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Democracy Promotion and the European Left: Ambivalence Confused?

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Contents

I. Precursors to 9/11 2

II. The European Left (scarcely) Debates Democracy 4

III. Four Axes of Doubt and Confusion 8

- Military Intervention 8
- US Unilateralism 9
- Universal Values and the Islamist Question 11
- Economic Development as Alternative 13

IV. Towards a Progressive Take on Democracy Promotion 14

The new prominence of debates over democracy promotion has engendered much soul searching in Europe. While the European Union (EU) has introduced enhanced democracy promotion commitments since 9/11, a distinct lack of enthusiasm has been evident from many European governments. Democracy promotion commitments have routinely been conveyed in a fashion suggesting that Europe has followed reluctantly in the US's footsteps. Many European governments and officials either give the impression that they are not enthusiastic about democracy promotion, but rather grudgingly feel the need to move with an international zeitgeist clumsily foisted upon them by the United States; or they confidently assert that the EU already has an established and superior model of democracy promotion.

Although the United States has been committed to democracy promotion to some degree under Republican and Democratic presidencies since the 1960s, US democracy policies appeared to move up a gear in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Overall, US funding on democracy increased from around 800 million dollars at the beginning of the century to 1.4 billion dollars in 2005; the new Millennium Challenge Account has made additional aid increases conditional upon democracy-related criteria; Washington began for the first time openly to criticise the democratic shortfalls of some key allies, such as Saudi Arabia; and notable pro-democracy interventions were undertaken in Ukraine and Georgia. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has spoken of a new 'transformational diplomacy' guiding US foreign policy.

Rather than being widely welcomed, this US advocacy of democracy promotion has been generally viewed with suspicion. Far from the US's new focus on democracy having fomented a widespread and intensified support for democracy promotion amongst other states and international organisations, misgivings have increasingly taken root. Indeed, the democracy agenda is now widely judged to be treading water. 'Freedom's agenda', in the words of one expert, is 'under siege'.[2]

European doubts have emanated from different positions on the ideological spectrum, with divisions often forming along national rather than left-right lines. But debates over democracy promotion appear to have engendered some very specific and particularly difficult dilemmas for the European left. While European leftist criticism of the United States is familiar and of long pedigree, the admonishment has traditionally centred on the pre-eminence in American policies of unprincipled *realpolitik*. Advocacy of foreign policies centred more strongly on human rights and democratic values was often seen, to a significant extent, as the preserve of progressives. With a widely derided, right-wing US president now adopting a 'forward leaning' strategy to spread 'freedom', the left's broad criticism of US foreign policies seemed to infuse its perspective on the democracy agenda. This question invites further investigation.

This paper provides an account of democracy-related debates within different quarters of the European left. It adds to on-going debates through empirical research aimed at revealing more about the way in which democracy promotion is being debated within left of centre parties in four of the most influential member states of the European Union: Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The paper's originality lies in it providing primary source material, from a large number of interviews conducted with politicians and political party officials, as well as from published policy statements, position papers and speeches of party leaders.

Our research highlights the paucity of democracy promotion debates within the European left. To the extent that democracy promotion has been debated by the left, it has been largely as an off-shoot of other concerns. While in principle the left shares an aspiration to encourage democratic governance, a

The authors wish to thank Michael Allen, Fred Halliday, Mark Leonard, David Mepham and Ted Piccone for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and Kristina Kausch and Irene Menéndez for invaluable research support.

[2] Windsor J., 'Advancing the Freedom Agenda: Time for a Recalibration?', *The Washington Quarterly*, 29/3, 2006, p. 21.

notable ambivalence over democracy promotion strategies has arisen. This ambivalence derives from doubts over four questions:

1) The ethics of military intervention;
2) American unilateralism;
3) The universality of democratic norms; and
4) The relationship between economic development and democracy promotion.

The paper contends that the nature of such debates reflects considerable conceptual confusion within the European left. It argues that clearer understanding and more focused debate on these four 'axes of doubt' would enable the left to develop a more committed approach to democracy promotion. The European left could in this way reclaim the properly progressive dimensions of democracy promotion – rather than further relinquishing leadership of this agenda as a reflexive reaction against its adoption by a right-wing US administration.[3]

I. Precursors to 9/11

Before outlining current debates, it is instructive to recall that the European left has long wrestled with issues related to democracy. History reveals that support for international democracy was often strongly rooted in liberal-leftist thinking; even if it was sometimes seen as sitting uneasily with other (perceived) 'progressive' values.

The evolution of the left as a political force in Europe went hand in hand with the evolution of democracy on the continent. At the same time, the left's contribution to democratisation was accompanied by the development of other themes in progressive politics, which limited the pursuit of democracy as an exclusive goal. Pacifism, redistribution of wealth or recognition of other cultural values, for example, were also championed by the left. Sometimes they appeared to conflict – or at least compete - with the commitment to enhance democracy either domestically or as part of a foreign policy programme. Moreover, governments of the left frequently pursued policies based on perceived national interest rather than a commitment to ideological goals. In earlier periods of history the left's commitment to democracy was notable, although also not without caution.

Whilst support for democracy was central to earlier movements such as the seventeenth century Levellers in England, the modern concept was effectively a product of revolutionary France, which also gave birth to the term 'left'. From then on, the demand for greater democracy remained a clarion call of progressive forces in Europe. Leftist forces played, for example, a vital role in the embedding of Scandinavian social democracy. In the first half of the twentieth century, the commitment of many on the left to democracy was even more apparent as they attempted to maintain their influence in a continent increasingly torn between totalitarian forces of the left and right.

In the 1920s and 1930s some on the left, beguiled by revolutionary Marxism, ended up as apologists for authoritarian Stalinism. In Britain, even the Fabians extolled the virtues of 'Soviet Civilisation'. Others, such as Mussolini or Oswald Mosley in Britain actually founded fascist movements. And at the other end of the spectrum yet another group, typified by the Popular Front government of Leon Blum in France, retreated into pacifism and appeasement rather than defend democracy.[4] The bulk of the left, however, insisted that democracy and socialism were interdependent and actively resisted both communism and the advance of fascism through Western Europe. During the Spanish civil war, Clement Attlee went in person to the Republican front line in 1937 and some of the politicians who later dominated the post-war social democratic left demonstrated considerable personal courage in the face of totalitarian oppression. Willy Brandt's very name was a *nom de guerre* adopted

[3] A similar case in respect of the US Democrats has been made in Marshall W. (ed) *With all our Might*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.

