

Review Commentary

The State of the Art in the EU Democracy Promotion Literature

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Abstract

The literature on EU democracy promotion is fragmented into a number of sub-literatures, and this makes it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of this area of EU activity. Surveying these literatures and their various strengths and weaknesses is a necessary first step to a fuller understanding of what makes EU democracy promotion work most effectively, a task that is all the more vital given the increasingly challenging global environment that democracy promotion now faces.

Keywords

Democratisation; European Union; Democracy promotion; Common Foreign and Security Policy; Human rights; Conditionality

THE LITERATURE ON EUROPEAN UNION (EU) DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IS FRAGMENTED into a number of sub-literatures. This commentary offers a review of four such sub-literatures in which findings of relevance to EU democracy promotion may be found. It argues that this fragmentation of the EU democracy promotion literature serves to demonstrate that the EU itself has an uncoordinated approach to democracy promotion. This review will firstly offer an overview of some of the main themes that have emerged in four of these literatures: the promotion of human rights, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the EU's use of conditionality, and activities to promote democracy in existing EU Member States. Whilst there is a general consensus that domestic factors are uppermost in explaining long-term prospects of democratisation, the role of international organisations and transnational actors in democratisation has been paid increasing attention (Burnell and Youngs 2010). Indeed, the international system has been described as the "missing variable" in democratisation studies (McFaul 2010) and the EU as a major transnational actor has been the subject of much attention. However, despite this increased attention, what has been missing in the literature is an attempt to judge between the various mechanisms used or to integrate them into a coherent framework (Levitsky and Way 2010). Surveying the relevant literatures is a necessary first step for such an attempt.

EU promotion of human rights

The literature on the promotion of human rights by the EU tends to focus on two areas: the use of legal clauses in EU agreements, and the funding of small-scale projects by civil society organisations (CSOs). This reflects the way that EU activity in this area has

developed, *i.e.* through legalistic means and through piecemeal and often uncoordinated methods of funding. The strength in this literature is that it covers EU human rights activity in a huge variety of countries, from Central and Eastern Europe, to Africa and the Caribbean, and the Middle East. The EU approach to the promotion of human rights varies substantially across these different regions and countries, and it generally prefers a positive approach through providing aid for human rights work, conditionality and critical diplomacy, rather than taking punitive action (Youngs 2001). The main weakness in the literature, however, is a proper examination of which instruments work under what conditions.

The 'human rights clause' was established in 1995 for use in all EU co-operation and association agreements with third countries (Youngs 2001; Smith 2008), allowing the operation of conditionality through the threat of suspension of the agreement if human rights are breached. The use of such a clause to promote human rights has been hailed as a way of backing the EU's words with actions, and has even been lauded as being conducive to world peace (Hornig 2003). Whilst this is important, it is clearly not sufficient on its own to do the work that the EU wants to do in promoting human rights.

Funding for human rights work is another method used by the EU. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) was created by an initiative of the European Parliament in 1994, but became an "instrument" in 2007 rather than an "initiative", a significant change of emphasis. The EIDHR funds small-scale projects run by CSOs in non-EU Member States and relies on the target government's co-operation in order to function, and so those states in most need cannot benefit (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 227; Smith 2008: 133). The EIDHR has a budget of €1.1 billion for the period 2007-2013, a relatively small sum, which is massively oversubscribed by applications to it, and ten times less than the budget for projects in the EU's close neighbouring countries (see ENPI below). The operation of the EIDHR has recently become more focused, having previously been considered to be poorly co-ordinated and inflexible (Youngs 2001: 32) or even working in a way that unintentionally undermined the EU's own policy goals (Bicchi 2010).

It is important to note that approaches to civil society have also been the source of disagreement in the literature. The role of CSOs has mostly been seen as positive and necessary in terms of aiding the democratisation process. CSOs have also been viewed as being able to use the EU accession process as leverage to pursue their domestic aims (Parau 2009). There are some critics, however, who point out that CSOs are not always progressive in this way (Kopecky and Mudde 2003) and may actually act as a brake on democratisation, or play an "ambiguous or even malign role" (Schmitter 2010: 24). Civil society has sometimes been presented as having a "magical power", embodied in such leading members of civil society as Michnik in Poland and Havel in Czechoslovakia (Grugel 1999: 18). Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that CSOs should not be assumed to necessarily be working in ways that further democratisation or look to transnational organisations or networks to help them domestically. In that respect, the literature has developed from a sometimes rather blind faith in the power of civil society towards a more nuanced understanding of the role of CSOs.

