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What Has Europe Been Doing?

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Abstract

European governments are spending more on political aid and democratization in particular. The ways in which this money is being spent have evolved. This has corrected many shortcomings of previous European democracy-promotion policies but also leaves many doubts about the effectiveness of this funding. In particular, it remains uncertain how pertinent the strong European focus on governance and social policies is to broad, systemic-level political change. Some contours of a “European” approach to democracy exist, but significant differences remain between the policies of different member states, and simplistic differentiation from US policies should be resisted.

Trends in Democracy Assistance

WHAT HAS EUROPE BEEN DOING?

Richard Youngs

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Is Europe spending enough on democracy assistance, and spending it in the best ways? How pertinent to democracy is such aid, and how will the programs through which it is funneled need to improve if they are to meet rising challenges to democratization? Recent years—which have seen the European Union and its member states spending significantly more on foreign political aid in general and democratization in particular—have made these questions more important than ever. Before addressing them in detail, it will be well to survey the field of European political aid both in itself and as it compares to efforts by other donor societies. As a matter of deliberate policy, EU donor countries generally prefer to fund civil society initiatives as well as efforts to improve governance and respect for human rights. Although most European countries focus on sub-Saharan Africa, there are differences of emphasis, geographic and otherwise, from one donor country to another. Moreover, the ways in which the money is spent have been evolving as well.

Making a direct comparison between European and U.S. levels of democracy assistance is nearly impossible. European donors—the EU itself as well as individual member states—actively work on political-reform issues and administer numerous democracy-related budgets. These initiatives are often defined in a variety of ways and combine democracy assistance with governance, human rights, and civil society support (see Table 1 on p. 162). European donors generally resist the notion that democracy aid can be separated from these related issues. In most cases, assistance to political reform, broadly defined, has increased incrementally, if unspectacularly, during the last decade.

The United Kingdom recently surpassed Germany (traditionally the

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