

THREE LESSONS ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

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Some lessons have been learned - or should have been - by the providers of assistance for democratization in the post-communist world. First, while the international community was instrumental in ensuring the elections are free and fair, party building was a disappointing affair. In spite of the large amounts of resources invested, for example, in the right-wing coalitions in Romania and Bulgaria, these organizations remained blatantly unprofessional and suffered major electoral setbacks. Second, an NGO sector has been built, but its sustainability and accomplishments are still in question. Third, media assistance helped many independent publications stay alive and improved the skills of journalists, but left unaddressed the issues of motivation and political control, especially in that part where stakes are highest: television stations. Finally, and encompassing all of the above, the donors should understand that the process is as important as the end points in the transition process - or even more. How you do it - responding to real needs in societies, engaging local partners, following strict democratic procedures - should take precedence over achieving milestones and predefined end-points.

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Democracy aid in the 1990s consisted of a series of assistance programs around what is by now a familiar range of issue areas and institutions. With respect to who is doing it, the answer turned out to be: lots of organizations are doing it, both governmental and nongovernmental, public and private, North American and West Europeans and others. And with respect to why they were doing it, all the sinister theories turned out to be replaced by the unfortunately boring conclusion which was that people were just actually trying to promote democracy. The underlined and sort of conspiratorial ideas that there was some deeper agenda partly I think didn't prove as true.

I think we should start looking at the lessons learned by noting that there were three kinds of cases in the last 10 years and they are quite different from each other. The broadest category are the countries which made some kind of transition to pluralism in 1989 or 1990 and have been struggling to make it work since then. The second category are the countries where non-democratic leaders, usually semi-authoritarian leaders or authoritarian in the case of Belarus, held on for some or most of the 1990s and the international community tried to mobilize efforts to orchestrate their downfalls, such as in Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Belarus. This is a quite different profile of democracy assistance than the first category of countries. Then, the third category are the countries that experienced severe civil conflict and the international community has moved essentially into what might be considered an international trusteeship rule, such as Bosnia and Kosovo and, to a lesser extent, Macedonia. And these presented also a quite different profile of democracy assistance efforts.

I'm going to focus my remarks on the first category, the broadest category, but I'll make a brief comment of the other two categories, as well. The efforts to mobilize against semi-authoritarian leaders, the international community did learn that it was able to play a significant role, but I think the most important lesson, which I'm not sure it learned, but maybe it has, at least partly, is that the success of such efforts was really based upon the skill and the courage and the entrepreneurship of the local actors [...]. Truth should be told, that the real victories were internal, the external assistance was only an extra-help, it was not the cause of the political change itself. That's actually quite a profound lesson and one in that the United States still struggles with, as it confronts desires for political change in other parts of the world. In situations of trusteeship, I think the ultimate lesson is turning out to be that to promote democracy through a trusteeship experience involves a basic contradiction that has not been resolved.

Turning then to the main category of cases, let me mention just a few lessons about what democracy aid has proved it can and can't do, by looking at some of the basic areas in which it has attempted to do things in the last 10 years. To start with, democracy promoters have been able to make some real contribution to make elections more free and fair, that has been, as you know, a huge improvement in the quality of the elections in the region and international aid has played some role in that. At the same time, however, democracy promoters have not been able to make sharp differences with political party development and in some cases that meant a high degree of frustration. The

example of Romania is very relevant in this regard - the great deal of assistance from the United States and a few other countries went to the Democratic Convention across the 1990s and today the political forces that were at the heart of that movement, particularly the Peasants' Party, are in an extremely weak condition. Similarly, in Bulgaria there was an amount of US assistance to the UDF, some feel it was quite beneficial, others don't, but clearly there's a broader problem in Bulgaria with the US commitment to the UDF as a political force in the 1990s. And one can number other cases as well. So, in elections, like I said, some significant contributions have been made, but on political parties there is a more doubtful record.

With respect to civil society, which of course has been one of the areas where democracy promoters have talked a very great deal about, they have clearly made a large contribution to helping build NGO sectors, made up of advocacy groups, think tanks and some other organizations. It's absolutely true that external aid has played a significant role in the construction of NGO sectors in Eastern Europe. It's less clear, however, whether or not, first of all, this NGO sector is sustainable over the long term. Arguments have been made about the danger of equating NGO sectors with civil society and this is a question that still needs further examination and debate. And then, thirdly, there are questions about even with these NGO sectors in place, whether or not they really meet the demands of the citizenry or are mechanisms to channel their interests to the state. So NGO sectors have been built, but their sustainability and accomplishments are still in question.

With respect to media, which was an area of fair amount of Western assistance in the 1990s, assistance has clearly helped to professionalize some journalists and many journalist training programs did change the lives of a number of individual journalists. The assistance also helped independent publications stay alive and many independent publications or some magazines should thank international assistance for still being there. But this aid has not been able to do much about the problematic state of the most important media, which is, of course, television. As we know, the political control of state television is still a major problem in most of the countries in the region and private ownership of electronic media has proved to be problematic in various political ways, as well. The international aid has not really been able to do much about that.