[4] Brendon P., *Dark Valley*, London: Pimlico, 2001, pp.283-303.

when he was forced to flee Germany from the Nazis. Despite a 'flirtation' with Vichy, François Mitterrand escaped from his Nazi captors to spend the rest of World War II working with the resistance movement.[5]

With the onset of the Cold War, the mainstream European left continued to be amongst the strident critics of communism and Soviet domination. In Britain, communists or suspected 'fellow-travellers' were sometimes expelled from the Labour Party.[6] In Germany, the social democrats redrew their party programme at Bad Godesberg in 1959 to clarify their commitment to social democracy – a move later followed by the Spanish socialists (PSOE) after Franco's death in 1975. Leftist politicians and party foundations played significant roles in the democratic transitions that took place in Spain, Portugal and later in South Africa.

Beyond its frontiers, as European empires were dismantled, the left was frequently allied to the independence movements demanding democratic self-government in other parts of the world. But many European leftists – including politicians as different as Michael Foot and Shirley Williams in the UK, and much of the French political elite - were soon adopting sympathetic positions towards the raft of *dirigiste* autocrats that emerged across Africa and Asia, believing these leaders to be beneficial to economic development. Some leftist intellectuals pointed to the problematic impact on local democratic capacity of such anti-colonial solidarity.

Moreover, the apparent commitment to the broadening of democracy was mixed with some opposition on the left to the increasing militarism entailed by the Cold War. There was considerable tension within the left between those who sought robust security policies to defend what they argued were basic democratic freedoms, and those who regarded the militarisation itself as the bigger threat. Anti nuclear or quasi pacifist organisations founded in the 1950s waxed and waned throughout the European left, but on occasion were still able to mobilise large numbers of activists against, for example, the Vietnam war or the deployment of American Pershing missiles in the 1980s. In Madrid, suspicion of US-led collective security meant that the socialist Prime Minister, Felipe González, had to overcome significant opposition from within his own party and call a referendum before Spain joined NATO in 1982. A general distancing from the US meant there was little discernible European enthusiasm for President Carter's human rights-oriented foreign policy.

In the 1990s the European political class of left and right was preoccupied by the challenges that arose from the collapse of communism and the incorporation of most of central Europe into the European Union. As an exercise in spreading democracy, the success of this process, which culminated in the accession of ten new member states into the EU in 2004, should not be underplayed. At the same time, however, European unification distracted established democracies – and many on the left - from offering more assistance to Balkan states to manage a process of transition that might have helped to avoid a regional bloodbath.

Partly as a result of this experience, and partly from an awareness that globalisation was bringing new forces to bear in international relations, the foreign minister of the first social democratic government in Britain for nearly two decades sought to formulate a policy of *New Internationalism*. Foreign secretary Robin Cook argued that 'our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves'.[7] This spurred debates focused on the desirability of intervention in the Balkans, which did

[5] One of Brandt's most famous leitmotifs was 'we want to venture more democracy'.

[6] When Khrushchev was invited to a dinner at the House of Commons by Labour's National Executive Committee, the meal famously 'ended in uproar' when MPs, led by the Party leader Gaitskell, challenged the Russian leader over human rights abuses. Williams P., *Hugh Gaitskell*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.277.

[7] Rt Hon Robin Cook, *Mission Statement*, 15 May 1997. But even this commitment did not prevent the government from pursuing more traditional national interests when, for example, it went ahead with the controversial sale of British- built Hawk fighter aircraft to the Suharto regime in Indonesia.

translate into a gradually more significant commitment from the left to democracy-building in this area. Indeed, at this stage it appeared that parts of the European left were leading the way in forging a new 'liberal internationalism' that included a focus on democracy promotion. This was the state of unfolding debate when terrorists hit the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001.

II. The European Left (scarcely) Debates Democracy

Against this rich historical background, how did the European left react to 9/11? How has it debated democracy promotion during the last five years? To shed light on these questions, we interviewed politicians and officials from the main left of centre parties in four EU countries and surveyed in detail their policy statements and speeches. We found a remarkable dearth of deliberation over democracy promotion strategies.

In ***France***, the Socialist Party (PS) has not published any formal policy document or commitment on democracy promotion in the period after 9/11. One PS politician admitted that debate on the issue was 'non existent'. The shock of the party's defeat by the National Front in the 2002 presidential election is recognised to have turned the party inwards. At the same time, profound internal divisions over the EU constitution ensured that European issues have dominated the party's foreign policy deliberations. One socialist MP lamented that 'socialist and social-democratic solidarity and mobilisation is less strong compared to earlier generations' and that there has been 'a backsliding of international socialist solidarity'. 'The Socialists are closer to *realpolitik* than before, less utopian', this politician observes.

According to a French socialist member of the European parliament (MEP), on concrete policy choices, such as whether and how to use the democracy clause incorporated into EU external agreements, the Socialists have 'not [even] thought about it'. Within the PS the International Secretariat has far greater weight than the Human Rights Secretariat, which officials say has compounded a downgrading of democracy issues.

Few prominent French socialist politicians have spoken out unreservedly and explicitly in favour of the need to attach greater priority to democracy promotion. One relative exception is former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. He cautions that for European strategy the key is to 'jointly explore the road to democracy' with Arab states, avoiding 'one-to-one tensions', but also indicates that the EU should look at how to use association agreements clauses as more effective leverage.

One senior PS party official admits that the European left is in danger of repeating the same mistake as in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, when the US's more active policies in favour of democracy created a situation where 'many people in Central and Eastern Europe think much more favourably of the Americans than they do of Western Europe'. He is one of few French politicians pushing to overcome resistance – strong on both the left and right in France – to a European-level foundation for democracy.

Similarly, in ***Germany*** a senior Social Democratic party (SPD) foreign policy spokesman admits that 'democracy promotion, putting it mildly, has a rather low priority status'. SPD members make a distinction between ends and means: to the extent that democracy is promoted, it is a means to peace and stability, not, they assert, primarily as an end value in itself – this contrasted with what party officials judge to be the US perspective on democracy. While the party's general foreign policy spokesman insists that greater priority needs to be given to democracy promotion as reflective of progressive values, those in the Human Rights Committee reject such assertions.

Certainly, during the period of the red-green government (1998-2005) tensions grew between

chancellor Schröder and his SPD party as the latter became increasingly angered by the chancellor's 'double standards' and unprincipled actions in foreign policy. It was partly as a result of such growing realism that the SPD lost many of its left-wing members to the newly founded Election Alternative Grouping (WASG) and the Linkspartei (Left Party). Policy towards Russia was the most emblematic case of this tension. Party officials talk of progress having been made at a lower, 'institutional' level, through the creation of new instruments and guidelines (a Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee in the Bundestag, a Human Rights Commissioner in the Federal Foreign Office, a German Institute for Human Rights, a government-wide Action Plan for Human Rights, amongst others). At the same time, many in the party admit that they are minded to support a significant degree of *realpolitik*, for example in relation to China. One official quoted Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*: 'Grub first, then ethics'.

