

The External Democratization Efforts of a Union of Twenty-Eight: Breaking with the Past?

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Abstract

This contribution maps the position the new European Union member states from Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe that joined in 2004/2007/2013 adopted vis-à-vis external democracy promotion. While certain traits all eleven scrutinized countries share can be detected, the paper argues that these states certainly do not constitute a homogeneous block *qua* external democratization. To reflect the differences that exist between the new member states with regard to how they perceive (and implement) their external democratization policies, an external democratization matrix is put forward. Consequently, this opens up new research venues, where one of the most important questions is the role the individual member states (and separate regional clusters) play in the EU's external democratization policy. In a first attempt to uncover these, this paper's empirical contribution focuses on the extent to which the Czech Republic was successful in translating its domestically defined transition politics into an EU-wide approach. Emphasis is placed on Prague's attempt to – while holding the EU Council presidency – conclude negotiations on both a European Consensus on Democracy and a Civil Society Forum accompanying the emerging Eastern Partnership.

Key words: European Union, Normative Power Europe, 2004/2007/2013 EU enlargement, external democratization policy, EU Council Presidency

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Introduction

Having commemorated the tenth anniversary of the 2004 EU enlargement to the East on May 1, 2014, it is time to take stock of the implications the largest ever enlargement round has had on the European Union (EU) as a whole, on the individual member states (both *old* and *new*), and on the third countries with which the European Union established contractual relations. Prior to the widening, EU integration scholars were concerned with the consequences the enlargement would have on the EU's decision-making processes (whether or not a political dead-lock seemed plausible),¹ on the EU's economic well-being,² and on the many individual policy areas constituting the bulk of the European Union's daily work.³ Similarly, others took up the question of how the acceding countries were being transformed as a result of EU conditionality (loosely referred to as *Europeanization*); while some focused on the Central and Eastern European countries' (CEECs) changing identities and political systems,⁴ others looked into whether (and how) the individual candidate countries' policies were changing as a result of being exposed to exogenous demands formulated in Brussels.⁵ In line with the growing scholarly interest in the many questions surrounding the upcoming EU enlargement to the East, also the domain of foreign policy received academic attention from both above-distinguished groups of scholars. The first conducted research into the impact the individual candidate countries' foreign policies would have on the EU foreign policy framework (of which the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is only one integral part).⁶ The second was concerned with the question of the extent to which the national foreign policies of

¹ See, for instance, Richard E. Baldwin, "The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union," *European Economic Review* 39, no. 3-4 (1995).

² See, for instance, Richard E. Baldwin, Joseph F. Francois, and Richard Portes, "The Costs and Benefits of Eastern Enlargement: The Impact on the EU and Central Europe," *Economic Policy* 12, no. 24 (1997); Frits Breuss, "Macroeconomic Effects of EU Enlargement for Old and New Members," in *WIFO Working Papers, No. 143* (Wien: Austrian Institute for Economic Research, 2001).

³ See, for instance Jon Kvist, "Does EU Enlargement Start a Race to the Bottom? Strategic Interaction among EU Member States in Social Policy," *Journal of European Social Policy* 14, no. 3 (2004); Robert W. Ackrill, "EU Enlargement, the CAP and the Cost of Direct Payments: A Note," *Journal of Agricultural Economics* 54, no. 1 (2003); Carsten Daugbjerg and Alan Swinbank, "The CAP and EU Enlargement: Prospects for an Alternative Strategy to Avoid the Lock-in of CAP Support," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 42, no. 1 (2004).

⁴ See, for instance, Wojciech Sadurski, "Accession's Democracy Divident: The Impact of the EU Enlargement upon Democracy in the New Member States of Central and Eastern Europe," *European Law Journal* 10, no. 4 (2004); Heather Grabbe, "How Does Europeanisation Affect CEE Governance? Conditionality, Diffusion and Diversity," *Journal of European Public Policy* 8, no. 4 (2001).

⁵ See, for instance, Frank Schimmelfenning and Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe" *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004); Jurgen Dieringer et al., "The Europeanization of Regions in EU-Applicant Countries. A Comparative Analysis of Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia," in *7th EACES Conference (Forli2002)*; Ronald Sturm and Jorgen Dieringer, "The Europeanization of Regions in Eastern and Western Europe: Theoretical Perspectives," *Regional and Federal Studies* 15, no. 3 (2005).

⁶ See, for instance, Antonio Missiroli, "EU Enlargement and CFSP/ESDP," *Journal of European Integration* 25, no. 1 (2003); ———, ed. *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP? The View from Central Europe. EU-ISS Occasional Paper 34, April 2002* (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2002).

Bratislava, Budapest, Ljubljana, Prague, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, and Warsaw (and later also Bucharest and Sofia)⁷ have changed as a result of preparing for EU accession (and the eventual accession itself).⁸

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the general sentiment among scholars regarding the impact the EU's eastern enlargement would have on the EU's foreign policy was one that would see the soon-to-be new member states push for a more unified – and somewhat firmer – approach towards Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Indeed, based on their proximity to Russia and the rest of Eastern Europe, and due to their unique historical experience, the new member states were expected to upload their bilateral foreign policy preferences vis-à-vis their Eastern neighbours onto the EU level, thereby causing a geopolitical shift on the EU's foreign policy agenda.⁹ Thus, if European integration scholarship before 2004 was concerned with predicting the implications the enlargement would have on the EU's foreign policy, it is only natural that the last decade has been spent to confirm/disprove the many hypotheses made. As such, Juncos and Pomorska established that the CFSP has not suffered from a deadlock as a result of the number of member states growing to twenty-five in 2004.¹⁰ In addition, the assumption that enlargement to the East would lead to a reinvigorated interest in Russia and the larger Eastern European space has been proven correct as – among others – manifested in the formulation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004.¹¹ However, research has also shown that within the EU foreign policy domain, the new member states would pursue also other preferences than those strictly pertaining to Russia, often in areas not deemed strategic or salient by the others.

