, since policy consistency is likely to be undermined by the recent foreign policy tensions between the United States and the European Union, as well as by the geopolitical concerns related to the Middle Eastern conflict, which may override democratic objectives in parts of the former Soviet Union.¹⁵

In the former Soviet republics the politics of democracy promotion are closely intertwined with strategic concerns related to competing Western and Russian geopolitical interests in the region. Russia's active regional policy in its former "imperial backyard" undermines international efforts to foster democracy in two important ways: first, Russia has intervened directly in the domestic politics of some of its neighbors, either by supporting ethnic separatists to gain leverage over potentially "rebellious" governments (as in Georgia and Moldova) or by supporting pro-Russian political forces, as in the Ukrainian elections of 2004. Second, Russia has effectively leveraged the fuel dependence of several of its neighbors to counter attempts at closer Western ties, which

would have arguably resulted in greater democratization. At the same time, as the example of the Belarusian President Lukashenka suggests, the resulting bipolar power structure in the Russian backyard imposes much lower opportunity costs on authoritarian leaders who reject Western political conditionality. While the geographic reach of such bipolarity has so far been fairly restricted—Russia backed off from similar attempts in Slovakia and Yugoslavia in the mid- to late 1990s—this equilibrium could be affected by the changing power balance between the former cold war rivals, in the context in which Russia's political stability and oil-driven economic recovery coincide with increasing ideological and security disagreements between the United States and Western Europe.

While outside efforts to tilt the domestic power balance in favor of democratic politicians have played an important role in a number of countries, such interventions—especially when they involve financial support from official sources—have to be carefully “calibrated” to avoid having the domestic opposition labeled as “agents of foreign powers,” which may undermine the domestic legitimacy of the intended beneficiaries and can provide authoritarian governments with an excuse for repressive measures. Given the increasingly widespread view—reinforced by the rhetoric changes surrounding the U.S intervention in Iraq—that democracy promotion merely provides cover for the pursuit of geopolitical interests, such caution is particularly important in countries, such as Russia or China, where for historical reasons the West is perceived at least in part as a geopolitical threat. Under such circumstances, support from the nongovernmental sector and from other ex-communist countries—such as the Serbian “revolution consultants” from Otpor in Georgia and Ukraine—may provide a more effective venue for supporting antiauthoritarian forces.

Other types of outside interventions into the domestic politics of transition countries also have a number of drawbacks and limitations. For example, economic sanctions often hurt the average citizen to a much greater extent than the authoritarian leaders and give the latter the opportunity to blame the economic hardship on the sanctions rather than domestic policy mistakes. Moreover, the effectiveness of economic sanctions is undermined by serious

enforcement difficulties because several great powers (such as China and increasingly Russia) do not share the West's democracy concerns and have weak incentives to go along with the sanctions. As the experience of the Yugoslav embargo shows, economic sanctions also have potentially deleterious long-term effects for the rule of law not only in the target country but also in neighboring countries by creating the ideal conditions for the development of "sanction-busting" organized crime networks, which can interfere with the normal functioning of democracies long after the sanctions have been lifted.¹⁶

Military interventions and thinly veiled official threats about the consequences of the "wrong" domestic political outcomes run the risk of providing an unwitting popularity boost for authoritarian leaders. As the example of Milosevic's surprising popularity boost during the Kosovo crisis suggests, such leaders may benefit at least in the short run from the sovereignty threats inherent in external interventions, especially when these threats are reinforced by the almost inevitable human costs of military actions. However, even if there is widespread popular support for a Western military presence in a given country—as was the case in Bosnia in 1995 following the civil war—any attempt to build democracy from outside and above are likely to be fraught with substantial difficulties, illustrated by the Bosnian experience of the last decade. Even though the country has made significant progress under the Office of the High Representative (OHR) administration in controlling political violence and fostering peaceful political competition through a series of free elections, outside observers are increasingly concerned about the tension between international efforts to marginalize extremist and/or corrupt politicians and the freedom of Bosnian citizens to elect and be ruled by the political leaders of their choice.¹⁷