Since the change of government in Germany, the SPD has in some senses become a slightly more outspoken scrutiniser of democracy issues. Revealing the depth of division that had taken root between Schröder and his party, there has been some moderate praise from the SPD for Angela Merkel's diplomatic steps towards giving more weight to human rights issues. At the same time, SPD officials have doubted the impact: 'Merkel's shaking hands with Russian NGO leaders has not prevented the harsh NGO law from coming into force'. By mid-2006, the left was focusing its attention on criticising Merkel for agreeing to the sale of two submarines to Israel in the midst of the latter's incursions into Lebanon.

For several years, the SPD has been debating a renewal of its 1998 'Berlin' policy programme; the leadership is committed to submitting a new draft manifesto to internal debate in 2007. The 1998 programme includes an entire chapter on democracy, which contains general principles and proposals for their *domestic* implementation, but which lacks any mention of the active promotion of democracy *abroad.* Many members hope a policy renewal will provide the opportunity to define a more values-led foreign policy identity. So far, the party's participation in the new coalition government – including through occupancy of the foreign ministry – does not suggest any significant diminution of *realpolitik*.

Indeed, the *Power for Renewal* document that sets out proposals for the prospective new SPD manifesto marks some change in tone, but still lacks any explicit reference to the promotion of democratic regimes. Values-based issues are presented in more multilateralist terms such as, 'The rule of law must be ensured on a global scale through the strengthening of international jurisdiction'. The focus is overwhelmingly on challenges at the international level, with no prescribed action against particular authoritarian regimes at the individual, national level.

The new Linkspartei/WASG alliance, which now forms the so-called 'left faction' in the Bundestag, has been critical of the SPD's drift away from ethical values but has itself shown little interest in foreign policy. Its rhetoric is unsurprisingly anti-globalisation, multilateralist, pacifist, anti-imperialistic and anti-American; but neither of the two parties advocates the active promotion of democracy. The parties' manifestos suggest only the need to promote democratisation of the international financial architecture.

This lack of clarity and in-depth debate is widely seen in the SDP as reflective of the broader search for a post-1989 German foreign policy identity, which has also affected centre-right parties. While it is often perceived outside Germany that the party pursues an active democracy promotion policy through the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), officials stress that it is mistaken to perceive the latter as the party's democracy promotion branch: 'The FES is definitely no direct implementer of SPD policies', officials insist.

Significantly, German leftist politicians point to the lack of a strong lobby for democracy promotion from values-based advocacy groups, which in Germany tend to focus on other issues. The often-mentioned (including by many of our interviewees) German

'collective guilt complex' works as a double-edged sword in this respect: on the one hand, it intensifies opposition to non-democratic government; on the other hand, it makes Germans reluctant to 'tell people what to do'. This latter sentiment is often prominent in what is seen as representing progressive internationalism. Many in the German left admit to clinging to the principle of 'inherited guilt', to the detriment of forceful democracy promotion. Our interlocutors suggest that while this self-castigation has begun to be questioned during the last two or three years, it remains an influential conditioner of foreign policy. Germany's much heralded 'return to international responsibility' has had significant impact on German foreign policies, but has not yet sired a clear leftist commitment to democracy promotion.

The SPD ambivalence is thrown into even sharper relief alongside the pro-democracy commitments of the Green party. It was the Green party's foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, who between 1998 and 2005 worked hardest and almost on a parallel track to the chancellor's office in order to retain some focus on democracy and human rights within the Schröder government. Contrasting with its SPD counterpart, the Green party's manifesto at the 2005 elections stated that: 'democracy must be promoted worldwide and universal human rights acknowledged in the world all over ... [and] ... [s]anctions must be made more effective'.

Meanwhile, in ***Spain*** socialist Prime Minister José Luis Rodríquez Zapatero has at best been a tepid advocate of democracy promotion. He regularly stresses the desirability of democratic transition, before cautioning that Spain should encourage such change gently and, at most, through cultural dialogue. Within a Spanish domestic political context of bitter tensions between Zapatero's governing social democratic party (PSOE) and the centre-right *Partido Popular* (PP), this soft, cultural approach is frequently given a 'progressive spin'. Moreover, Zapatero and other Spanish ministers stress their support for democracy, but then in public speeches on the Middle East suggest contentment that reforms under way in Arab states do in fact represent democratisation – a judgement with which few independent observers concur.

The Zapatero government has undoubtedly sought to inject a more moral discourse into Spain's foreign policy identity. But the norms frequently listed by ministers and policy statements are those of international legality; multilateralism; social justice; and poverty reduction. Democracy is rarely mentioned as a priority. Launching the United Nations High-level Group's report on the Alliance of Civilisations, the prime minister stressed the relevance of this initiative - his most distinctive foreign policy proposal - to reviving the Middle East peace process and to confronting 'those who want to sacrifice peace to defend our values' (for which, read the US and the UK). Its use as an instrument for pressing Arab governments into democratic reform was not envisaged.[8] Perhaps most controversially, the PSOE government pursued a new engagement and partnership with Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, despite this policy being strongly condemned by the party's own core supports, precisely on human rights grounds.[9]

One prominent PSOE figure laments that, 'The debate on democracy promotion is non-existent within the PSOE International Secretariat', which is understaffed and under-funded. Another PSOE member of parliament recognised that, 'We only talk about democracy promotion when it is a necessity, when situations arise that cannot be tolerated'. Another party official concurs that there is 'no internal debate within the party on democracy promotion as such, partly because control of this area has been taken over by the government'. Moreover, she highlights, with a weak International Secretariat the perception is widespread that 'the PSOE does not have the capacities – like the German Foundations do – to increase the political weight of democracy promotion and put policies into practice'. Even in Latin America, the one area where the PSOE does have some pro-

8 *El País,* 14 November 2006.

9 Barbé E.,'Disenso y adversidad: la política exterior y de seguridad de España en 2005', in *CIDOB Anuario Internacional 2005*, Barcelona: Fundació CIDOB, p. 290.

democracy legacy, 'the PSOE needs to reaffirm its commitment in this area'. And even advocates of an upgraded democracy policy within the PSOE prefer to see this emerge 'from the political foundations, not from the party'.

PSOE debates have focused on how to respond to specific situations, with discussion at the level of 'how to deal with Chávez', rather than the design of an overall democracy promotion policy. One PSOE official argues that in relation to Morocco, and 'in the context of the rise of Islamists, the Party does not know how to deal with the situation': 'There is no discussion on the issue of rising Islamism nor on relations with the Moroccan socialists', the intensity of relations between the government and Morocco 'precludⁿing] greater party action'.

PSOE officials reveal that the one partial exception has been in relation to China. But, although there was discussion on the need for a focus on democracy, in this case ultimately economic motives prevailed. While PSOE dialogue with the Chinese Communist Party is ostensibly intended to build-up trust to address human rights concerns, party officials admit that the latter have been avoided so far. More generally, PSOE insiders reveal that there have been no recent instances where the party has pressed strongly for cooperation to be withdrawn or dialogue suspended on democracy-related grounds. Representatives of *Izquierda Unida* (IU), the smaller party to the left of the PSOE, admonish the latter for their 'attitude of exceptionalism towards the Castro regime, which should not exist'.