On the side of the state, which is the third pillar after elections and political parties, on the one hand, civil society on the second, the international assistance in the 1990s was directed to legislatures, judicial sectors and local governments. Just very briefly, we can say that with legislatures there was just a very slow and in some cases nonexistent record of improvement. We see today legislatures that are very poorly valued institutions in their societies despite endless study visits and technical assistance. [...] As regards the local government, I think here one sees a bit more progress in some cases I think even in Romania. Here we see international donors, I'd say particularly from United States, but also Western European donors, starting to make some progress, but again the record

has been slow and disappointing to many people, but I don't think not without hope.

I think there are three broader lessons that cut across sectors. People ask me what people really learned or what they should have learned, these are the three lessons that I would point to, although they are not very satisfying.

The first lesson: it is actually much less important what you do than how you do it. This has been the hardest thing for donors to understand. It really doesn't matter what institutions you worked with or what people you worked with, it depends on whether you can really find the methods of true partnership. You can genuinely empower people, you can create a relationship of trust between a donor and a recipient, you can show you are there for the long term, you can get inside the fabric of society and be responsive to real needs. If you can do those things, it really doesn't matter what you do, because then you are going to do something good for the people and the society and creating something good. But that's the hardest lesson for the international bureaucracy and the large aid agencies to learn, because it involves the most radical proposition as they essentially change the nature of themselves or the organizations or of how they do business.

The second lesson is that creating processes of change is much more important than achieving end points. There's been an obsession with end points, partly because of the end of history syndrome and the people's minds that end points are so definable now in terms of targets, models and institutions that we like to see in place. The programs have been very much structured around achieving end points, rather than creating processes of change. Again, it is much more important to stimulate processes of change in people's minds and in their actions than to start trying to get people gravitate around certain kinds of institutional behavior. So, when you go to national legislatures for example and say *If you just had a committee system, you would be organized, you'd have agenda, so let's train you to have a committee system.* That's a classical institutional end point program. They can have the committees and the national legislature doesn't change one bit, because you haven't altered changed anything substantial.

The third lesson is that exporting particular models, which I've been critical of in a lot of my work, is actually less of a problem than I initially thought. And the Eastern Europeans have been bombarded with models over the last 10 years - French models, American models, Canadian models, all kinds of models - and it turns out they like having a lot of models because they have a sort of eclecticism about their transitions and they are determined to make their own choices. Actually in some cases it's helpful to have a lot of models, as long as they are given the space to make their own choices. But so many people are acting in these societies from the outside that the heterogeneity of models has helped alleviate the problem of allowing an eclecticism of models and encouraging that is actually in some ways a good thing.

When we look at the state of democracy today, what we see is that looking ahead at the next 10 years the major issues and problems are often linked to the fact that democracy aid has a lot of trouble. So when I talk about *the end of*

transition paradigm, one of the implications of that approach for democracy promoters is that the idea of a sort of three-part model that they had in the 1990s is focused on elections, building civil society and gradually change and rebalance the nature of the state. What people did best in the 1990s, which was to promote free and fair elections and build NGO sectors is not going to be that relevant to the essential challenges of the next 10 years. It doesn't mean that it is not important to keep having free and fair elections and to continue to have vital and active NGO sectors. But the period of constructing those institutions has already been achieved. The problems we are facing now are not going to be solved by simply the existence of those institutions. And so there's a real exhaustion in some way of programmatic ideas because people like to keep on doing what they did best, because they've proven they're good at it and that it is hard to face the new problems. When we look at the problems we've been discussing here, they are generally things that democracy assistance in the first 10 or 12 years didn't focus on very much, for example the general problem of renovating political elites and trying to get a sense in the society of regeneration of the political elites, that people can believe in. This is a kind of problem that really hasn't been focused on in democracy assistance. Similarly, making governments responsive to citizens at a day-to-day level, tackling the recalcitrant bureaucracy and so on hasn't been very much a part of a democracy agenda, because you noticed when I talked about the state-oriented programs - legislatures, judiciary, local government - they are not executive branch programs. The executive branch was largely left untouched by democracy assistance in the 1990s, which is puzzling. When you think back, you wonder why that was the case. Well, it was so because a lot of assumptions of democracy promoters were that the executive branches were too strong and that the communist system was necessary to reorder the balance of the state and of other sectors. Therefore, we'll let the World Bank, we do administrative reform and others will work at the executive branch ministries, but the democracy assistance community was absent in some ways from that, which I think it's been a mistake. And then, reform of police and in some countries intelligent services was badly left behind and this again has not been a focus of very much attention. Democracy promoters don't like to work with the police, they have guns, they are often not speaking English, they are not like NGOs, they are not much fun to work with. But if you ask people what they would like, they would like greater personal security and police could actually help them in some ways and that's been an area badly neglected. And then, of course, the issue of ethnic tensions was one that didn't work very well in the democracy assistance framework, it didn't fit into the three-part model I have talked about and then it blew up in the face of the Western community again and again in former Yugoslavia across the 1990s.

So, to conclude, the challenges that democracy promoters and democracy itself still face are quite large. Democracy does have some achievements that you can use to move forward. [...] There will be a special challenge when we look at the basic fact that the United States to a large extent is just pulling out of

democracy assistance in this region and the European aid is not focused on democratization per se, but more on preparing for enlargement, which is actually quite a different task - it has some relationship with democratization, but actually it is quite different. So, neither of the two largest donor actors, generally speaking, United States and Western Europe, are present in Eastern Europe at a time when we witness in fact a crisis of democratic governance and democratic legitimacy.