



**Policy Brief for the Roundtable Conference:**

**“Democracy promotion East and South after the Arab Spring:  
Re-evaluating the EU's Engagement with Authoritarian Regimes”**

**Brussels, 1/2 December 2011**

**Maastricht University, Brussels Campus**

Avenue de L'Armée / Legerlaan 10, 1040 Brussels

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**The European Union (EU) as a ‘Moral Power’ through its Democracy Promotion Policy in  
the South Caucasus**

*Syuzanna Vasilyan*

The European Union (EU) has been a most important actor promoting democracy in the South Caucasus. This Policy Brief will use the conceptual framework of ‘moral power’, which has been proposed as an ‘objective, robust and nuanced analytical framework’, which intends to ‘epitomize a policy with both wide theoretical latitude and maximum realistic leeway’ in order to provide policy advice (Vasilyan 2012, forthcoming).<sup>1</sup> While a ‘moral power’ has been defined ‘as an international actor, which a) is internally coherent, b) retains consequentialism in its foreign policy, c) preserves consistency between its rhetoric and behavior, d) does not exhibit normative contradiction, e) manifests respect for values when the latter run parallel to and, especially, collide with its interests, f) considers the aspirations of all policy beneficiaries and g) is able to create and enjoy an amenable receptivity climate’ (Ibid.), this Brief will use the mentioned parameters to explain and help guide the Union’s policy in terms of its democracy-promotion in the South Caucasus.

Consequentialism

The EU’s democracy promotion policy is one of the Union’s most forceful ones in that it has been a vehement facilitator of both procedural (minimalist) and substantive (maximalist) democracy in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. However, the EU has not been strategically goal-oriented whereby 1) attainment of specific democratic standards would be foreseen and 2) apposite policy streamlining

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<sup>1</sup> Vasilyan, Syuzanna (2012, forthcoming), ‘Moral Power’ as Objectification of ‘Civilian’/‘Normative’ Eulogy: the European Union (EU) as a Conflict-Dealer in the South Caucasus’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*.

would be exercised. Instead, the EU seems to have pondered its strategy 'on the go' and this has, in turn, hampered appropriate thematic distribution of programs and projects, which hardly coincide with the democratic perspective of a respective neighboring country.

Consequently, the Union has often retreated from its stance of direct bilateralism opting for indirect multilateralism, especially in the case of Azerbaijan. Moreover, while its funding has been gradually increased, this has not been attuned to the potential symmetric progress made by the South Caucasian states. To evade alienation vagueness and open-endedness in dialogue have prevailed over overt demands leading to generic assessment.

For the Union to be a credible actor it would need to develop a clearly designed and strictly evaluated democracy promotion strategy. The desirable level of democracy expected from each South Caucasian neighbor should be spelled out. The assessment should stratify the technical and substantive issues so as to assure sustainability of the policy. Full 'conditionality' imbued with both positive and nill (if not negative), rather than merely 'partial positive' requisites would push for more tangible results. Most importantly, democracy could be mainstreamed by the EU.

#### Consistency

The Union's preaching has surpassed its practice. Whereas in the most important documents comprising the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) the Union and the partners have spelled out the important democratic credentials to be fulfilled by the South Caucasian states, this has not been adequately followed up. Only distant monitoring or qualitative assessments have been conducted. These do not suffice for bridging the rhetoric with actions and ensuring the requirements of the mutually agreed commitments are implemented by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Quantitative indexing would help both the Union and the neighbors check their progress and stimulate better performance through comparison. Meanwhile, this would facilitate to the Union's 'actorness'.

#### Coherence

No institutionalized cooperation has taken place among the EU member-states and/or between the EU institutions and member-states in promoting democracy in the South Caucasus. These agents have acted independently, even though they have complemented, rather than obstructed each other's efforts. Meanwhile, a more coordinated policy would make the Union's substantive democracy more solid.

As far as inter-institutional interaction is concerned, the Council has at times been at odds with the Parliament – a most vocal actor when it comes to democracy in the neighborhood. The Council's reticence has stood against the Parliament's boldness with respect to the constitutional amendments in Azerbaijan, for example. Inter-institutional coherence would help the Union retain its unity in external policy and have its voice heard. 'Presence' would in this fashion be reinforced.

#### Normative steadiness

Human rights have comprised the bulwark of the Union's democracy promotion. They have been underlined at the expense of procedural elements, which, while lying at the foundation of a democratic regime, have been sidelined not to harm the relations primarily with Azerbaijan and to a lesser extent with Armenia. Moreover, through its budget support programs and projects the Union seems to have underscored governance and marginalized democracy proper comprising such cornerstones as representation, participation and legitimacy. Revitalizing these issues would attribute its policy a new spell. In this manner, 'shared values' would be made sound.

#### Balance between interests and values

The Union's interests have often derailed its values. Firstly, stability has been preferred over a shift towards more democracy, which might create turbulence in a conflict-prone "region". Secondly, the EU's desire for uninterrupted delivery of hydrocarbon resources from the Caspian basin has tarnished its normative agenda. In case of Azerbaijan the Union has not manifested assertiveness; in case of Georgia, it has acknowledged the role of the latter as a transit territory for energy supply. Thirdly, the power-related friction with Russia has made the EU member-states struggle for asserting their foothold to have access to the oil and gas repositories. This has undermined the Union's normative standing and cast a veil of double standards onto its normativity.

Bringing the interests and values into a balance would be crucial if the Union truly aspires to witness progress with democracy especially in Azerbaijan. If the values are important only as long as they do not imperil the interests then the Union might consider becoming more honest with its policy and stating from the outset that it is primarily a pragmatically driven actor. This would help the EU retain its respect than be viewed as a superficial actor 'mumbling' democracy. In this fashion, the expectations would not be frustrated and the capability would be in accord with the criterion of 'differentiation'.

### Inclusiveness

While democracy can be engineered from the top, it is more often cultivated from the bottom. Whereas through the Eastern Partnership the Union has engaged the civil society into its policy through provision of voice (qua monitoring) and funding (via allocation of funds), this has been done 1) in the intermediate stage of the policy and 2) with the help of non-governmental organizations only. Expanding the reach to the policy negotiations whereby the civil society could partake and contribute to the ongoing Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTAs) agreements, as well as the visa facilitation/liberalization negotiations would ameliorate the Union's image as a different type of an actor. Moreover, the NGOs should not be the only civil partners for collaboration. Business representatives, religious authorities and most importantly, the academic community should be at the center-stage of the Union's policy by providing reflections and grounded advice as to how democracy can bear fruits in line with the civic needs and aspirations. This would enlarge the principle of 'joint ownership' and instill it into the EU's policy in an irreversible way.

### External Legitimacy

The Union is viewed as a democratic archetype. Yet, the latter is more specifically a social welfare club, which competes externally with the liberal democracy prototype offered by the US and the 'sovereign democracy' model proclaimed by Russia. It is also known as a democracy promoter. However, this is taken for granted as a policy to be pursued for the sake of pursuit. Raising public awareness on the achievements and marketing the Union's ways and means as benevolent would be essential. For democracy promotion to be perceived as real and closer to the human dimension and not just as an empty political word detached from practical application the Union should ensure that through people to people contacts this objective is met whereby its model is experienced and appreciated as worthy of transfer and replication. 'Partnership' would thus attain its full meaning.