One Spanish MEP admits that the left has not 'had the strength' to request that the European Commission invoke the EU's democracy clause. The lack of consideration given to detailed policy choices is also revealed by a PSOE member of the European Parliament's External Affairs Committee, who suggests that for the European left it is now 'more a question of implementation of existing instruments than of devising an alternative theoretical framework/discourse'.

Leftist politicians admit that there has been a stronger focus on internal than external rights issues. At the European level, for instance, European Socialist Party (PSE) representatives admit to a far stronger focus on bettering the quality of European democracy than on exporting democratic values.

Some of our Spanish, French and German interviewees point to the way in which the centre of gravity within party structures has shifted towards Brussels, and argue that this helps explain the stronger focus on internal EU issues such as agriculture and constitutional change rather than external democracy promotion. 'Europe has absorbed the International Secretariats of national political parties', one MEP complains: where earlier struggles saw greater solidarity with liberation movements and brother parties, 'now, Europe ... [has] ... been pushed to the fore'. Another centre-left MEP observes that discipline within the European Socialist party is limited, with MEPs 'carrying out their own agendas', rather than sticking to any party line on democracy.

As in so many other policy areas, the debate in ***Britain*** has been somewhat different. It is the British Labour Party that of all European parties and institutions has made probably the most outspoken case for democracy promotion in recent years. In a formal policy statement of 'Foreign Policy Priorities and Beliefs' the party maintains that: 'Our core values of equality and social justice resonate in the way we engage with the rest of the world, seeking to help alleviate poverty, protect human rights, build peace and promote democracy'.[10] This is echoed by the latest draft of another policy document, *Britain in the World (2006)*, which states that, 'Promoting democracy and human rights is at the heart of Labour's foreign policy'.[11]

Despite deep divisions amongst the Labour rank and file over Iraq, these policy statements have been widely supported within the party and ratified by the party's

[10] Available at www.labour.org.uk

[11] See *Partnership in Power* policy documentation at www.labour.org.uk

formal decision-making mechanisms. Indeed, much pressure from within the party has been aimed at the Labour government's failure more robustly to implement its democracy promotion commitments. One former minister laments that the Blair government has in practice done little to 'look creatively' at supporting NGOs, foundations and opposition forces, or to 'develop instruments of soft power' that could 'provide the mechanisms for making real changes' in developing states. A Labour MEP complains that, 'We prefer to make speeches than do something'.

However, other sections of the British Labour party have been more ambiguous towards the democracy promotion agenda. Former development minister Clare Short, who resigned over Iraq (after the invasion had taken place), argues that under some circumstances democracy promotion work might actually be counterproductive in achieving development goals. Few Labour members have directly opposed democracy promotion, but many have balked at the 'missionary' zeal with which they judge Blair to have approached the challenge of encouraging democracy and human rights. The left in Britain might have been less ambivalent about democracy promotion than its continental counterparts, but many in the Labour party cautioned that the Iraq experience and Blair's line on the Israel-Hizbollah conflagration of July 2006 had left Britain badly placed to act as a credible lead player in Arab political reform.

III. Four Axes of Doubt and Confusion

This provides a flavour of the general ambivalence that has taken root amongst large sections of the European left over democracy promotion since 9/11. Digging slightly deeper, four different 'axes' of concern and caveat can be discerned in debates over the democracy promotion agenda.

These four sets of concern exist in relation to:

1) The use of military intervention to protect or promote democratic government;
2) The association of democracy promotion with American unilateralist tendencies;
3) The extent to which democracy is a universal value; and
4) The rightful sequencing of economic development and democracy promotion.

Our primary source research sheds light on each of these axes of debate in turn.

Military Intervention

The issue of military intervention has to an overwhelming degree dominated the foreign policy debate on the left. The question of military projection has been conflated with democracy promotion, or has at the very least overshadowed the other, far more 'bread and butter' aspects of democracy-support strategies.

In Germany, SPD officials insist that the party is strongly and unanimously opposed to the US approach to democracy promotion, which the party associates with the use of force outside of the boundaries of international law: as one spokesman revealed, 'There is hardly any topic on which there is such unity throughout the party'. Debate within the

SPD has, members highlight, been overwhelmingly dominated by the question of military intervention. While few question outright the desirability of encouraging democratic governance, caution in the party stems from the perception that the US is embarked on a campaign of 'imposing' democracy: 'Nobody has the right to impose their model of a democratic state on any other society, which might want a different kind of democracy, or not even be prepared for democracy at all, as was the case, for example, in Afghanistan', stated one foreign affairs spokesman. Hence, the SPD position is said to be 'more differentiated' than that of the US, to the extent that it is both based on support for a wider range of social groups and on a rejection of military intervention to change a regime.

However, while strenuously rejecting this (perceived) US proclivity for promoting democracy through force, SPD representatives support Germany's cautious moves away from its post-war civilian power status: 'It is remarkable that the first deployment of German troops abroad has happened under the rule of a left government', suggested one member. While Germany also sent troops to the Great Lakes, one SPD spokesman highlighted that this deployment was debated in terms of a narrow peace-restoration mandate and not linked to the design of a broader democracy-building effort. The left often appears to be far more comfortable with the discourse of conflict resolution than it is with that of democracy promotion, even though analysts argue that in practice these are deeply intertwined agendas.

In Spain, the PSOE also backed NATO's intervention in Afghanistan. This engendered criticism and charges of hypocrisy from IU, the latter arguing that the Afghanistan intervention lacked firm legal grounds in the same way as the Iraq invasion (which the IU and PSOE jointly condemned). Somewhat contrary to the perceptions left by its departure from Iraq, the PSOE government's most notable contribution to democracy is listed – by many of its own senior members – as precisely the dispatching of troops to places like Afghanistan, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the case of the latter, Spain's 800-troop deployment is the largest among European countries. The numbers of Spanish troops now authorised to serve overseas on missions with an element of democracy promotion is not significantly different under the current socialist government than it was under the centre-right *Partido Popular* government and there is debate within the PSOE about the extent to which Spain should increase its peacekeeping capacity in the future. Despite this, few PSOE ministerial speeches or conversations with officials are bereft of veiled criticism of those who seek 'to impose democracy by force'. The then International Secretary of the PSOE, Trinidad Jiménez, criticised the US policy of preventive strikes and 'regime change based on military invasion as a pretext for promoting democracy'.[12]

Indeed, in light of the left's support for a range of missions other than in Iraq, the latter has represented an exception. But this exception has had a disproportionate impact on views towards the democracy promotion agenda. The most common reaction from leftist politicians (in our survey) when asked about democracy promotion has been to focus in on the line that, 'We do not support force to impose democracy' – even if this is not the question being put to them. Politicians of the left acknowledge that this is the issue that has excited passions and dominated debates, in a way that has diverted attention away from the questions far more pertinent to 'everyday' democracy promotion: what level of funding to invest in this area, what forms of conditionality to contemplate or with which kinds of opposition group to engage.