Consequently, it is one of these 'unexpected results' of the EU's 2004 enlargement to the East that this contribution scrutinizes. Put simply, the EU-15 was soon confronted with the desire of some of the new member states to cause a more conceptual shift in the EU's foreign policy, namely

⁷ Equally, scholars were also interested in the effects the EU membership perspective has had on the foreign policy of both Larnaca and Valetta, but as these do not form part of the CEECs, these two are omitted in the rest of this contribution.

⁸ See, for instance, Joanna Kaminska, "New EU Members and the CFSP: Europeanization of the Polish Foreign Policy," *Political Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2007).

⁹ See, for instance, Richard G. Whitman, "The Common Foreign and Security Policy after Enlargement," in *The Enlargement of the European Union: Issues and Strategies*, ed. Victoria Curzon Price, Alice Landau, and Richard G. Whitman (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Jackie Gower, "EU-Russian Relations and the Eastern Enlargement: Integration or Isolation?," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 1, no. 1 (2000).

¹⁰ Ana E. Juncos and Karolina Pomorska, "The Deadlock That Never Happened: The Impact of Enlargement on the Common Foreign and Security Policy Council Working Groups," *European Political Economy Review*, no. 6 (March 2007).

¹¹ See, for instance, Jackie Gower, "The European Union's Policy on Russia: Rhetoric or Reality?," in *Russia and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: An Uneasy Partnership*, ed. Jackie Gower and Graham Timmins (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2007); Kristi Raik, "A Europe Divided by Russia? The New Eastern Member States and the EU's Policy towards the East," in *Russia and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: An Uneasy Partnership*, ed. Jackie Gower and Graham Timmins (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2007); Karen E. Smith, "The Outsiders: The European Neighbourhood Policy," *International Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2005).

to inject the EU's ailing external democratization policy with new impetus. While scholars agree that such a claim – though generalizing – can be substantiated,¹² this paper is interested in mapping out the different positions the new Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern European countries that have joined the EU in 2004, 2007 and 2013 respectively harbor with regard to EU-wide external democratization policy. This should enable us to answer the main question of whether the EU's widening to the (South-)East can be seen as a break with the EU-15's lackluster external democratization work.

After a short discussion of the EU's external democratization policy prior to the 2004 EU enlargement, the paper identifies some of the more recent developments within this particular EU foreign policy domain. Arguing that the EU's external democratization policy was indeed reinvigorated in the post-2004 period, the paper proceeds to establish a matrix of the new member states' position *qua* democracy promotion along two axes; negative/positive experience with the Russian Federation and democracy as a goal/democracy as a mean. The subsequent section introduces an empirical case study, assessing the role of the Czech Republic in bringing about a conceptual change in the EU's understanding of external democracy promotion. The concluding section summarizes the main findings and maps out venues for further research.

The EU as an External Democratization Actor in the Post-2004 Period

The first impetus for the European Union to develop a conscious externally-g geared democratization policy came with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent political and economic transitions unfolding in the EU's direct neighbourhood to the East.¹³ Yet, while the mechanism of conditionality vis-à-vis those European countries with a membership perspective seemed to bear fruit with regard to their transition towards democratic polities, the EU's external democratization policy beyond the soon-to-be-EU-member-states remained inconsistent, incoherent, and very often dependent on other interests the individual EU member states were pursuing with regard to the third country in question. These shortcomings of the EU's external democratization policy were duly noted by both the old and the new EU member states and as such it comes as no surprise that the European Union as a whole set out to tackle these, aiming at calling into life a more efficient and better streamlined democracy promoting policy. The developments that have recently taken place within this specific EU policy domain are to be discerned along three lines; (i) financial, (ii) institutional, and (iii) in-scope.

Financially, the enlarged European Union further cemented its position as the world's largest Official Development Assistance (ODA) donor, which – in 2012 alone – disbursed €13.6 billion

¹² Laurynas Jonavičius, "The Democracy Promotion Policies of Central and Eastern European States," in *Working Paper 55* (Madrid: Fundacion para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Dialogo Exterior (FRIDE), 2008).

¹³ Marek Neuman and Ronald Holzhaacker, "Framing the Debate: The Evolution of the European Union as an External Democratization Actor" (paper presented at the Europe and Peace, Montreal, 2014).

through a multitude of projects.¹⁴ Still, the EU as a whole falls short of the 0.7% of the EU's Gross National Income (GNI) collective target it set for ODA contributions back in 2005 and to be achieved by 2015.¹⁵ Furthermore, the picture becomes even more bleak when the individual member states' achievements regarding this target are scrutinized. While in 2012, only four EU member states managed to increase their ODA contributions as a percentage of their GNI (Austria, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Poland), the remaining EU countries either maintained or even decreased their contributions.¹⁶ This trend appears worrying to those that have harbored greater hopes for the European Union's development policy in general and its democratization policy more specifically, considering that the latter forms only one – rather limited – part of the first.

On the institutional front, however, the developments with regard to strengthening the EU's external democratization capacity have been more positive. Among the first – albeit bilateral – initiatives was the establishment of the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD). Initiated by the Czech Republic together with the Netherlands and several private donors in 2008, its rationale was to provide a supplementary organization to the European Union's European Instrument for Democracy & Human Rights (EIDHR), which particularly Prague regarded as too bureaucratic and cumbersome for NGOs seeking financial contributions in support of their democracy-promoting projects abroad.¹⁷ It was modeled on the American National Endowment for Democracy and stands outside of official EU structures, while still being located in Brussels to facilitate the individual NGOs contacts with Brussels-based decision-makers.¹⁸ By 2011, the EPD's rationale of providing a less bureaucratic access point for partner organizations to European funding for democracy assistance programs has been well understood by the European Union itself, which – together with the EU's member states – in 2012 consequently established the European Endowment for Democracy (EED).