In terms of human rights within the EU, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) was established in 2007, having previously been known as the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). It provides "assistance and expertise" for the EU's Member States and institutions and can conduct investigations. For example, the European Parliament requested a comparative legal analysis on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the EU from the FRA. Many human rights NGOs put the charge of double standards against the EU in terms of its concern for human rights in non-Member States compared with those in existing Member States, in which issues such as

homophobia, discrimination (*e.g.* against Roma groups), and dubious anti-terrorism practices are all argued to impact on human rights within the EU.

This perception of an EU double standard is also argued to exist in EU candidate countries - a perception that served to weaken compliance with standards on minority protection (Hughes and Sasse 2003: 13). As well as this internal-external gap, there is also a gap between EU rhetoric and practice due to the inconsistent application of possible measures to protect human rights. The differences in the EU's human rights practices internally and externally have been argued to imbue EU human rights with a sense of irony, in that they differ in all the three crucial aspects of human rights: their definition and scope; the methods of scrutiny employed; and the enforcement measures the EU uses (Williams 2005).

The use of the law to promote human rights also takes place of course within the EU's own court. Two classic studies traced how key European Court of Justice (ECJ) decisions established a constitutional framework for Europe (Stein 1981) and made it harder for Member States to avoid their legal obligations (Weiler 1991). The ECJ, as one such multilateral institution, clearly has an important role to play in safeguarding democracy in the EU. Private individuals and pressure groups have used victories in the ECJ to force governments to alter domestic policy and it is this aspect of the ECJ that has been the focus of the comparative politics literature (Alter 2010: 34-35). Judicial reform is also frequently an area of criticism in the EU's annual Progress Reports on countries aiming for EU membership.

I would argue three points. Firstly, that the literature on human rights promotion is overly legalistic and lacking in a proper examination of which EU activities in this area work most effectively and under what conditions. If legislation alone was the path to universal and secure human rights, then the EU would by now be the utopia that it blatantly is not. Secondly, that there needs to be a re-emphasis on the "human" part of human rights through a study of peoples' perceptions both within the EU and beyond. Thirdly, that the piecemeal nature of the EU's funding for human rights work makes it difficult to evaluate the overall effectiveness or otherwise of the EU's work in this area at a strategic level. What is needed is a synthesis of the human rights promotion literature with that in other relevant areas.

EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

The literature on CFSP focuses mainly on the high-level geopolitical considerations that have shaped its development and the nature of the perceived threats to the EU. The literature is strong on the co-operation between EU Member States on foreign policy, its development over time, and the way policy-making in this area is dominated by "intensive transgovernmentalism" (Giegerich and Wallace 2010: 454). What the literature is less strong on is how CFSP relates to other areas of EU activity and any assessment of what is actually working.

The inability of the EU to deal effectively with the break-up of Yugoslavia and the resulting wars of the early 1990s caused much hand-wringing and eventually some reform of European foreign policy. The oft cited "capability-expectations gap" (Hill 1993) was argued to have developed and the ineffectiveness of CFSP was blamed on the intergovernmental nature of foreign policy-making (Wagner 2003). The EU was seen as unable to reach collective foreign policy decisions, let alone have an impact on events on the ground, and this found common expression in the infamous "when I want to call Europe, who do I call?" question attributed to Henry Kissinger.

As in many other issue areas, both rationalist and constructivist (see Glarbo 1999) approaches have been taken to the study of CFSP, as well as the more nuanced view in which the two approaches are taken as being complementary rather than incompatible (see Smith 2004). While rationalist approaches view the foreign policy preferences of Member States as fixed, constructivist approaches focus on the convergence of national foreign policies and the formation of a community of norms and values around foreign policy at the European level. If CFSP has become more supranational in some ways, there is still plenty of evidence that, in foreign policy, it is hard-nosed *Realpolitik* based on the interests of the nation-states that rule the game, rather than shared values and norms. Within the EU, whilst there is much agreement in the CFSP arena, it is far from saying that all Member States share the same views on foreign policy issues. For example, in August 2008, the leaders of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (as well as Ukraine) visited the Georgian capital Tbilisi in a show of solidarity with President Saakashvili after the Russian invasion. They saw Russia's action in more threatening terms perhaps than their fellow EU leaders.