US Unilateralism

Related to the military intervention debate, our research of the European left confirms the suspicion that much of the left has questioned democracy

[12] Jiménez T., 'Nuevos Instrumentos Para la Seguridad y la Cooperación Internacional', Speech, 18 November 2004.

promotion because this is seen as an agenda primarily sponsored by a right-wing American president.[13]

The judgement is common that the post-2001 commitment to more muscular democracy promotion serves merely as a convenient and unduly instrumental cloak for US power-projection. Robust democracy promotion has not, critics charge, been pursued by Washington in a way consistent with the ethical premises underlying the very concept of democracy. This in turn has made it easier for autocrats to clampdown against democracy promotion activities, with some success convincing their populations that these in truth represent a US effort to increase its own strategic reach rather than a legitimate normative agenda.

Most on the left attach considerable importance to not wanting to 'be associated' with an agenda whose credibility has been undermined by the Bush administration's own apparent disregard for international human rights standards – as evidenced in detention conditions at Guantanamo Bay, the abuses carried out at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the practice of 'rendition'. Despite this point having been so heavily laboured and being so apparently obvious to the rest of the world, it still appears to have found little sympathetic hearing in the Bush administration or met with any understanding about why this may be a problem for the European politicians the US seeks to enlist in democracy's cause.

Our interviews suggest that the view is highly prevalent on the left that democracy promotion is a disingenuous vehicle to promote or perpetuate the American national self-interest, driven by ideological forces antithetical to the left. Many in the SPD, for example, judge the term 'democracy promotion' to be a US-imposed term, which is seen as a fig leaf to secure US strategic interests. Despite some French leftist voices tentatively admonishing the extent of their compatriots' anti-Americanism, this assumption is also received wisdom in Paris.

This objection is routinely linked to the view that the US is home to a particular model of market capitalism, which tolerates levels of social inequality that are anathema to European social democrats - it is assumed that Washington seeks to promote democracy as part of this broader package, thus further undermining potential left-liberal support.

In a typical example of these views, the maverick British left-winger Tony Benn argues that, 'The left should be very cautious about getting involved in democracy promotion because for many people it is simply a smokescreen for getting rid of one government you don't like and putting in its place another government you do like. I don't for a moment believe that George Bush is interested in democracy. Look at the American approach to Chávez in Venezuela'.

Others on the mainstream, orthodox European left have adopted a sceptical view of American policy within the context of perceived national or historical experiences when the US worked to subvert apparently democratic left-wing movements. In Greece one left-leaning commentator opined that, 'The concept of democracy promotion is closely linked to the United States and is, therefore, thought of as an American idea ... Many Greeks, especially on the left, remember American involvement in the left's defeat in the Civil War [1948-9] and their support for the military coup and dictatorship of the Colonels after 1967. The predominant view is that the Americans use democracy promotion to in fact promote their own national interest'. Similar perceptions in Spain often flow from the left's criticism of the US for having propped up the fascist regime of General Franco, when it suited them.

In other cases the left has displayed a bewildering contrariness. A decade ago, many on the left berated governments for failing to isolate regimes such as that of Suharto in Indonesia or Abacha in Nigeria following flagrant abuses of human rights. Yet more recently, when the US has contemplated sanctions against, for example the Iranian regime, leftist politicians and commentators have not welcomed such proposals as measures that might give substance to international

[13] The contention given significant intellectual profile by the European 'manifesto' proposed by Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 May 2003.

ethics but have tended to criticise them as unilateralist and imperialistic bullying.

The task of defending the role of the US in democracy promotion policy has fallen primarily to ministers in the British government. In 2005 the then British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, accepted that for some on the left 'President Bush's commitment to promoting freedom and democracy is simplistic and misguided, or is simply a veil for more sinister motives', but he insisted that 'to promote democracy requires that the UK and Europe as a whole work closely with the United States'.

Straw noted that the traditional positions of idealists (left) and realists (right) were now being inverted, and argued that the left should not let this happen: '[I]t would be highly dangerous for the left to settle into a comfort zone and become the opponents and critics of American power and American objectives in the world. The left has always believed in the power of politics to change things for the better – and in the extension of freedom and democracy. Today we have a better chance than ever to promote that in the Middle East ... The left should be seizing this opportunity, leading the drive to bring Europe and America together in support of democracy and freedom'.[14]

This view has been asserted even more forcefully by Tony Blair who in 2006 argued that 'anti-American feeling in parts of European politics is madness when set against the long-term interests of the world we believe in. The danger with America today is not that they are too much involved. The danger is they decide to pull up the drawbridge and disengage'.[15]

But at lower levels in the British Labour party, critical association of democracy promotion with US unilateralism persists. One noted liberal commentator observes that many on the left 'have become trapped into a crude anti-Americanism where "my enemy's enemy is my friend"'. As one expert outlines, the left's venom for Blair's 'internationalism' has simply intensified, in the last year expressed for example through the explicit support given by large parts of the British Labour movement to the increasingly autocratic Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez.[16] Curiously, the European left has ended up being more critical of the US role in democracy promotion than some Arab civil society organisations![17]

Universal Values and the Islamist Question

Another axis of debate has been over whether democracy promotion amounts to little more than the imposition of a particular set of Western values and ideals to parts of the world.

Mainstream left politicians have regularly asserted what they see to be the universal applicability of democratic norms. For example, Jack Straw asserted that, 'The aspiration for democracy is universal. We are sometimes told that democracy is a Western value; and that promoting democracy reflects a Western agenda which we are seeking to impose on others. That is a condescending and ignorant position and I utterly reject it'.

The existence of this current of thought has been acknowledged and attacked by Tony Blair: rejecting the relativism used by Islamic leaders to resist democracy the British Prime Minister lamented, 'Their case is that democracy is a Western concept that we are forcing on an unwilling culture of Islam; the problem we have is that a part of the opinion in our own countries agrees with them'.[18]

14 Straw J., 'Democracy Promotion: a progressive foreign policy agenda', Speech, 2005.

15 Blair T., 'Global Alliance for Global Values', Speech, 27 March 2006.

16 Michael Allen, review of Francis Fukuyama 'America at the Crossroads. Democracy, Power and the Neoconservatives', in *Democratiya,* August 2006.

17 See for example, Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy, *Open letter to President Bush*, 11 September 2006 – this Washington-based institute compiling a list of activists and experts from the Middle East calling for the US to invest more effort in promoting political reform.