Finally, since the 2004 EU enlargement, the EU has – with more or less success – attempted to position itself as an external democratization actor to be taken seriously. Whether during Ukraine's Orange revolution in 2004, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the establishment of the Eastern Partnership, the events commonly summarized under the heading "Arab Spring," or the 2013-2014 developments in Ukraine in general and the Crimea in particular, Brussels wanted to be heard. This paper certainly does not make the claim of Brussels being successful in its endeavor at all

¹⁴ "European Union," DonorTracker, <http://donortracker.org/donor-profiles/european-union>.

¹⁵ Please note that the new EU member states' contribution to achieving the overall EU target lies in pledging to reach a national ODA/GNI ratio of 0.17%, reflecting their incremental change from being an aid recipient to becoming an aid donor.

¹⁶ "The European Commission Calls on EU Member States to Fulfil Their Commitments Towards the World's Poorest," in *Press Release* (Brussels: European Commission, 2013).

¹⁷ Marek Neuman, "Interview B," (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), : 6.

¹⁸ Thomas O. Melia, "Supporting Democracy Abroad: Transatlantic Cooperation at a Crossroads," in *US-EU Responses to Globalization - Working Papers* (Washington: Center for Transatlantic Relations), : 7.

times, but only states that, when compared to the EU's approach to promoting democratic development abroad during both the Cold War and the 1990s, the European Union has become more of a visible actor.

Hence, while these developments have taken place – some enhancing and others reducing the EU's *potential* for establishing and implementing an effective external democratization policy – the question of just which role precisely the new Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern member states have played within this process remains. It is the mapping of the new member states' position *qua* external democratization that this paper thus now turns to.

Mapping the Position of the New EU Member States *qua* External Democratization

Treating the new member states of the European as one homogeneous group *qua* promoting external democratization through the European Union would constitute a great simplification. Yet, as others have argued, certain variables the eleven Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern EU countries have in common¹⁹ – and that consequently determine their 'idealistic attitudes towards the normative importance of democracy promotion'²⁰ – can be distinguished. Jonavičius identifies five such factors that explain the new member states' perspective on external democracy promotion; (i) historical experience, (ii) the identity question, (iii) geopolitical reasoning, (iv) external incentives, and (v) EU-related commitments.²¹ Subsequently, it is these variables that merit a closer look at the role these eleven countries – both individually and as part of larger regional clusters – play within the EU's external democratization policy. First, the countries' shared experience with political oppression in the not-so-distant past stands behind their interest to share their own transition experience with their neighbourhood in order to create a "ring of friends." Second, promoting the building of democratic institutions and the internalization of democratic values in oppressed societies helps the new EU member states to cement their European identity, next to proving their Europeanness to their Western European counterparts. Third, the close proximity to the Russian Federation which is in general perceived rather negatively by the new member states' populations – coupled with the earlier mentioned historical experience – explains the geopolitical interest in furthering the new neighbourhood's democratic credentials, effectively creating a buffer between *us* (the EU) and *them* (Russia). Fourth, due to the new member states' perceived Atlanticism, the new EU members from Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe are likely to align their foreign policies with the United States' foreign policy, also in respect to its quest of democratizing the international community. This was, among others, reflected in Central and Eastern Europe's support for the US policy towards Iraq

¹⁹ This paper is concerned with all thirteen countries that joined in 2004, 2007, 2013 less Malta and Cyprus.

²⁰ Jonavičius, "The Democracy Promotion Policies of Central and Eastern European States," 1.

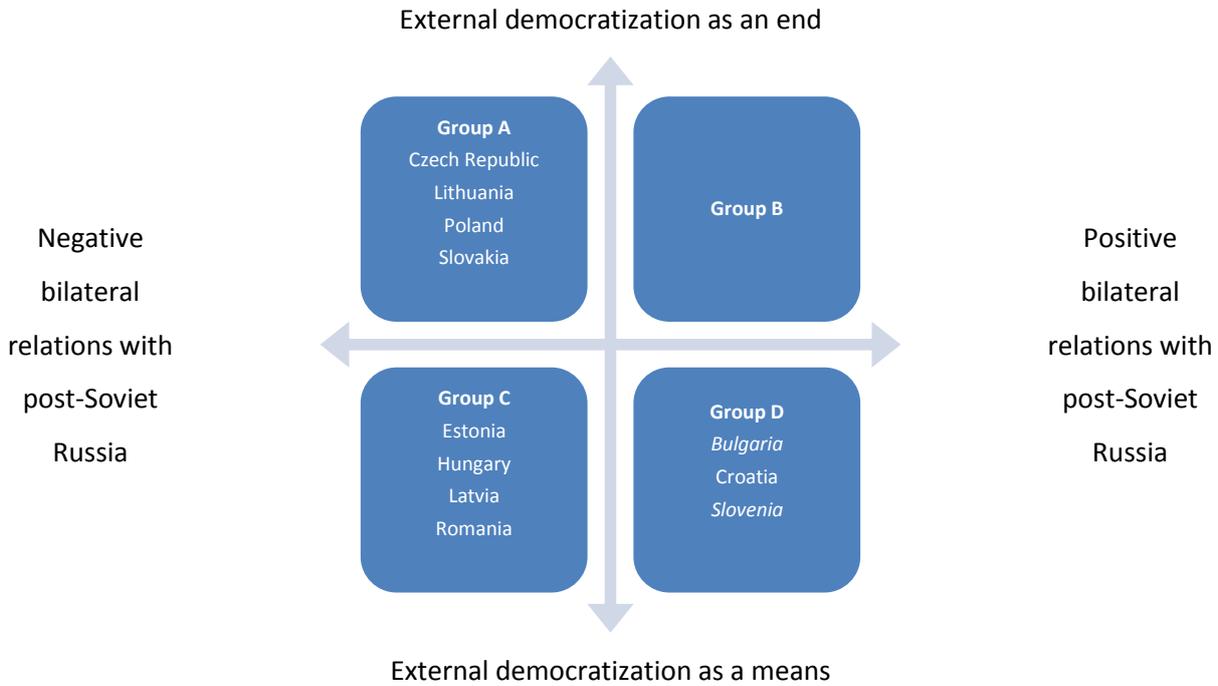
²¹ *Ibid.*, : 1-4.

in the early 2000s or Ukraine in 2014. Finally, the very fact of having become full EU members has driven the new members to adopting EU-wide commitments with regard to, for instance, official development assistance levels next to forcing them to find their own policy niche within the very complex system of EU foreign policy making. With all the previously stated, external democratization was promising to become such a niche within which the new member states could profile themselves as competent and useful.

