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Review of the doctoral dissertation

**“Democracy assistance policies of the US and the EU:
different approaches and their causes”**

submitted by Jan Hornát at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague

In his dissertation, Jan Hornát starts from the question of ‘why the US and EU institutions employ different tactics and strategies of promoting democracy’ (14) and seeks to ‘examine how normative ideals and understandings of democracy inform the formulation and implementation of democracy promotion strategies and policies’ (17). His research is thus situated in the field of international democracy promotion and, more narrowly, assistance and contributes to one of its main quests, namely that of understanding and/or explaining promoters’ – or donors’ – policies. Adopting a moderate constructivist perspective, he considers both ideas and structures in the, by now almost classic, comparison of the United States of America (US) and the European Union (EU) as two major but differing international actors and donors of democracy assistance. He finds that in line with their diverging democratic identities, ‘the EU inclines toward a “top-down – developmental – substantive” approach to democracy promotion and the US towards a “bottom-up – political – procedural” approach’ (206), suggesting that the normative background indeed shapes the (rhetoric and) practice of democracy assistance.

The dissertation is well written, clearly structured into 14 chapters, grouped into four larger sections, fulfils all the formal requirements of academic writing, and comprises an extensive bibliography covering primary documents and secondary literature on the topic. In an introductory part, Jan Hornát discusses methodological, theoretical, and conceptual issues in order to contextualize and clarify the premises of his research (chapters 2-4). In part I, he develops his typology of approaches to democracy assistance (chapters 5-6) as an analytical framework for the empirical analysis in parts II and III. Drawing on various strands of the literature on democracy and democratization, he elaborates three sets of (binary) ideal-typical approaches to democracy assistance: political vs. developmental, top-down vs. bottom-up, and procedural vs. substantive. For each of these approaches, he identifies the value and conception of de-



mocracy, impulses for democratization, as well as methods of democracy assistance summarized in Table 6 (63).

Turning to the empirical analysis with part II, he then analyses the respective 'democratic identity' of the US and the EU (chapters 7-10), drawing on secondary literature and formulating expectations of how this 'normative background' relates to the practice of and approaches to democracy assistance. He in turn investigates their self-image as democracy promoters (chapter 7), their political philosophical traditions of liberalism and socialism (chapter 8), and their respective notion of state-society relations with regard to the scope of the (welfare) state and its different sources of (input/output) legitimacy (chapter 9). In Table 10 (122-123, chapter 10), he summarizes for each actor their value and conception of democracy as well as impulses for democratization and draws conclusions for their practice of democracy assistance and their 'correlated' approach. In part III, he finally turns to analysing the US' and the EU'S 'conceptions of democracy' in their democracy promotion policies and instruments for democracy assistance (chapters 11-14). Based on a thorough analysis of primary documents, he traces their models of democracy and approaches to democracy assistance for the US since the 1980s and the EU since the 1990s both in 'guiding documents' (chapter 11) and in the 'architecture' of their various instruments (chapter 12) and further contextualizes their differing approaches against the background of historical and structural differences (chapter 13). In summary, he distinguishes in Table 14 (207-208) for each actor their conceptualizations of democracy in guiding documents and the strategic propensities of their democracy assistance instruments. In conclusion (chapter 14), finding his constructivist premises on the influence of the normative background on the practice of democracy assistance confirmed, he posits that

'the explanatory factor that causes the US and EU approaches to democracy assistance to differ is their democratic identity, i.e. different conceptions of the ideal-type of democracy. As a consequence, the design of institutions and programs that form the structure of democracy assistance policies are geared to toward achieving different targets.' (205)

Nuancing the simplified picture of two ideal-types, he stresses that the difference between the US and the EU lies in their respective 'balance between these approaches' (209) and that we might even see 'a gradual convergence of approaches to democracy assistance' (209) over time. While the difference between the US' more bottom-up/political/procedural and the EU's more top-down/developmental/substantive approaches might even be 'part of an unintended division of labor between two partners' (209), they also challenge critical accounts of democracy promotion that lump together the 'West' and its uniformly 'minimalist and procedural' approach (207).

With his dissertation, Jan Hornát clearly proves his ability to independently design and conduct theoretically guided empirical research in the field of international democracy promotion and political science that merits the award of a PhD in the social sciences. His dissertation demonstrates a breadth of reading with regard to the relevant, both theoretical and empirical, bodies of literature as well as an extensive analysis of primary documents that are brought together with a view to the central research question raised. Focusing on the US and the EU, it provides important empirical insights into the democracy promotion policies and their normative backgrounds of two of the main international donors of democracy assistance.