18 Blair, Global Alliances, op. cit.

In Spain, Prime Minister Zapatero explicitly rejects relativism, insisting that he sees no incompatibility between democracy and the Arab world: everywhere, he argues, 'Freedom is the best protection against intolerance and extremism'. At the same time he argues for respect for cultural specificities.[19]

However, our interviews reveal that strong currents of relativism persist within the European left – amongst both politicians, party officials and prominent leftist public intellectuals associated (in Britain) with journals such as *The New Left Review*. An intellectual pedigree continues here from the left's role in the radical relativism of post-modernism and post-structuralism – and indeed from a broad reluctance amongst leftist intellectuals to suggest that democratic values should in any way be seen as 'superior'.[20] Such a perspective is often aligned with an argument that EU states generally must be cautious in promoting democracy as a universal value as their colonial histories give them a legitimacy problem.[21]

Doubts over value universality surfaced in Germany in 2001-2002 in relation to whether adherence to a so-called *Leitkultur* ('leading culture') should be made a prerequisite for permanent residence. This domestic debate spilled over in an indirect sense to generate some unease over notions of cultural superiority embedded – it was judged by many on the left – in the democracy promotion agenda. SPD representatives acknowledge that the influence of cultural relativism on German left is still notable: some here explicitly term more value-based foreign policies as 'imperialistic'.

Reflecting the depth of such relativism, some journalists criticise the left for having 'abandoned large parts of the feminist agenda and ... women to the resurgent Taliban and the Warlords in Afghanistan ... [T]he really big mistake of the left is that it has been seduced by relativism. Leaving the Middle East to "solve its own problems" is a mistake. That simply leaves the Middle East in the hands of tyrants, despots, kings and thugs ... The left is defensive and afraid of being accused of "imposing" its own values. So it is cautious about standing up robustly for universal values and human rights'.

Two, opposed reactions have been forthcoming to the question of political Islam – neither constitutive of thoughtful democracy promotion. On the one hand, some on the left have explicitly allied with radical, anti-democratic Islamist forces in the Arab world on the basis of a shared anti-imperialism.[22] On the other hand, some liberal-left commentators have urged the left not to favour engagement with moderate but (they charge) highly conservative Islamist opposition groups, suggesting that progressive policies should have no truck with helping these repressed political groupings gain stronger democratic freedom.[23]

Domestic events have in turn lent fresh impulse to debates on the European left about the extent to which democracy – and other cherished continental values – are universal. For many of the European left the debate about democracy promotion, particularly in the Middle East, has become conflated with a debate about the compatibility of Western values and those of Muslims living in Europe.

Widespread rioting by disaffected young people from immigrant communities in France, the assassination of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands, Mohammed Atta's use of Hamburg as a base to plan 9/11, and the revelation that the 7/7 London bombers were actually British-born Muslims has led to considerable reflection on what is going wrong. The impact of large – and growing – immigrant communities *within* Europe is a

19 Rodriguez Zapatero J. L, Speech to the Arab League, 22 March 2005.

20 For a recent outline of which, see Lebow R. N., 'Fear, interest and honour: outlines of a theory of International Relations.', *International Affairs* 82/3, 2006, pp. 431-448.

21 Schmid D., 'A legitimate emergency? European efforts for democracy promotion in the Mediterranean', Foreign Policy Centre, April 2006, p. 10.

22 Halliday F., 'La izquierda y la 'yihad'', *El País*, 5 October 2006.

23 Berman P., *Terror and Liberalism*, London: Norton, 2004, p. 112; Bright M., *When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries: The British State's Flirtation with radical Islamism*, London: Policy Exchange, 2006, p. 12.

factor only slowly being absorbed into foreign policy debates. But few would doubt the relevance for the wider debate about democracy promotion of the way in which Europe seeks to resolve its own internal difficulties of integration.

The French left defends a strictly secularist vision of democracy. For Lionel Jospin the revival of religion is not positive for democracy, and the followers of such trends 'must come to terms with secularisation'. This goes hand in hand with the familiar statist model of political change: 'nothing can replace the state as the vehicle for democratisation and modernisation'. Much of this message is directed primarily at the French domestic audience, although Jospin also suggests that European governments must make much more concerted use of European Muslim communities to convey the pro-democracy message in the Arab world.[24]

In Britain, the cause of democratic universality has recently been taken up by the *Euston Manifesto*, a document drawn up by left of centre academics and political activists. This Manifesto states that, 'We reject the cultural relativist view according to which ... basic human rights are not appropriate for certain nations or peoples'. The group argues that the left has a moral duty vigorously to promote democratic values abroad. 'We value the tradition and institutions, the legacy of good governance of those countries in which liberal, pluralist democracies have taken hold ... We decline to make excuses for or to indulgently 'understand' reactionary regimes and movements for which democracy is a hated enemy – regimes which repress their own people or movements that aspire to do so'.[25]

Economic Development as Alternative

A final strand of deliberation reveals uncertainty within the European left over the relationship between economic development and democracy. Exhaustive academic debate has shown repeatedly that the causal links between economic and political change are complex and run in both directions. In formal terms, few on the left would indeed assert that the imperatives of economic development require the active *dis*couraging of democracy. However, the most common view is that economic development and poverty reduction are priorities that suggest a need not to overstate the focus on democracy – rather than development goals driving a *greater* focus on political liberalisation.

Again, there is intellectual background here: a prominent neo-Gramscian, critical take argues that under the label of democracy promotion the West has typically sought a 'low quality democracy' that functions better than autocratic regimes in 'disciplining' labour and securing the interests of multinationals rather than acting as a creed of genuine economic development.[26]

We found some nuanced sympathy for such doubts in our interviews. Lionel Jospin argues that democratic change requires, above all, prior effort to secure greater social and economic equality. Similarly, for another former French socialist Prime Minister, Michel Rocard (MEP), the French conception is of democracy promotion being inseparable from economic reform and welfare. In this sense, France's decision to abstain from supporting the *Warsaw Declaration* that created the Community of Democracies in 2000 in part related to this presenting democracy in a way that was 'exempt from references to the need to tackle poverty, as if democracy had its own virtues'. The conception of democracy put forward at the Warsaw meeting was, in Rocard's view, 'inoperable', because it did not take into account issues such as education and employment.

24 Presentation delivered at the conference, 'Democracy and Dialogue: The West and the Arab World', Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo, Santander, August 2006, see, www.fride.org

25 See www.eustonmanifesto.org

26 Robinson W., *Promoting Polyar*chy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Gills B. et al (eds), *Low Intensity Democracy: Political Power in the New World Order*, London: Pluto Press, 1993.

Another French MEP on the European Parliament Development Committee admits that at the national level the French left's debate has been limited to poverty reduction, and the focus on traditional development issues has eclipsed debate on the directly political aspects of democracy. As a consequence, democracy promotion has 'not been addressed by the European socialists ... [this area] is a clear case of *defaillance* ... socialist proposals are weak, the priority is elsewhere'. One of the most senior members of the PS's international section suggests that the left must resist the way in which the US 'angle' has, he asserts, conflated democracy with free markets.