In keeping with the overall aim of aiding the understanding of EU democracy promotion, I am less interested in differing explanations of the development of CFSP and much more interested in how we might assess its success, or otherwise, in delivering what the EU's members want to achieve. In other words, regardless of whether CFSP seeks to promote democracy because EU members share strong democratic norms and values or just because it is in their individual national interests to do so, or both, what is the level and nature of the EU's real power in promoting democracy? Doubts about this can be seen in a recent edited collection on EU foreign policy from an American perspective which has a concluding chapter entitled "EU Foreign Policy: Myth or Reality?" (Bindi 2010). EU foreign policy is certainly more than a myth; the more important question is "is it effective?"

Promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law is one of the major objectives of CFSP in the interest of increasing security. In the post-9/11 global context, the European Security Strategy of 2003 took a threat-driven approach and made it an objective to build security in the EU's neighbourhood - a neighbourhood that now included new problematic states such as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 59). This new context prompted the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003-04 as an instrument to promote security. The ENP deals with neighbouring countries, but without offering the prospect of membership. Indeed, this recognition of permanent non-members and the structured nature of the relationship with the EU's neighbourhood have been argued to represent the "coming of age" of the EU (Whitman and Wolff 2010). I do not agree; it represents rather the first faltering steps, with associated teething problems.

The ENP also includes a significant amount of financial aid to support democracy in the form of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). This has a budget of just over €11 billion for the period 2007-2013, which funds civil society projects in Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Russia, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine, with CSOs required to submit tenders. The main focus of the ENPI is on supporting "political, governance, economic and social reform programmes" and is mainly provided to fund the implementation of ENP Action Plans. These countries are also eligible for loan funding from the European Investment Bank of up to a total of €12.4 billion for the same time period, as highlighted by the website on ENPI programming. Political developments in early 2011 in some of these North African countries will no doubt necessitate some fairly major rethinking of the operation of the ENP in these cases, as the EU will want to catch up with events and be seen to be supporting democratic development. The case of Egypt in particular threw into rather stark relief the contrast and contradiction between EU policy

and individual Member States' historic legacies and geopolitical interests, not least the fear of some Southern EU Member States of waves of migrants reaching their shores.

Yet another part of CFSP is the Eastern Partnership between the EU and seven of its Eastern neighbours, which was launched in 2009. This policy does not hold the promise of EU membership, but rather "issue-specific rewards" such as visa-free travel for progress in key areas including human trafficking and illegal immigration (Sedelmeier 2010: 426). In what sense this might be a "partnership" in any meaningful sense of the word remains unclear.

The EU's recognition of its need to be better coordinated in its foreign policy informed the Lisbon Treaty's provisions for the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the creation of a High Representative (partly as an answer to the American "who do I call?" question). As the EEAS starts operating fully from the beginning of 2011, its actions must become a key area of study for those interested in EU democracy promotion. As both the Eastern Partnership and the EEAS are both relatively new, the academic literature has not yet developed, although some initial work has appeared (*e.g.* Duke 2010; Korosteleva-Polglase 2010). The CFSP literature is shifting then from examining how policy is formed to an overdue look at what actually works.

I would argue that the CFSP literature, when faced with the difficult question of which policy instruments are actually effective, retreats upwards into high-level politics and away from details and evidence. Once we get beyond the acronyms, we are left with many questions, such as: does grouping Ukraine with such permanent non-EU members as Egypt not seriously hinder efforts at EU promotion of democracy in Ukraine? How do the EU's rule of law missions, for example in Kosovo, relate to other EU democracy promotion instruments? How should the new EEAS ensure that it uses the various EU democracy promotion instruments in a more coherent, consistent and effective way? Again, what is required is for this literature to be related more closely to that in other relevant areas if we are going to get to grips properly with EU democracy promotion more broadly.