Yet, as argued before, while we can discern common traits in the new member states' interest vis-à-vis external democratization, they are far from constituting a homogenous group when analyzing the specific external democratization policies they have designed over the last two and a half decades. While some scholars analyze the member states by grouping them into several distinct clusters based upon historical, cultural, or geographical characteristics, for instance the Visegrád Four, the Baltic States, the Black-Sea States, or the countries North and South of the Carpathian Mountains dividing line,²² this paper seeks to develop a categorization more sensitive to the many differences that exist among the new EU member states. Consequently, this paper constructs a matrix with four categories, within which each of the new member states is being placed along two lines. As should by now be clear from the above, the relationship the individual new member states were able to build with post-Soviet Russia to a large extent determine the countries' position *qua* external democratization. Certainly, relations between the new EU member country and Russia are determined by many factors such as previous historical experience with the Soviet Union or the perceived and factual economic interdependence between the two entities. Moreover, they are to some extent contingent upon the political leadership in both the entities. Still, some long-term trends as to the quality of the relationship between the new EU member state on the one and Russia on the other hand can be detected. Consequently, the horizontal line of the matrix is determined by the very nature – positive or negative – of this very relationship. Such an axis proves to be relevant for understanding the member state's approach towards external democratization for we can hypothesize that the more negative the relationship between member state A and Russia is, the more prone member state A will be to develop and implement its own democratization policy, particularly towards the countries lying between the EU and Russia, who can be perceived as a buffer. The vertical axis, then, is constituted by a continuum where on the one end, democracy promotion is seen as an end in its own right, whereas on the other end, democracy promotion is regarded as a means to the achievement of other goals (security, economic development). While it certainly is true that all new member states benefit from the effects of successful democratization of

²² Kristi Raik and Grzegorz Gromadzki, "Between Activeness and Influence: The Contribution of New Member States to EU Policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood," (Tallin: Finish Institute of International Affairs, Stefan Batory Foundation, Open Estonia Foundation, 2006), : 25.

third countries, for some countries these effects stand in the foreground of launching their external democratization policy in the first place, while other countries regard these to only be side-effects of their democratization policy that merits its existence on other – less strategic – grounds. Consequently, along these two axes, the EU member states scrutinized in this paper can be categorized in the following manner:²³



Countries composing groups A and C all exhibit a more or less difficult relationship with post-Soviet Russia, either as a result of their Soviet experience or as a result of continued present day energy dependence or other trade-related matters. Yet, the four countries grouped in the upper left quadrant all share one feature, namely a more altruistic approach towards promoting democracy in third countries than the countries in the lower left quadrant. As a result of this, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, and Romania all primarily pursue overarching foreign policy goals – whether it is the support of national minorities in the bordering countries or enhancing national security by creating a democratic buffer against Russia – regarding external democracy promotion as only one of the mechanisms to do so. An additional correlated difference between countries A and countries B is that the prior extend their democratization efforts beyond their immediate neighbourhood – whether by focusing on some African, South-East Asian, or Latin American countries – while the latter tend to predominantly focus on their immediate neighbourhood.

²³ To a large extent, this categorization draws from the analysis of the new member states’ position qua external democratization as found in Jonavičius, "The Democracy Promotion Policies of Central and Eastern European States."

Interestingly, none of the eleven scrutinized new member states of the European Union falls into the upper right quadrant, whereas three countries – Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia – fall into the lower right one. However, of these three states, Bulgaria and Slovenia have barely defined, let alone implemented, their own external democratization policy and as such their inclusion into the matrix is questionable.²⁴ Nevertheless, what these three countries share is that besides lacking openly negative attitudes towards Russia, their very limited (democratization) activities in their neighbourhood are of a purely instrumental nature.

Once more, this categorization certainly is not absolute with the quadrants themselves exhibiting rather important differences among the included member states, with some moving closer to and others gravitating further away from the axes intersection. Moreover, depending on factors such as domestic political constellation, the quality of an EU external energy policy (or the lack thereof), or Russian leadership, countries can be expected to move both within and between quadrants. Despite these limitations, such categorization is useful as it opens up analytical space for further questions regarding the role of new EU member states in the EU's external democratization policy. As such, it becomes of interest whether and how the individual new EU members attempt to change the EU's ailing external democratization policy to resemble their bilateral democratization policies to a greater extent. Furthermore, are we able to detect cooperation between the member states both within and across the quadrants when it comes to promoting their external democratization policies in Brussels? Taking into account both the limited space of this contribution and the relative immaturity of this research field, the paper now turns to an empirical case concerned with the first of these questions, namely the extent to which one of the new member states – the Czech Republic – attempted to upload its democratization interests to the EU level.