There are, however, a number of issues that challenge the dissertation's specific – theoretical, methodological, and empirical – contributions to the state of the art as well as the academic and/or political relevance of its findings. The ontological and epistemological premises mentioned in the introduction (17) are not systematically elaborated as theoretical and methodological foundations in the introductory part and it is not clear how exactly they inform the analysis in parts I-III beyond the choice of considering ideational/normative factors. In addition, the dissertation's research interest remains ambiguous between 'understanding' and 'explaining' variation between the US' and the EU's approaches to democracy assistance, even though the research question is clearly stated. On the one hand, the dissertation aims to investigate 'causal mechanisms and generating processes', claiming rightly that this interest in the *how* 'holds an inherently explanatory value' (17). On the other hand, empirical observations of part II and III are 'correlated' (124, 146) with one another and the conclusion speaks of 'democratic identity' as the 'explanatory factor' (205), suggesting quite a different logic for causal analysis. This ambiguity is reflected both in the theoretical/conceptual framework and the empirical analysis and directly relates to the issue of relevance.

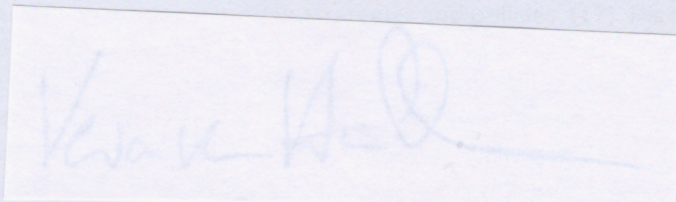
The typology of approaches to democracy assistance (part I, chapters 5-6) is a heuristic or *analytical* framework for distinguishing different approaches, but it does not in the more narrow sense present a *theoretical* framework that would speak to the research interest in causality. It specifies neither the bases for 'understanding', i.e. causal mechanisms and observable implications, nor those for 'explaining', i.e. explanatory factors and hypotheses on their causal effect. While it is a useful tool for analysing approaches, it does not follow from the typology what a 'democratic identity' is and how it relates to and shapes these approaches. The typology is presented as three separate sets of 'binary' ideal-types without elaborating on the relationship between these three aspects or dimensions. They are aggregated into two ideal types (bottom-up, political, procedural vs. top-down, developmental, substantive), but it is not clear whether these always have to go together or if we could think of this typology as a 2x2x2 matrix that allows any 'combination' of approaches. While many of the concepts are well developed, the dissertation would still benefit from a greater conceptual clarity: Categories used in the tables 6, 10, and 14 are not systematically defined and used to structure the analysis and the reader is left with an intuitive understanding of 'approach', as this key concept is not systematically embedded in a discussion of related notions, e.g. regarding objectives, strategies, and instruments of democracy assistance.

The empirical analysis in part II and III clearly sets out to investigate the *how* of democratic identity and approaches to democracy assistance (see the 'mission statements' of chapters 7-9 and 11-12 on p. 64, 82, 102, 124, 167). However, each chapter focuses very much on the respective 'factor' at hand and rarely creates an explicit link between the different aspects in terms of mechanisms and processes. Missing a comprehensive theoretical framework that more systematically elaborates on and brings together democratic identities, democracy promotion policies, and approaches to democracy assistance, it is not always easy for the reader to follow the inherent logic of the analysis, e.g. why 'democratic identity' is analysed with regard to these aspects and not others. In the same vein, chapter 13 seems to be an addition that is not well integrated into the overall analysis, providing on the one hand a broader perspective and on the other additional data for 'measuring' the US' and the EU's approaches to democracy assistance in terms of aid levels. While the case selection of the US and the EU is discussed several times throughout the dissertation, other related methodological questions of are not addressed, e.g. regarding the choice of primary documents for the analysis in chap-

ter 11. Analysing a 'wide swath' does not necessarily immunize against the charge of 'cherry-picking' (124) as long as the criteria for selection are not made transparent – or the analysis includes *all* of the relevant documents. Similarly, chapter 12 covers a large number of 'instruments', but it is not clear whether these are *all* the instruments the actors ever had at their disposal – and how the analysis is going to deal with the variation over time and across instruments, an issue only quickly mentioned in the conclusion.

Finally, it would be great to tease out more explicitly the relevance and contributions of this dissertation. The starting point – or 'conundrum' (205)? – of 'same goal, different approaches' is not necessarily puzzling (12-13, 17). Instead, a systematic review of the extensive literature dealing with the US' and the EU's democracy promotion policies and approaches to democracy assistance and existing answers to the research question posed could help identifying the specific 'gap' in the literature that the dissertation seeks to fill. What are the ongoing academic debates on understanding/explaining international democracy promotion policies that the research design and findings of this dissertation are contributing to? What are avenues for future research? Also, the dissertation claims practical relevance in terms of policy advice to international democracy donors – but this claim is mostly based on expected implications for the effectiveness of their efforts (17). It is completely legitimate that effectiveness is not part of the analysis, but it limits the potential for policy recommendations. After all, if democracy promotion approaches are based on democratic identities – what is the potential for policy change?

Notwithstanding these issues for further discussion during the defence, Jan Hornát has submitted with his dissertation a solid example of theoretically guided empirical research that provides rich empirical insights into the normative background and foundations of the US' and the EU's democracy promotion policies. I therefore recommend to the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University, Prague, to award Jan Hornát with a PhD.



Prof. Dr. Vera van Hüllen