EU use of conditionality

Democratic conditionality has emerged as a major area of research within EU enlargement studies and in democratisation studies generally. Democratic conditionality is the strategy used to induce candidate states to comply with the EU's democratic standards (Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2003). As one of the major international organisations (IOs) that play a role in democratisation, the EU has been a prime focus of attention in the existing research on conditionality as it has, since the enlargements in the 1980s, developed a much more "extensive and systematic" conditionality approach than other international organisations (Pridham 2008). Studies on the role of international organisations and the EU in particular (Whitehead 2001; Linden 2002; Kubicek 2003; Pevehouse 2005) are useful in examining theoretical approaches to the role of IOs but most appeared too early to fully capture what was taking place in terms of the EU's application of democratic conditionality to the Central and Eastern European states that joined in 2004.

Conditionality refers to the logic of consequentiality ("do X to get Y") as opposed to the logic of appropriateness ("good people do X") in terms of the mechanisms by which IOs have a domestic impact (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2002; Kubicek 2003). It is not only the EU that uses a conditionality approach, but the EU accession process has developed into one that is "extensive and systematic" and that has shown both change and continuity in the ways in which it is applied (Pridham 2007a, 2008). The process of refining the conditionality approach is likely to continue, and it has already changed in light of lessons learned after the 2004 enlargement (Grabbe 2007: 116). In terms of the

effectiveness of conditionality, a good summary statement is as follows: “conditionality appears to be far less effective with countries that are either not willing or not capable of adopting European ideas because they do not resonate with domestic structures and identities or they lack the necessary capacities to introduce required changes” (Börzel and Risse 2009: 10).

The end of communism in Eastern Europe represented both a huge challenge and a huge opportunity for the transition to democracy and for its consolidation. Transnational actors have been the “dark matter that held the various aspects of post-Communist transition together” (Orenstein *et al.* 2008). Within that, the EU has been argued to be the “causal behemoth” of transnational influence on Central and Eastern Europe (Vachudova 2008). This influence has been most visible in the process of EU enlargement, which, it is argued, is best understood as being driven by the long-term economic and geopolitical interests of current EU Member States (Moravcsik 1998; Moravcsik and Vachudova 2003) in the “liberal intergovernmentalist” approach. With EU applicant states similarly making rational calculations to bring themselves into line with the conditions of EU membership, such interstate bargaining can be said to reflect “asymmetrical interdependence” (Keohane and Nye 1977). This reciprocal influence between domestic and international affairs in which governing political elites seek to negotiate at an international level at the same time as securing their domestic position has been described as a “two-level game” (Putnam 1988). For those studying this area, this implies a need to take account of the entanglements between international relations and comparative politics (Putnam 1988: 459).

Other models of the operation of conditionality have recently been tested through empirical research in a number of case studies. Magen and Morlino (2008) have developed the “EU Cycles and Layers of International Democratic Anchoring” (EUCLIDA) model and applied it to Romania, Turkey, Serbia and Ukraine. They concluded that the “external-internal nexus” is characterised by “a chain of anchoring” in which continuous conditionality actions create opportunities for elites to act, the weakening of veto players, and shifts in the cost-benefit balance of rule adoption. In summary, they state that “[c]onditionality may be weak and at the end may even fail [...],’ but that “empirically, conditionality remains the main mechanism of influence” (Magen and Morlino 2008: 255-256).

A number of key themes have emerged in the academic literature on democratic conditionality, and three of these are detailed below:

(1) Full membership of the EU has such a powerful attraction that it provides “passive” leverage on potential applicant states and “active” leverage over candidate states. The concept of “active” and “passive” leverage that the EU can exercise was introduced by Vachudova in *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage & integration after Communism* (2005). The attraction of the prospect of membership of the EU is argued to provide “passive” leverage on potential Member States, and this becomes “active” leverage when accession negotiations begin. In these two ways, the EU has great power as a transnational actor.

(2) The EU has been argued to have a “transformative power” over potential applicant states by Grabbe in *The EU’s Transformative Power: Europeanization through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe* (2006) and has been the “causal behemoth” of transnational influence on the democratisation of Central and Eastern Europe (Vachudova 2008). The EU had enormous influence on potential Member States in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after 1989, and there was a strongly asymmetrical interdependence between the EU and candidate countries. Adapting to the EU had become embedded in CEE policy-making long before accession, and for this reason domestic politics matter hugely in understanding how EU conditionality worked.