In Spain, the government has tightly linked its discourse on human rights with its new *Alliance against Hunger*.[27] A senior member of the PSOE International Secretariat explains that even where democracy has been included as a policy aspiration, the ultimate objective has been that of social justice, with a focus on themes such as governance, institutional strengthening and participation, along with a special emphasis on gender as a cross-cutting concern. IU argues that its focus is even more on this dimension than that of the PSOE, and advocates policies that take account of the socio-economic dimension and 'justice within society', in preference to those that attach priority to the emergence of a multiparty political system in the first instance.

Again, some British views appear less hesitant on this issue. Development minister Hilary Benn has argued that, 'There are some who argue that poor countries will only take human rights seriously when they have managed to reduce poverty. Or that political freedom comes after prosperity. They are wrong. We will only end poverty if poor people have the freedom to make their voice heard in the decisions that affect their lives'.[28] In this view Benn was, however, questioned by his predecessor (see above) and others within the Labour party.

27 Rodriguez Zapatero, op. cit.

28 Benn H., 'Human Rights and Development in the Real World', Speech, 11 November 2005.

IV. Towards a Progressive Take on Democracy Promotion

Unpacking the different strands of the left's views on democracy promotion reveals complexity and variation. It points to some areas of doubt common to a 'European' perspective on democracy promotion, but other arguments distinctive of a leftist critique. The exercise also helps disaggregate where future debate will be most important and necessary. To begin to delineate a progressive understanding of and approach to democracy promotion, the European left would do well to move beyond the uncertainties associated with each of the four axes delineated above.

First, on military intervention: The invasion of Iraq has had a profound and generally negative effect on the European left's attitude to democracy promotion. In the late 1990s through to the invasion of Afghanistan, governments and parties of the left began to demonstrate an increasing commitment to intervention for humanitarian ends. This went hand in hand with a questioning of the traditional, Westphalian concept of sovereignty and consideration of the incipient notion of 'a responsibility to protect'. The opposition to the intervention in Iraq halted these developments and has had several unfortunate consequences.

It has had the effect of frequently reducing the debate about democracy promotion on the left to a discussion about the use of military intervention. However convincing the left's assertion that Iraq has been a significant foreign policy failure, the democracy promotion agenda is far wider than this quite singular case. The left risks rejecting the entire policy agenda on the basis of one episode.

The left needs to get beyond a line of 'the US is imposing democracy by force, therefore we must retreat from democracy promotion'. President Bush

can be criticised for many things but not (yet) for 'imposing democracy by military force'. While the US has been routinely berated for seeking to 'impose' democracy in blanket fashion around the world, the notable shift has in fact been back towards protecting alliances with non-democratic states such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China. The Bush administration has launched two military invasions, and neither of these had democracy promotion as their main objective, but rather as side effect. Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq, Freedom House lists 49 countries in the world that still lack basic democratic rights; countries where there is (as of this writing) little evidence that the US has planned to invade in democracy's name.

Equally important, leftist analysts and politicians on the *other* (pro-Iraq invasion) side of the debate must also de-link *their* views on Iraq from the broader democracy agenda. A fixation with justifying the Iraq invasion from a progressive point of view is also in danger of obscuring a clearer vision on more proactive democracy promotion.[29]

This 'democracy by force' debate is a diversion. One analyst points out that this debate has dragged the European left into rallying forcefully behind the 'imperialism' judged to lie behind a small number of interventions, but to ignore the far larger number of cases around the world where the West has by its

inaction and silence been complicit with autocracy.[30] There is no prospect of a far-reaching 'doctrine of democratic intervention'. Debate at the multilateral level has long settled on the view that an absence of democracy cannot in itself justify military intervention in a particular country. At least for the present, no state appears likely to challenge this.

The morality of military intervention is of course a crucial issue for international ethics; but, the core business of democracy promotion is essentially about civilian strategies. It is here where the left must engage and have something more creative and productive to say.

More than any other foreign policy issue of modern times, Iraq has split the European left. Some important points have been made, not least those around the validity of international law and the efficacy of using armies for regime change. But the debate has also been damaging and confused. When not actively disagreeing with each other some on the left have appeared simply to be talking at cross-purposes. Tony Blair's speeches abound with references linking democracy with firmness whilst Zapatero constantly stresses the need for democracy through non-prescriptive dialogue.

The European left risks regressing to an unsatisfactory binary distinction between 'intervention' and 'doing nothing' in non-democratic countries. Ironically, while it lambasts US military power, the left itself appears to have slid back towards a Westphalian view of international relations, reversing the evolution in its own internal debates during the 1990s.

If the European left is justified in pointing to the limits of US 'hard power' in promoting democracy, then where is the sustained effort from the left to develop more effective European 'soft power' instruments'? The left cannot have moral credibility in admonishing the use of such American power when it has been reluctant to advocate (or even interest itself much in) increases in democracy assistance, the firmer exertion of diplomatic pressure, better support for the repressed victims of autocracy or a willingness to stop rewarding with increased aid and trade deals those regimes so flagrantly in abuse of democratic norms.

Debate could focus here on the possibility of a graduated and sensitive use of conditionality as a potentially distinctive European model of involvement in third countries' processes of political change. Many have (correctly) pointed out that such European policy instruments are unlikely to have any determinant influence over political dynamics in the Middle East,

[29] An example of this danger can be seen, for example, in Kamm O., *Anti-Totalitarianism: The Leftwing case for a Neoconservative Foreign Policy*, London: Social Affairs Unit.

[30] Marko Attila Hoare, review of 'Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies', in *Democratiya*, August 2006, p. 4.

Russia or China. But, that surely does not make it less desirable that European countries seek to play at least some modest, positive role in democratic change, through strategies that are more coherent and effective.

Second, on US unilateralism: The European left needs to deliberate on the virtues of international democracy, quite aside from the question of whether US policies of the current administration are purely a cloak for self-interest. Indeed, if the latter is true it is even *more* imperative that the European left contributes to the spread of democracy in a forceful way, de-linking the normative value of democracy from its security connotations in the West.

It is true that this is not made easier by the Bush administration itself often seeming to revel in presenting democracy promotion as a 'singularly American endeavour'.[31] But again, to the extent that this is the case, so much greater is the need to combat such hubris. And so much greater is the need to understand and address the roots of US unilateralism – roots found in a dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of a multilateralism that accords vetoes to states actively concerned to block the spread of democracy.

The European left must define the goals it itself defines as progressive, not work backwards from a predetermined attitude towards a particular US administration. The latter logic in fact pushes the left towards a form of 'Euro-nationalism' – a creed no less anti-progressive than its national-level equivalents and which in fact echoes right-wing Euro-Gaullism.[32] Encouragingly, Scandinavian social democrats, as well as the new left-wing Italian government elected in May 2006, have expressed such sentiment in espousing (at least rhetorical) support for democracy promotion.