A brief comparison of the Serbian case, on one hand, and the experiences of Slovakia and Romania, on the other, reveals the crucial importance of two additional components of such political maneuvers, namely, the popular views about the legitimacy of Western actors and about the specific policy change pursued in a given intervention. Thus, while many Serbs were wary of the role played by the West in the breakup of the former Yugoslavia

and were further opposed to the specific question of increased autonomy for Kosovo Albanians, Slovak and Romanian voters had a much more positive view of NATO and the European Union and arguably felt less threatened by the more moderate ethnic claims of the Hungarian minority, which was one of the cornerstones of the conflictual relationship between their governments and the West. In countries with reasonably free and fair elections, outside attempts to affect internal political outcomes undermine popular sovereignty and thereby create a tension between democratic substance and procedure. While such interventions may be necessary to ensure respect for basic liberal democratic norms (such as civil rights for minorities) they are nevertheless a two-edged sword because they allow the opponents of liberalism to either appropriate the democracy discourse¹⁸ by claiming to speak for the popular will or to paint democratic conditionality as a hypocritical, thinly veiled ideological cover-up for the pursuit of Western economic and geopolitical interests. This problem is particularly salient in the former communist countries, where for decades Soviet political interests had been pursued in the name of proletarian internationalism and people's democracy.¹⁹

Another potentially important trade-off exists between attempts to shift the domestic power balance away from nondemocratic politicians and the leverage of the West to convince such politicians to change their stance on specific policy issues. In particular, it matters greatly whether Western pressures are focused on specific issues violating democratic principles (such as a problematic electoral law) or whether they target individual politicians or political parties. If the latter is true, as in the case of Milosevic and Lukashenka, then these leaders may conclude that any political action short of resigning would be unlikely to placate their Western critics. The resulting siege mentality is likely to produce even more confrontational rhetoric and—at least in the short run—lead to an intensified political repression that would have been the case in the absence of such pressures. A related danger is that in the event of a sudden decline in popular support for Western integration, blacklisted politicians such as Slovakia's Meciar and Romania's Tudor would become the obvious beneficiaries of

protest votes even if the disaffected electorate does not necessarily share their nationalist and authoritarian views.

One final—and frequently ignored—lesson for anyone interested in engaging in any sort of outside policy advice and conditionality is probably best summarized in a quote from Max Weber almost a century ago: “A nation forgives if its interests have been damaged, but no nation forgives if its honor has been offended, especially by a bigoted self-righteousness.”²⁰ While the occasional frustration of Western diplomats and specialists at the recalcitrance of their East European counterparts is understandable, delivering contemptuous “lectures” to post-communist political leaders is much more likely to create a counterproductive rhetorical backlash than to achieve the desired policy objectives.²¹

III. Policy implications

The key problem with trying to extrapolate from the experience of EU democracy promotion among the East European integration frontrunners to the other ex-communist countries is that the next democracy wave would have to include structurally much more disadvantaged countries (such as the Ukraine, Albania, or Georgia) in the context of a less welcoming international political climate than in the early post-cold war era. Therefore, it is unlikely that the powerful incentive structure provided by EU integration in the case of first- and second-wave candidates²² can be fully replicated for countries without deep integration prospects in the foreseeable future. Under such circumstances, it is unlikely that the current “institutional export” strategy can be replicated in other countries of the region with similar success. Even if the weaker economic and political incentives for compliance would persuade domestic actors to adopt Western institutional models, these countries’ socioeconomic, cultural, and political development differ greatly from Western Europe, therefore making it less likely that such institutional transplants would actually produce the expected results.²³ Instead, such countries could end up with façade democracies where under a thin veneer of representative institutions the everyday business of governance proceeds largely along the lines of traditional clientelist politics.

Since democratization-through-adoption does not appear to be a realistic option, the best alternative is to focus on helping transition countries develop the preconditions for functioning “homegrown” democracies, such as a viable set of prodemocracy political and civic organizations and a functioning state apparatus. Therefore, Western democracy promotion should shift to a longer-term approach consisting of a few crucial elements. First, along the lines of the 2004 Ukrainian elections, the international community should *provide financial, logistical, and moral support for domestic democratic forces*. The inevitable geopolitical tensions inherent in such interventions can be reduced when outside support originates in the nongovernmental sector, particularly if it is billed as civil society promotion rather than as a partisan political mission.

The aftermath of the recent second-generation revolutions in the former Soviet bloc offers an important—and unfortunately frequently overlooked—cautionary reminder to temper the arguably excessive democratic optimism that often follows such remarkable episodes of popular mobilization. While undoubtedly effective in overthrowing corrupt and authoritarian governments, these revolutions (and the considerable domestic and international organizational efforts behind them) represent only a first—and by no means sufficient—step toward the establishment of genuine democracy. Nor is it certain that the erstwhile opponents of corrupt and abusive regimes will live up to their political promises once they are in power, as illustrated by the disappointing aftermath of the Kyrgyz revolution and the growing evidence of corruption and clientelism in Yushchenko’s Ukraine.²⁴ Therefore, Western democracy promotion should *target a diversified network of prodemocracy civil society organizations* rather than focusing on a small number of political opposition parties. While such an approach may produce fewer tangible political results in the short term, it is probably the only viable long-term approach for building the domestic political basis for democratic governance in countries with historical legacies that are unfavorable to homegrown democracy.