(3) The evidence favours rationalist explanations (conditionality) over convergence ones (the internalisation of norms through socialisation) (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Kubicek 2003; Linden 2002). Rationalist versus constructivist approaches have been tested, notably in *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe* by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005), and the evidence has been found to favour rationalist bargaining models. In other words, the impact of the EU as a transnational actor on domestic politics in potential Member States is to do with elites in those states making rational, cost-benefit decisions and through reacting to the use of “carrots and sticks” by the EU. Pridham, most notably in *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe* (2005), has traced the development of what is now an “extensive and systematic” conditionality approach (Pridham 2008). In this process, the role of elites is a crucial explanatory factor (Pridham 2007b), and this is why the research methods used have most frequently focused on elite views of the process gained through elite interviews.

There is widespread agreement in the literature on conditionality that its effectiveness relies on a credible offer of full EU membership and favourable domestic conditions. In the “rational bargaining model” that was favoured in Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier’s 2005 study, the concern is with the cost-benefit calculations that are made and with the impact of “carrots and sticks” on the behaviour of states seeking membership. In this process, there is agreement in the literature that it is only the credible prospect of full EU membership that provides an effective incentive for domestic political elites to make legislative and other changes.

There is disagreement in the literature over the question of when the EU ever really had “transformative power”, for example, whether EU democratic conditionality really played a role in the case of the ousting of the Meciar government in Slovakia in 1998. Haughton (2007) argues that EU leverage had little effect in this case, although it is often used as an example of the success of democratic conditionality (*e.g.* Glenn 2003). Much of the literature accepts that EU democratic conditionality is effective without offering detailed enough evidence to really support this claim. Some argue that in some cases focusing on conditionality may undervalue democratisation processes that are already taking place (Ulusoy 2007: 472).

I would argue that the conditionality literature is strong as far as it goes, *i.e.* in explaining Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. Nevertheless, it is not generalisable to the present day when the EU is facing much more difficult cases in much more difficult conditions. Its focus on the considerations of political elites also misses too many domestic nuances, and its lack of hard evidence makes the apparent consensus look rather flimsy. A whole generation has grown up since 1989 which sees the transition of the CEE countries from communism to democratic EU members for what it is – history – and our research needs to reflect that. Although the literature has shifted from fairly simple “carrot and stick” explanations to more developed ones, it has not made the necessary shift to seeking to explain the more difficult cases.

EU promotion of democracy in its existing Member States

There is only a small amount of literature on how the EU promotes democracy amongst its own members, and this is its main weakness. The studies that do exist are good on explaining the specific actions that have been taken in specific cases and about the differing interests and processes that were involved, but this area remains under-researched. One specific area of the literature that has developed is that on the “democratic deficit” within the EU itself, which has had to reflect changes in the institutional balance of power as the European Parliament has gained powers.

The concern about the EU's ability to promote democracy in its own Member States applies to both "new" Member States (those who joined in the 2004 and 2007 enlargements) and "old" Member States. The concern over issues of democracy in new EU Member States and the ability of the EU to promote democracy in them relates to how the EU can do this once they have joined and the leverage over their membership is gone. Specifically, there have been fears of a populist backlash once EU membership has been secured (Rupnik 2007).

In Poland, the government from 2005 to 2007 caused particular concern as it included the Law & Justice Party in coalition with the populist Self-Defence and the nationalist League of Polish Families. Similar concerns over extreme nationalist parties potentially coming into government have emerged in Slovakia and Hungary. In Romania and Bulgaria, which both joined the EU in 2007, a post-accession Cooperation and Verification Mechanism was put in place by the Commission to assess their progress against benchmarks relating to judicial reform, and the fight against corruption and organised crime. Initially for three years, it has since then been extended indefinitely as progress has been slow. This mechanism reflects a new emphasis on the issue of corruption that was not present in earlier enlargement rounds.