There has been much comment about the danger of the US retreating into isolationism. But there is another risk, namely that it will be the modern European left that retreats into isolation. If this were to happen it would be ironic and unfortunate. Ironic, because since the inception of modern democracy the left has been at the forefront of those who have championed the cause. Unfortunate, because it is the left that now could have the credibility to make a difference in parts of the world where democratic change is essential.

Again, Iraq has framed a debate in which false dichotomies have flourished: between accepting an agenda drawn up in Washington or opting for isolation, between military intervention and doing nothing. We have revealed here how few carefully thought out arguments are made for democracy promotion on its own merits, let alone for the kind of detailed strategies that could effectively implement pro-democracy commitments. This should be a cause for deep reflection on the left throughout Europe. The European left is guilty here of a 'narcissism of small differences', of being 'criminally self-indulgent', when differences with the US pale alongside the magnitude of global challenges facing both Europe and America – the 'push-back' against democracy promotion from authoritarian regimes, and the way in which Russian and Chinese foreign polices are threatening to undercut the scope for principled Western actions.[33]

Third, on the question of universal values: The left needs to reflect on the argument that there is no contradiction between forceful democracy promotion and 'allowing people to choose their own destiny'. Indeed, this latter progressive sentiment can be seen as given expression through the democracy promotion agenda. How are local populations to have the ability to choose their own future if not through democratic means? The left surely errs in its tendency to posit such self-determination as mutually exclusive to robust democracy promotion.

When the left cautions against strong democracy promotion on the grounds that other states must be

31 Carothers T. , 'The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion', *Foreign Affairs*, 85/2, 2006, p. 66.

32 Garton Ash T., *Free World*, London: Penguin, 2004.

33 Ibid., p. 183 and p. 234; Gershman C. and Allen M., 'The Assault on Democracy Assistance,' *Journal of Democracy* 17/2, 2006, pp. 39-46.

'free to develop as they choose', where democracy is absent this boils down to saying, 'repressive *regimes* must be free to decide the pace and extent of change'. Hardly a piece of progressive thinking to be proud of. Lord Dahrendorf has pointed out, indeed, that such unfettered Westphalian principles are antithetical to the spread of liberalism.[34]

We have found that a common line forwarded by the European left is that: 'Democracy is not an end in itself, but a means to development'. But arguably, the reverse reasoning would be robust: while democracy's utility as a means to development is actually complex and contested, for many people living under the yoke of political repression the left's reluctance to pursue democracy as an end in itself might seem deeply puzzling.

If the very language of 'democracy promotion' has come to cause discomfort for the left, it might help to unpack this agenda and couch aims in terms of democracy's component elements – the rule of law, free media, accountability, civilian control over militaries, and so on. At the same time, doubts over rightful policy *means* should not elide into doubt over the rightful *end* – that of developing fairer, less repressive government as a universally applicable aspiration.

A commitment to democracy promotion runs with the grain of what most people in most places appear to desire. The relativism of many sections of the European left sits uneasily with numerous polls that record stronger belief in democracy amongst people in the Middle East than in Latin America or even some European states. The number of democracies in the world has risen dramatically in the last 20 years because that is what people have chosen when they have had the chance to express themselves. To recognise this is not an uncomfortable trade-off for the left, but could return it to the historical roots of progressive thinking described in our opening section. It would also sit better with polls that show European citizens rather more supportive of democracy promotion than Americans.[35]

Leftist critiques of engagement with moderate, political Islam are profoundly misguided. That governments are talking tentatively to organisations such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, does not represent a sinister favouritism of such groups. The suggestion, for example, that the British government has 'favoured' the Brotherhood simply by virtue of exploring possible contacts is unhelpful journalistic mischief. It is wrong to paint such groups as irredeemably and uniformly 'reactionary'. For all the left's hyperbole against the US, such attitudes take them close to the Bush administration's eschewal of contact with the Muslim Brotherhood – one of the decisions most at odds with the US's democracy promotion rhetoric (albeit one apparently now changing, as it is rumoured that US officials have made overtures to the Muslim Brotherhood).

The issue here is not that pro-democracy policies would be akin to promoting Islamists; rather, it is that democracy itself will naturally involve an engagement with Islamists as one amongst many actors. It is cautioned that political change should be built around existing vehicles of political legitimacy, and that 'formal democracy' can assist the 'democratisation' of these social structures.[36] Such an angle on democracy promotion would seem to offer compatibility with leftist concerns for communities' rooted values – and a convincing reversal of the common argument that support for such local values is what militates *against* progressives focusing on democracy promotion.

Fourth, on economic development: The left is right to seek to keep a focus on poverty reduction, but wrong to imply that this is somehow a desirable alternative to investing more resources into direct democracy promotion activities. Indeed, it echoes previous

[34] *The Guardian*, August 2006.

[35] German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Attitudes Survey 2006. 71 per cent of Europeans expressed support for democracy promotion compared to only 45 per cent of Americans.

[36] Roy O., 'The predicament of 'civil society' in Central Asia and the 'Greater Middle East'', *International Affairs*, 81/5, 2005, p.1002 and p.1011.

regressive thinking that there is a choice to be made between promoting economic and political freedom. It has been demonstrated by many analysts that democracy and development are invariably mutually determinant, each dependent on parallel progress in the other. A key link in this relationship is the construction of more effective and democratic state institutions – that can provide for effective economic development precisely by enhancing citizen participation and accountability. Such a focus on the state would seem to be a distinctive area of social democratic political philosophy. And an emphasis on the state could provide a link both necessary and desirable between the development and democracy agendas.[37] This would build on suggestions that the EU's most progressive potential has arisen from its lead role in tightening a nexus between development, human rights and a governance-oriented 'new trade agenda'.[38]

Progressive political actors in continental Europe may well feel vindicated in their opposition to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and argue that intervention in democracy's name has been proved counter-productive. But is that really the end of the story? A debate bogged down in the sands of the Hejaz with the result that nothing constructive can now be achieved? Preserving democracy has been part of the left's historical mission; significant change in current debates is required if it is to become central to the left's global role in the twenty-first century.

[37] Mepham D., *Changing States: A Progressive Agenda for Political Reform in the Middle East*, London: IPPR, January 2006.

[38] Young A. and Peterson J., 'The EU and the new trade politics', , 13/6, 2006, pp.795-814.

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FRIDE

The European left has been ambivalent over the question of democracy promotion. This working paper explores the reasons for this scepticism, drawing on interviews with officials in left-of-centre parties in France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. The paper argues that debates within the European left exhibit considerable conceptual confusion, in large part because the democracy agenda has been wrongly conflated with a series of other concerns. It is suggested that correcting this confusion would offer the prospect of a more progressive commitment to democracy promotion.

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