Group A Countries – Enthusiastic Democratizers? The Case of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's historical experience with an illiberal political regime was soon reflected in Prague's newly emerging foreign policy, of which both human rights and democracy promotion became an inherent component. In essence, since the early 1990s, Prague began to position itself as a human rights and democratization actor to be taken seriously, which was to a great extent aided by the support of the likes of Václav Havel, Karel Schwarzenberg, Jiří Dienstbier, or Šimon Pánek. To give its newly found interest in democratization policy institution form, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) created the Department for Human Rights and Transformation Politics (LPTP), which articulated the Czech Republic's *transition policy* that would support projects abroad only if they duly recognized the inherent duality of the *problématique* at hand. In terms of operationalization,

²⁴ This is, consequently, highlighted by including them in italics, only.

Prague's efforts focused on strengthening civil society in – initially – ten priority countries, spanning the globe from Latin America (Cuba), over Europe (Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Georgia, Serbia, Ukraine) and the Middle East (Iraq), to Asia (Burma).²⁵ Yet, over time, Prague came to realize that it 'can use its transition experience particularly in relations to countries that are culturally, geographically, historically or otherwise similar [and] therefore focuses on collaboration with partners in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.'²⁶ Next to its geographic scope, the Czech transition policy was characterized by two additional features; first, in terms of democracy promotion, the Czech Republic was willing to brace for short periods of instability if the long-term prospects of establishing democratic rule in the target country so required²⁷ and second, the bulk of the responsibility for the success of the mission was to be assumed by the many participating non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see Figure 1 below).

²⁵ Veronika Bílková and Šárka Matějková, "Šíření demokracie jako národní zájem? Legitimizace české transformační politiky," in *Hledání českých zájmů: Obchod, lidská práva a mezinárodní rozvoj*, ed. Petr Drulák and Ondřej Horký (Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2010), : 128.

²⁶ "Transition Policy," (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), : 3.

²⁷ Gabriela Dlouhá and Jan Šnidauf, "Toward a Common Approach to the Global Pro-Democracy Agenda and a Revival of Democracy Promotion in the Arab-Muslim World," in *Policy Brief by the MFA of the Czech Republic* (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011), : 3.

Year	Target country	Project description	Implementing NGO
2006	Belorussia	“Interviews with authorities” – simulation game	EUROPEUM
2006	Belorussia	“Assistance to politically persecuted”	People in Need
2006	Georgia	Training of political representatives + experience transfer Czech Republic - Georgia	Training Centre for Public Administration of the Czech Republic (FALA)
2006	Moldova	Capacity building of Transnistrian NGOs	People in Need
2007	Belorussia	“European Radio for Belorussia” – a multinational project to provide the local population with objective information	Civic Belarus
2007	Belorussia	Providing 10 Belorussian students with grants to study at Czech universities	Caritas of the Archdiocese of Prague
2007	Ukraine	Democratization of public policy in Southern and Eastern Ukraine – involving the local population and media in decision-making processes	People in Need
2007	Ukraine	Transferring Czech NGO experience with the European integration process to Ukrainian partners	EUROPEUM
2007	Belorussia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina	“Reporting EU” – training for journalists, special focus on on-line journalism and blogging	Transitions Online
2008	Belorussia	“European alternative for Belorussia” – supporting local independent “euroclubs” to transfer Central European transition experience	Association for International Affairs
2008	Cuba	“Supporting democratic opposition” – direct support of civil society, independent journalist, doctors, teachers, activists, etc.	People in Need
2008	Moldova	“Transferring Czech transformation experience to Moldova”	Prague Security Studies Institute
2009	Burma	“Burmese projects” – direct support for political prisoners, independent journalists, civil society organization and democracy activists	People in Need

Figure 1: List of MFA sponsored transition projects

Recognizing a certain degree of misfit between the Czech and EU-wide approach towards external human rights and democratization promotion, it may come as no surprise that once a full EU member, Prague would set out to have its own domestic preference translated onto the EU level. Particularly the period prior to its 2009 EU Council Presidency saw the most activity, supporting Tallberg’s notion of the strategic importance the individual member states attach to the rotating

Council Presidency, seeing that it enables them to (partially) shape the EU policy agenda.²⁸ Before uploading one's preference to the supranational level, the Czech MFA undertook a stock-taking exercise on which very aspects of its transition policy should form the locus of its domestically defined preference *qua* EU external human rights and democracy promotion. While previous research has shown that the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been inconsistent when providing access points for civil society actors interested in co-shaping the Czech national preference,²⁹ with regard to its transition policy, the MFA's approach differed substantially. Put simply, the level of cooperation between the institutional actors (the LPTP in particular) and the civil society sector was unprecedented, at times making a differentiation of the contribution each of these made to the national position difficult, if not outright impossible. Indicative is the MFA's initiation (and funding) of the establishment of the Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights (DEMAS), which was founded in 2008 – initially bringing together eleven of the most prominent Czech NGOs – and that was meant to streamline LPTP's communication with the NGO sector. Besides non-governmental organizations, also prominent individuals – mostly united under the banner of the former dissent – made their voices heard either directly in the MFA or through the many seminars, workshops, conferences, and media appearances.

In a joint effort of these three actor groups – the MFA represented by the LPTP, the non-governmental sector, and the Czech moral authorities – the Czech national preference *qua* the European Union's future human rights and democratization policy was beginning to take shape. Among others, the Czech bureaucracy was urged (i) to recognize the potential the Czech Republic (and other CEECs) may play in bringing about democratic change (in the near) abroad, (ii) to restructure its own grant scheme and to initiate a refurbishment of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), (iii) to make use of its upcoming Council Presidency, increasing the visibility of human rights and democracy promotion, and (iv) to streamline and strengthen institutional cooperation with and within such groupings as the Visegrád Four, the EU and its institutions, the OSCE, and the United Nations.³⁰ Moreover, the Czech Republic was urged to

²⁸ Jonas Tallberg, "The Agenda-Shaping Powers of the EU Council Presidency," *Journal of European Public Policy* 10, no. 1 (February 2003). Note that since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, the newly created Foreign Affairs Council – as the only one of the ten existing Council constellations – no longer is subject to the rotating Council Presidency. Yet, the entire remaining structure of the Council of the European Union – including all the working groups dealing with foreign policy matters and both COREPER and COPS – continue being headed by a representative of the presiding country. As such, further research into whether the member states' ability to co-shape the EU's foreign policy agenda has remained intact is necessary. Yet, this is irrelevant to the present study as the Czech Republic held its Council Presidency before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009.