So again, there is the charge of double standards against the EU in that it does not practise what it preaches. Existing Member States, whether new or old, are arguably not subject to anything like the same level of monitoring or enforcement of democratic standards that potential members or states with which the EU has dealings are. The democratic credentials of existing Member States have at times therefore been placed in doubt (Berg-Schlosser 2004: 28). In 2010, in the Netherlands, the far right Freedom Party of Geert Wilders made strong electoral gains and became a key player in coalition negotiations, raising concerns that his anti-Islam policies such as banning the Koran and his extreme immigration policies would be put into practice. This case has echoes of a decade ago, in 2000, when the domestic politics of Austria caused widespread concern and led to the unprecedented step of 14 EU members imposing bilateral sanctions on Austria due to the presence of Jörg Haider's extreme right Freedom Party and the fear that this threatened the human rights of immigrants and asylum-seekers (Smith 2008: 114). Although these sanctions only remained in place for seven months, the action did point towards the development of a human rights and democratic norm, although it is very important to note that this was not an EU action, but rather one taken bilaterally by Member States (Merlingen *et al.* 2001: 59-60).

This example has been contrasted with that of concerns about the effect of the concentration of media ownership in Italy under Berlusconi. In this case, there were no sanctions imposed and an initiative from the European Parliament in 2004 seeking legislation on media ownership went nowhere. Why action is taken in some cases, but not in others, has been explained in terms of the interests of regional leading powers and external pressure - in the case of Austria, international pressure from the US combined with German and French insistence on taking action. In the case of Italy, there was no such external pressure or support for action from regional leading powers (Van Der Vleuten and Hoffmann 2010: 742-746). If this explanation is accepted, it says little for the EU's capacity or willingness to act as a true promoter of democracy amongst its own Member States. Another study found that enforcement of democratic norms in regional intergovernmental organisations was less likely in countries of high geopolitical importance (Donno 2010). In other words, geopolitical interests trump upholding democratic standards; hardly a surprising finding.

Other more recent examples suggest perhaps that the EU is becoming more likely to take action against its own members in this area. In August and September of 2010, the expulsion of over 1,000 ethnic Roma immigrants from France caused widespread criticism

and raised the possibility of legal action by the Commission for breach of the fundamental principle of free movement of people within the EU. France had to take legislative steps to avoid the threatened legal action. Hungary was also threatened with legal action by the Commission over its new media law in 2010-2011. These cases are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Action taken regarding democracy in existing Member States

Action	Taken by	Against
Bilateral Sanctions	14 Member States	Austria, 2000
Threat of legal action	EU Commission	France, 2010 Hungary, 2010-2011
Cooperation and Verification Mechanism	EU Commission	Romania, Bulgaria 2007 - ongoing
No Action		Netherlands, 2010 Poland, 2005-2007 Italy, 2004

Source: author's own elaboration

What is important here is not so much the rights and wrongs of the specific cases, but that the EU has become more proactive in taking Member States to task, and a recognition that accession to the EU is not the end of the democratisation story. When aspiring EU members are to be held to high standards of tolerance and “democracy”, then existing Member States must also be held to account for their actions. Therefore, for those studying democracy in Europe, perhaps the lens of enquiry needs to be refocused to ensure we do not miss what is going on close to home.

Within the EU then, there are concerns about the state of democracy in Member States, both new and old. Perhaps more fundamentally to the EU itself, there is also the frequent charge that the EU itself suffers from a “democratic deficit”. This debate has been the subject of argument in the literature, with some arguing that the EU does not suffer from such a deficit (Moravcsik 2002) and some that it does (Follesdal and Hix 2006). As the European Parliament has gained powers, this area of the literature has had to develop to take account of this. Declining turnouts in the European Parliament elections are one piece of evidence for the argument that EU citizens are not motivated to participate as part of a European polity, although surveys show that the public has not lost faith in democracy itself, but have become disenchanted with the political elite that emerged from the transition from communism post-1989 (Mungiu-Pippidi 2007: 12).

I would argue that at a time when citizens across the EU are facing a very severe economic outlook and the associated austerity plans, there is a real danger that issues of democracy both at home and abroad might slip down the agenda, or fall off it completely. The examples given above may seem wide-ranging and somewhat unconnected, but they serve to make the point that problems with democracy persist across the EU, not just in the “new” Member States. In addition, they are in fact more closely connected than they might first appear, and just as important for us to study if we are interested in the promotion of democracy. Nor is this just of academic interest; a justified perception that the EU is not internally democratic must surely detract from its effectiveness in promoting democracy externally. Better connections need to be made in the academic literature

between the so-called “democratic deficit” within the EU, problems of democracy within existing EU Member States, and the problems of democracy promotion in the EU’s neighbourhood, and indeed the wider world.