Civil society promotion efforts should arguably be complemented by *civic education projects* (potentially through the

public education system) to foster greater citizen involvement in public life. Despite some progress, ex-communist countries still have a long way to go in overcoming the anomic legacies of communism at the level of individual citizens. This lack of public virtues and civic participation persists in much of the region and undermines the effectiveness of largely Western-funded NGOs in the past fifteen years.

Fourth, the West should *help with the development of greater state capacity* to ensure that the political preferences of the population are not only reflected in the composition of parliament but also translated into actual policy outcomes. In states (such as Albania, Georgia, or Moldova) that are too weak to provide at least a minimum of public services throughout their territory, popular support for democracy is likely to erode as citizens are disenchanting with the results of democratic governance. Moreover, even in nominally democratic countries, citizens living in the often extensive areas outside the reach of the central government are likely to experience corrupt and authoritarian local governance practices, which bear little resemblance to the democratic norms that prevail at the national level. In this respect, the most sustained international state-building effort to date—post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina—has produced some real achievements in improving governance²⁵ but also serves as a reminder of the significant resources and long-term commitment required for the successful completion of this complicated task.

Finally, the most difficult challenge for a successful continuation of democracy promotion in the ex-communist countries is the *design of an international institutional architecture* that can *provide a coherent set of incentives for democratic reforms* even in the absence of near-term European integration prospects. To do so, the leaders of the advanced industrialized countries have to coordinate their bilateral development and aid programs and use their influence over regional and international organizations (e.g., the EBRD, the IMF, the World Bank) to ensure that political leaders in transition countries receive clear and consistent signals about internationally acceptable norms of governance and political freedoms and that compliance with these standards is rewarded by sufficient economic and political benefits. To achieve this goal,

Western countries will have to take a combination of several measures, including (1) an *increase in merit-based development funds*; (2) the use of meaningful intermediate Western integration benefits, such as security guarantees (possibly through NATO membership) and a graded system of *trade and labor mobility concessions* to reward compliance with political and economic reform criteria; (3) a more effective division of labor between various international organizations to minimize conflicting advice and duplication of efforts; (4) a reduction of geopolitical interference with democratic conditionality to avoid double standards and mixed signals; and (5) a sustained effort (backed by economic and political incentives) to get Russia back on a democratic trajectory, since without a reasonably democratic Russia, democracy promotion efforts in the former Soviet Union will continue to be severely undermined.

Based on the evidence of the post-communist political transformations of the past sixteen years, this article has laid out the various mechanisms through which external incentives and interventions have made a significant contribution to democratization in the region. This contribution has been particularly strong in “intermediate” countries (such as Romania and Bulgaria) whose initial conditions were less conducive to democracy than in their East-Central European neighbors but where the powerful economic and political incentives of European integration strengthened the democratic opposition and moderated the authoritarian impulses of the former communists. However, the success of this institutional export strategy is unlikely to be replicated in the next wave of ex-communist democratizers, which are burdened by even more difficult legacies and have weaker prospects of deep Western integration and, therefore, weaker incentives to comply. While international support for domestic opposition forces may help them achieve the laudable goal of overthrowing authoritarian rulers, such short-term achievements cannot substitute for a long-term strategy of supporting civil society and building state capacity without which democratic governance in poor countries is unlikely to succeed in the long run. Of course, such an ambitious strategy would require a greater political and economic commitment on behalf of advanced

industrial democracies but one whose long-term benefits are likely to greatly outweigh its near-term costs.