²⁹ Marek Neuman, "The Nexus between Czech Non-State Actors and Domestic Foreign Policy Making in the EU Presidency Context," *Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (2011).

³⁰ Jeff Lovitt and Věra Řiháčková, "Is the EU Ready to Put Democracy Assistance at the Heart of European Foreign Policy?" (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society, 2008); Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt, "New

'support only activities with a clear democracy assistance component.'³¹ Consequently, the Czech MFA decided that it would pursue the inclusion of a dedicated democratization dimension into the EU's foreign policy.

To successfully upload its national preference onto the EU level, the Czech Republic devised three intertwined, yet separate, strategies, of which the first largely remained outside of EU structures, with the remaining two seeing Prague making use of the European Union's institutional web. The first strategy centered on the idea that Prague would raise its international visibility with regard to promoting democracy abroad, hence lead by example, which could later be tapped for establishing best practice during an inventory of mechanisms to form the new EU approach. To this end, the MFA would continue cooperating with local NGOs when implementing democratization projects abroad. Moreover, to voice its discontent with the EIDHR's bureaucratic character, the Czech Republic, together with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and several private donors, initiated the establishment of the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) in 2008. The EPD – created outside official EU structures – was modeled on the American National Endowment for Democracy organization and was to facilitate the increased need for financial support for democracy-promoting projects in a less cumbersome way.³² The remaining two strategies, then, were to be pursued from within EU structures. As such, Prague would pursue a shift in the EU's conceptual understanding of assisting democratic efforts in third countries, by introducing – and during its Presidency negotiating – a *European Consensus on Democracy*. Modeled on the *European Consensus on Development* adopted in 2005,³³ the document was to comprehensively define the constitutive elements of democracy, institutionalize active democracy promotion within EU structures, and operationalize this by defining an exhaustive list of policy instruments to be employed. The final – third – strategy, focused on the European Union's democratization policy *on the ground*. Specifically – and in line with Prague's democratization policy's geographic scope – the intended Eastern Partnership (also negotiated during Prague's Council Presidency³⁴) was seen as an

Kids on the Block: Can the Visegrad Four Emerge as Effective Players in International Democracy Assistance?," (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society, 2008); Věra Řiháčková, "EU Democracy Assistance through Civil Society - Reformed?," (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society, 2008).

³¹ Vladimír Bartovic, "Limited Resources, Global Ambitions," in *Democracy's New Champions: European Democracy Assistance after EU Enlargement*, ed. Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society, 2008), : 32.

³² Melia, "Supporting Democracy Abroad: Transatlantic Cooperation at a Crossroads," : 7.

³³ "The European Consensus on Development: Joint Statement by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on European Union Development Policy: 'The European Consensus'," in *Official Journal of the European Union C 46* (Brussels: European Union, 2006).

³⁴ Marek Neuman, "The Czech Republic's EU Accession: A Shift-Producing Variable in the EU's Foreign Policy towards Russia?," in *Europe Twenty Years after the End of the Cold War: The New Europe, New Europes?*, ed. Bruno Arcidiacono, Katrin Milzow, and Axel Marion (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012).

appropriate testing ground for the Union's reinvigorated approach to democracy building abroad. As such, besides its own bilateral efforts to further democratic development in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, Prague would also seek to launch a multilateral dimension on behalf of Brussels. This strategy was, ultimately, to find its anchoring in the proposed Civil Society Forum (CSF), which was to become an inseparable dimension of the Eastern Partnership and was intended to significantly strengthen the civil society in the respective partner countries.

The Czech Republic's uploading efforts primarily consisted of raising awareness and familiarizing the other EU capitals with the dire state of democracy in countries such as Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, or Burma. Yet, rather than emphasizing the normative legitimacy of its preference by invoking everyone's *right* to live in a democratic society only, Prague also made references to more materialist arguments, highlighting enhanced internal security stemming from being surrounded by friendly democratic regimes. Preference uploading then took place along both a governmental and non-governmental track, where the first can further be distinguished into formal and informal norm diffusion. Formally, the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union coordinated Prague's efforts in Brussels. This task was by no means an easy one, taking into account the horizontal coordination difficulties that exist with regard to external democratization both within the Council of the European Union and between the Council and other EU institutions (the Commission first and foremost). Indeed, due to democracy policy's relevance to such policy areas as international trade, human rights, development, and others, Prague's representatives to the many involved working groups faced the difficult task of conveying one message only. This was further aggravated by the fact that the two working groups most concerned – the Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) and the Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST) – operated differently. While the Czech Republic has a permanent representative to COEST which meets at least on a weekly basis, at COHOM meetings – taking place only once a month – Prague is represented by MFA staff from the Prague headquarters, mostly by the LPTP director him/herself. To remedy for the resulting limited socialization opportunities, Czech representatives to the relevant working groups were instructed to at all times make use of their right to outline Prague's position, despite this not always being embraced by the other state's representatives present for 'unnecessarily' prolonging the discussion. While some European partners began to label their Czech counterparts as "activist,"³⁵ following a consistent line served the purpose of increasing Prague's visibility vis-à-vis external democratization. In addition, the Czech Republic distributed human rights and democracy reports compiled directly by kindred NGOs from Belarus through Coreu, establishing a precedent in terms of

³⁵ ———, "Interview X," (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011), : 4.