Conclusion

Given the rather pessimistic consensus over how effective the EU is in promoting democracy, and the general agreement that the EU needs to adapt its previous approaches in order to be more effective, what can the various different literatures that have been reviewed in this article tell us about the effectiveness of EU democracy promotion and how it might be improved? There are clearly many new challenges to democratisation (Burnell and Youngs 2010) and with regard to the EU, the gravitational pull of enlargement is weakening, the scale of European democracy assistance remains extremely limited, and EU Member States and the Commission have not developed a common approach. More fundamentally, questions remain as to what the EU is actually trying to achieve in its democracy promotion activities, and there is a need to support grassroots democratic capacity, rather than focusing on political elites. Some now argue that democratic conditionality has been “superseded and undermined” by short-term security goals and that the EU is failing to meet the challenges of a more complex international environment (Youngs 2008a, b, c; 2009a, b; 2010a, b, c).

Table 2 below offers a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four areas of literature that have been surveyed, and also indicates what a successful synthesis of these literatures would offer, namely that it would seek to explain under what conditions and through which mechanisms EU democracy promotion works most effectively. Despite the pessimism referred to earlier, the survey of these literatures does point to a way forward for research into EU democracy promotion.

Table 2: Comparing the literatures relating to EU democracy promotion

	Human rights	CFSP	Conditionality	Existing Member States
Focus on	Legal clauses Small-scale project funding	High-level geopolitical considerations Perceived threats to the EU	Cost / benefit calculations by political elites	Actions taken in specific cases
Strengths	Many studies covering EU activity across the world	Inter-governmental development of CFSP is understood	Consensus over EU’s power in CEE cases in 1990s	Clear about political interests and processes involved
Weaknesses	Which instruments work under what conditions?	How does CFSP relate to other areas of EU activity?	Lack of sufficient evidence Not fully generalisable to other cases / other times	Under-researched / small body of studies
Synthesis would explain	Under what <u>conditions</u> and through which <u>mechanisms</u> does EU democracy promotion work most effectively?			

Source: author’s own elaboration

It is clear from this review of the literature that the EU has developed a wide array of instruments that have a role in democracy promotion, but it is also widely acknowledged that the EU does not use them in a sufficiently strategic way. I would argue that in order to make EU democracy promotion more effective, we need to understand much more fully under what conditions and through which mechanisms EU democracy promotion is most effective. To do this, we need to investigate how political elites and civil society actors in non-Member States perceive the EU's various democracy promotion activities and compare this across cases and time, and also with perceptions within the various institutions of the EU. In addition, making more of a connection between safeguarding democracy within the EU and promoting democracy outside of the EU, and seeking to close the gap between rhetoric and reality, would aid our understanding of what really works.

To recap, my main criticism therefore of the literature on EU democracy promotion is that it is fragmented and that this very fragmentation hinders the development of both our theoretical understanding of democratisation processes and specific EU policies that really work. Given that, between 2000 and 2010, the EU twice took in new members, the literature on EU democracy promotion had an understandable focus on enlargement and the operation of democratic conditionality. This has now shifted, however, towards a more nuanced examination of what instruments the EU has in its toolkit for promoting democracy and human rights, both in the more difficult cases it now faces, and in the cases where EU membership is never going to be on offer.

As the EU's institutional structure has undergone a major change with the Lisbon Treaty and the creation of the EEAS, this also has provided newly emerging areas for the focus of study. However, so far there have not been sufficient attempts to really examine how the various EU instruments of democracy promotion may work in their interaction with the domestic politics of target states. Comparative research designs have been recommended in the existing literature as a promising way forward for further study in this area. Indeed, the state of the current literature affords considerable unfilled scope for more comparative analysis, and there is acknowledgement that we do not know enough about what works and why (Burnell 2008: 424-431). Given the increasingly challenging global environment for democracy promotion, and the problematic cases that the EU is now dealing with, this task of understanding how the various instruments of EU democracy promotion work together and under what conditions they are most effective is all the more pressing for all those concerned about democracy promotion, and it should be an increasing focus of our research.

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