Notes

1. For example, according to recent surveys by the author, the majority of Romanians (54 percent) and Bulgarians (67 percent) are opposed to having Roma neighbors, and almost three-quarters of Bulgarians were opposed to daily Turkish language programs on Bulgarian national TV.
2. Of course, such calls for “original democracies”—issued among others by Romania’s first president, Ion Iliescu, and more recently by Russia’s Vladimir Putin—often include elements that are hard to reconcile with genuine political competition and freedom.
3. See Ute Gabanyi, “Moldova im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rußland, Rumänien und der Ukraine,” *Bericht des BIÖst*, 16 November 1996.
4. The Orban government backed away from a plan to issue identity cards and provide extensive rights to ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and Romania, after the European Union issued a warning in this respect.
5. For a more detailed account, see Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 151-59.
6. Vachudova, in *ibid.*, 161-79, illustrates this mechanism with respect to EU integration incentives in Eastern Europe.
7. See Mark R. Beissinger, “Promoting Democracy: Is Exporting Revolution a Constructive Strategy?” *Dissent*, Winter 2006, 84-89.
8. See Antoaneta Dimitrova, “Enlargement, Institution-Building and the European Union’s Administrative Capacity Requirement,” *West European Politics* 25:4(2002): 171-90.
9. See, for example, Dani Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Pablo Zoido-Lobaton, “Governance Matters” (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper no. 2196, Washington, D.C., 1998).
10. See, for example, Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); and Guillermo A. O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
11. The figures refer to the proportion of respondents who reported being “not at all satisfied” or “not very satisfied” according to the 2004 Candidate Countries Eurobarometer surveys.
12. See Grigore Pop-Eleches, “Transition Fatigue: The Changing Fortunes of Post-Communist Anti-Establishment Parties” (Presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, December 2004).
13. For a similar argument regarding the double standards of existing EU members regarding minority policies, see Andrew Moravcsik and Milada Vachudova, “National Interests, State Power, and EU Enlargement,” *East European Politics and Societies* 17:1(2003): 42-57.
14. Frank Schimmelfennig “The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union,” *International Organization* 55:1(Winter 2001): 47-80.
15. For example, the Afghan crisis made several authoritarian Central Asian countries into strategic U.S. allies in the war on terror (see Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal, “New Friends, New Fears in Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 82:2[March/April 2002]: 61-70), whereas the looming Iran crisis may do the same for Azerbaijan.
16. For an elaboration of this argument, see Peter Andreas, “Criminalizing Consequences of Sanctions: Embargo Busting and Its Legacy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (June 2005): 335-60.
17. See David Chandler, “Bosnia: The Democracy Paradox,” *Current History* 100 (March 2001): 14-19.
18. For example, following a statement by NATO Ambassador Nicholas Burns that a Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) victory in the 2002 elections could endanger Slovakia’s efforts to join NATO, Meciar promptly replied that “I am glad our guest reminded us of the

- rules of democracy, and I would like to ask him to respect those rules himself” (RFE/RL Newline, vol. 6, no. 42, pt. II, March, 2002).
19. After the U.S. ambassador to Slovakia, Ralph Johnson, had criticized the Slovak electoral law prior to the 1998 elections, Meciar compared Johnson to Stepan Chervonenko, the Soviet ambassador to Prague at the time of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact (CTK National News Wire, 1 July 1998).
 20. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 117.
 21. A telling example in this respect comes from a Slovakian MP during the Meciar government, who lamented that “we are advised by all as jerks, enlightened as fools, taught as illiterates, judged as recidivists, scolded as delinquents, given tasks as the retarded, frightened, threatened as some criminals” (cited in Alexander Duleba, “Democratic Consolidation and the Conflict over Slovakian International Alignment,” *Columbia International Affairs Online* [1997]).
 22. For the ongoing academic debates about the relative effectiveness of different aspects of European Union conditionality, see for example, Vachudova, *Europe Undivided*; Judith Kelley, “International Actors on the Domestic Scene: Membership Conditionality and Socialization by International Institutions,” *International Organization* 58:4(2004): 425-57; Wade Jacoby, *The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO: Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Frank Schimmelfennig, “Strategic Calculation and International Socialization: Membership Incentives, Party Constellations, and Sustained Compliance in Central and Eastern Europe,” *International Organization* 59:4(2005): 827-60; and Heather Grabbe, *The EU’s Transformative Power: Europeanization through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
 23. On the dangers of institutional monocropping, see Peter Evans, “Development as Institutional Change: The Pitfalls of Monocropping and Potentials of Deliberation,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 38 (Winter 2004): 30-52.
 24. For a more detailed overview of the post-revolutionary democratic disappointments in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, see Mark R. Beissinger, “Promoting Democracy: Is Exploring Revolution a Constructive Strategy,” *Dissent*, Winter 2006, no. 7.
 25. Gerald Knaus and Marcus Cox, “Whither Bosnia?” *NATO Review* 48 (Winter 2000/2001): 6-11.