its employability.³⁶ Besides these formal venues, the Czech administration also made use of the more informal ones to diffuse its position *qua* external democratization among its European partners. The most striking of these was then Czech Ambassador to the EU Milena Vicensová's initiative to invite the entire Committee of Permanent Representatives II (COREPER II) for a four-day visit to the Czech Republic, which was – in its entirety – marked by the spirit of globally strengthening the protection of human rights and democratic development conveyed in multiple seminars, workshops, and cinematic screenings.³⁷

The non-governmental track was dominated by DEMAS, closely cooperating with the MFA. As such, the Czech Republic's Permanent Representation to the EU scheduled meetings between DEMAS representatives and relevant EU officials, during which the first highlighted the saliency of adopting a reinvigorated EU-wide approach to democracy promotion in line with the Czech preference.³⁸ Most importantly, though, DEMAS, together with the MFA and the European Partnership for Democracy, organized the most visible norm uploading event, namely the 'Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy Support' conference organized in Prague in early 2009. It was here where the fundamental principles of the Consensus-to-be were outlined: (i) ownership, (ii) partnership, (iii) dialogue and inclusiveness, (iv) long-term commitment to democracy support, (v) complementarity of existing policies and instruments, (vi) technical as well as political assistance, and (vii) multiple-track approach.³⁹

Yet, the question of the extent to which the Czech Republic's uploading efforts were successful still remains. Prague was able to garner support for its national preference among its kindred democratization allies – mainly the Baltic countries, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom – but encountered opposition in other EU capitals. Such opposition was grounded in both a debate on whether to first promote democracy or (economic) development (France) and a more fundamental debate on whether or not to promote democracy at all, with some member states (France and Italy) regarding the CEECs' interest in external democratization as a sign of revived Atlanticism.⁴⁰ Despite such disagreements, the EU as a whole could agree on the saliency of supporting democracy promotion in its relations with third countries, thereby establishing grounds

³⁶ Traditionally, Coreu – as the EU's diplomatic communication network – is used only to disseminate official documents of the member states' ministries.

³⁷ Marek Neuman, "Interview V," (Brussels: Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union, 2010), : 6.

³⁸ Moreover, not only did the MFA schedule these meetings, it also reimbursed DEMAS' travel expenses. Found in ———, "Interview Q," (Prague: DEMAS Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights, 2010), : 3-4.

³⁹ "Report from the Conference," in *Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy Support* (Prague: European Partnership for Democracy, 2009), : 34-35.

⁴⁰ Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt, "Re-Energising Europe to Champion Democracy," in *Democracy's New Champions: European Democracy Assistance after EU Enlargement*, ed. Jacek Kucharczyk and Jeff Lovitt (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society, 2008), : 17-22.

for future negotiations. On the one hand, then, the Czech Republic's proposal for a Civil Society Forum received backing in the form of the 2008 EC communication on the Eastern Partnership with two of the proposed thematic platforms taking up the matter of democracy building; *Democracy, good governance and stability* and *Contacts between people*.⁴¹ On the other hand, however, the Czech Republic secured preliminary support for its *European Consensus on Democracy* proposal only in early 2009, at which time Prague agreed with Stockholm that they would proceed jointly. After circulating a joint non-paper among the other member states, the matter was picked up by the European Commission, which then circulated its own concept paper largely based on the Czech-Swedish proposal in July 2009 only,⁴² thereby after the end of Prague's Council Presidency.⁴³

Consequently, regarding the external democratization agenda, the remainder of the Czech Council Presidency was spent negotiating the details of the one Czech proposal that has received sufficient initial support from the other member states – the Civil Society Forum. Being negotiated together with the proposal for an Eastern Partnership, the CSF had to overcome the same difficulties that have shaped the negotiation arena at the beginning of 2009. More specifically, in a time when the Presidency was faced with bringing the 2008/2009 Gaza War to an end, finding a solution to the 2009 Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, and preventing the erection of protectionist measures by the individual member states as a response to the global economic crisis, the more normative aspects of Prague's Presidency program were at first somewhat pushed to the sidelines. Despite this – and having secured the Commission's support on both the Partnership and the Forum – Prague proceeded with negotiating the details of the six Eastern European countries' civil societies' involvement. As such, in COHOM, it set out (i) to gain the support of the other twenty-six member states to launch the Forum together with the Eastern Partnership, (ii) to empower the CSF by structuring it as the Partnership's mirror image, and (iii) to equip the CSF with direct access to the Partnership platform.⁴⁴ Hence, Prague proposed to structure the Forum along the same four thematic platforms on which the Eastern Partnership was to be built, ensuring comparable agendas at both governmental and non-governmental level. Each of the four Forum's thematic platforms was to produce recommendations pertinent to its policy area, present these at annual Civil Society Forum

⁴¹ "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Eastern Partnership," (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2008), : 9-12.

⁴² "Joint Paper - Commission/Council General Secretariat on Democracy Building in EU External Relations," (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2009).

⁴³ As a matter of fact, at the time of writing, no *European Consensus on Democracy* has been adopted as of yet, despite the backing the proposal has received not only from the Czech Republic and Sweden, but also the many other like-minded countries (mostly other CEECs, but also the United Kingdom). This not only speaks to the sensitivity of democracy as a policy domain as such, but also to the importance of securing continuous support for ambitious proposals across several consecutive Council Presidencies. Such support, however, faded particularly as a result of the scepter of the Council Presidency being taken over by Spain – generally less euphoric about external democratization – in 2010.

⁴⁴ Neuman, "Interview X," : 6.

conferences, with selected representatives then briefing and participating in the Partnership platforms and ministerial meetings. To achieve the transposition of these goals into the Forum's founding statute, Prague attempted to strengthen its position within COHOM by pointing out its expertise in the democratization domain in Eastern Europe. With COHOM meetings being chaired by LPTP director Dlouhá, the Czech Republic seemed to make use of what Haverland terms 'expert strategy',⁴⁵ namely the mobilization of *content expertise* by the government to increase its leverage in Brussels, which may explain policy making beyond the lowest common denominator. As such, Dlouhá pointed out Prague's long-standing experience with supporting non-governmental organizations in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. Moreover, if Prague's uploading efforts witnessed the precedent of the MFA using Coreu to disseminate non-governmental organizations' policy outputs among EU member states, Prague also resorted to extraordinary negotiation tactics by inviting NGO representatives to COHOM meetings. Indeed, the Czech Presidency provided Belorussian and Burmese representatives of their respective civil society sectors with the possibility to brief the twenty-seven EU members about the state of human rights and democracy in their country directly on Council soil. As an MFA official maintains, the rationale behind this precedent was that the Czech Republic thought this indispensable 'when we constantly declare our commitment to civil society and most COHOM officials never met a representative of an NGO.'⁴⁶

While the Czech Republic's unorthodox methods of establishing its authority within COHOM bore fruit in the form of the other EU member states signing off on the Forum as such,⁴⁷ the other two aspects Prague proposed were to cause more controversy. Whereas once again the group of the usual suspects prone to push the democratization agenda – Austria, the Baltic and the Nordic states, the Visegrád Four, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom – jointly promoted the empowerment of the Forum vis-à-vis the Eastern Partnership, the Southern European "bloc" once again turned out to be the stumbling block. Specifically, France voiced its discomfort with the proposition of civil society representatives accessing the Partnership's multilateral platform. The Czechs realized that the French position on the CSF was guided by a fear that if the Forum – and the Eastern Partnership writ large – turned out to be a success, the then ailing and French-favored Union for the Mediterranean could see its funding reduced in favor of the ENP's Eastern dimension. Ultimately, then, despite COHOM discussions being generally open to mutual persuasion based on best practices and best arguments,⁴⁸ the final agreement between the two opposing coalitions took the form of a political compromise;

⁴⁵ Markus Haverland, "How Leader States Influence EU Policy-Making: Analysing the Expert Strategy," *European Integration Online Papers* 13, no. 25 (2009): 2.

⁴⁶ Neuman, "Interview X," : 4.

⁴⁷ ———, "Interview T," (Brussels: Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union, 2010), : 4.

⁴⁸ ———, "Interview Z," (Brussels: Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the European Union, 2011), : 2.

while the Forum would be structured along the Partnership's thematic platforms, which it would monitor, its representatives would be able to access the Eastern Partnership only upon invitation and on an ad-hoc basis. Hence, while civil society organizations would perform the role of shadow governments to the individual Eastern Partnership thematic platforms, drafting their recommendations, these would not be disseminated among relevant Partnership delegates through *official* channels, thereby significantly limiting the potency of the Civil Society Forum as envisaged by Prague.

Conclusion

The value added of this contribution is twofold. First, it feeds into the discussion of whether the new member states that have joined the European Union in 2004/2007/2013 form a unitary block that not only shares interest in many of the EU's policy areas, but that also pursues this interest jointly. This paper looks closer at the positions the new EU member states hold *qua* external democratization and – concerning the above asked – argues that while certain common traits that all eleven scrutinized countries exhibit can be detected, they do not form a homogeneous block. Building upon previous work of scholars concerned with the European Union's external democratization policy and the role the new member states play within this, this study proceeds by constructing a matrix by grouping the new EU members into four categories *qua* external democratization. The horizontal axis is determined by the countries' bilateral relationship with post-Soviet Russia (positive/negative) as this is argued to largely determine the country's interest in democratizing its near (and further) abroad. The vertical axis then places the respective countries along a continuum defined by the motives the country harbors when constructing and implementing its external democratization policy (democracy promotion as an end/democracy promotion as a means). While two of the new member states – Bulgaria and Slovenia – are hardly preoccupied with external democratization at all, interestingly enough, the vast majority of the other countries regard democratization as an integral aspect of their foreign policy orientation.

Such a categorization of the European Union's Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern members subsequently opens an entirely new research agenda revolving around a new set of questions. What precisely is the role the separate new member states play within the EU's external democratization policy, which continues to suffer from numerous shortcomings, among which the lack of determination and consistency on Brussels' side figures prominently? Do the new member states form regional clusters – based not on their geographic proximity, but shared preferences – and if they do, do they promote their interests at the EU level jointly? Moreover, are those new member states successful in translating their domestic preferences *qua* external democratization into an EU-wide approach? With these questions in mind, this study makes a first attempt at assessing the role

of one of the new member states – namely the Czech Republic – in causing a change in the EU’s external democratization policy. Focus on the Czech Republic can be substantiated for two fundamental reasons. First, Prague has long attempted to position itself as an external democratization actor internationally, predominantly by means of conducting its own bilateral transition policy. As such, it should come as no surprise that once an EU member, it would attempt to translate its domestic preference onto the EU level. Second, its ability to do so may have been vastly enhanced as a result of holding the EU Council presidency in the first half of 2009. Consequently, through process-tracing, this study analyzes the extent to which the Czech Republic was successful in (i) garnering support for the adoption of a European Consensus on Democracy and (ii) establishing an effective Civil Society Forum accompanying the emerging Eastern Partnership. With regard to both, the findings were sobering; while the EU member states failed to agree even on the basic features of a European Consensus on Democracy, the Civil Society Forum – while established – fell short of Prague’s ambitions *qua* autonomy.

Notwithstanding these empirical results, the mere fact that Prague mobilized its entire foreign policy administration to bring about a change in the EU’s external democracy promotion policy goes to show that the new member states cannot be expected to stand idle while their national positions *qua* external democratization remain un-reflected in the EU framework. As such, more research into both the role of the individual new member states and potential regional groupings in reinvigorating the EU’s external democratization policy would be of merit. Only then will we be able to stipulate whether the 2004/2007/2013 EU enlargement truly constituted a break with the European Union’s pre-2004 lackluster approach to promoting democracy abroad.

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