

# European Union Democracy Promotion via Conditionality in Regional Context\*

Fatma Zeynep ÖZKURT\*\*

## Abstract

International organisations are among the key external actors promoting democratisation process of nation states. The tools international organisations utilise to externally impact on political transformations at the domestic level are centred on their democratic norms, rules and values. In that respect, the European Union (EU) has been acknowledged as primary democracy promoter within its region, attributable to its effective influence mechanisms based on democratic conditionality. This paper aims to analyse the formation of the characteristics of the EU as a democracy promoter and intends to unveil its contributions to the spread of democracy within its regional sphere, and democratisation processes particularly in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe.

**Keywords:** International Organisations, European Union, Democracy Promotion, Conditionality, Democratisation

## Bölgesel Düzeyde Koşulluluk Üzerinden Avrupa Birliği'nin Demokrasi Tesisi

## Öz

Uluslararası örgütler, devletlerin demokratikleşme süreçlerine etki eden aktörlerin başında yer almaktadır. Uluslararası örgütlerin ulusal düzeyde oluşan siyasi dönüşüm süreçlerine dışarıdan etki etmelerine olanak sağlayan araçları ise bu örgütlerin demokratik norm, kural ve değerleri ile bağlantılıdır. Bu bağlamda Avrupa Birliği (AB), demokratik koşulluluk ilkesine bağlı ve etkin olarak nitelendirilebilecek etki mekanizmaları sebebiyle, kendi bölgesindeki başlıca demokrasi destekçisi olarak tanınmaktadır. Bu çalışma temel olarak AB'nin demokrasi destekçisi olarak tanımlanmasına imkân sağlayan niteliklerinin oluşum sürecini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda ayrıca, AB'nin kendi bölgesinde demokrasi yayılımına

---

## Özgün Araştırma Makalesi [Original Research Article]

Geliş Tarihi: 03.07.2017 Kabul Tarihi: 06.09.2017

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17336/igusbd.324178>

\* This article is based on the re-evaluation of the findings of the author's PhD thesis from the University of Nottingham, Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Politics and International Relations, United Kingdom.

\*\* Asst. Prof. Dr., Nisantasi University, Istanbul, Turkey, E-mail:

[zeynep.ozkurt@nisantasi.edu.tr](mailto:zeynep.ozkurt@nisantasi.edu.tr), [zeynepozkurt@gmail.com](mailto:zeynepozkurt@gmail.com)

**ORCID ID** <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1284-0210>

ve özellikle Güney, Merkez ve Doğu Avrupa’da görülen demokratikleşme süreçlerine olan katkısı da incelenmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uluslararası Örgütler, Avrupa Birliği, Demokrasi Tesisi, Koşulluluk, Demokratikleşme

Sayfa/Page | 2

İGÜ Sos. Bil. Derg.,  
4 (2), 2017,  
ss. 1-21.

## Introduction

The aftermath of the Cold War has marked a turning point for the international organisations (IOs) role in world politics since they had been accredited as the main actors diffusing democratic norms and values in leading to political changes and expansion of democracy in the European continent.<sup>1</sup> It is in this context that democratisation and political transformation of states have become debatable subjects since analyses became highly indefensible unless the international dimension of democracy promotion triggered by IOs is taken into account.<sup>2</sup> In this context, IOs are considered as the key players of international democracy promotion since they provide the necessary tools and legitimate action plans for those states under democratisation process. In fact, IOs mainly provide external support for the establishment and promotion of democratic peace and development of economic and social welfare<sup>3</sup> as well as technical and financial support for the establishment of democratic institutions at the national level.

It comes as no surprise that the European Union (EU) is accepted as one of the leading IOs in democracy promotion attributable to its prevailing foreign policy and objectives materialised specifically through its enlargement and neighbourhood policies. This paper aims to present an overview of the role of the EU in democracy promotion and its impact on political transformation as part of democratisation of non-EU states in a regional context. The discussion therefore sheds light on the characteristics of the EU as a democracy promoter and aims to unveil its contributions to the spread of democracy within its regional sphere, particularly in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. Based on this, it is intended to present a general democratic template of the EU in order to assess to what extent the EU can play an active and effective role as an external actor in democratisation processes of non-EU states.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Kubicek, “International Norms, the European Union, and Democratization: Tentative Theory and Evidence”, Paul J. Kubicek (ed.) *The European Union and Democratization*, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Burnell, “Democracy Assistance: The State of the Discourse”, P. Burnell (ed.) *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization*, London and Portland, Frank Cass Publishers, 2000, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Burnell, “From Evaluating Democracy Assistance to Appraising Democracy Promotion”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 56, 2008, pp. 414-415.

This paper firstly touches upon the formation of democratic principles of the EU. The EU's stance on establishing effective democratic institutions protecting civil liberties, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law at the supranational level without a doubt enhances social consciousness, institutional transformation, and reorganisation of structures of authorities at the national level. Hence it is important to clarify the roots of the epitome of liberal democracy within the EU, before delving into its role as 'democracy promoter' within its region. Recent literature on democratisation gives reference to the external impact of IOs as the key facilitators of domestic change in relation to democratisation and democratic consolidation at the national level. In that respect, the EU's role as a democracy promoter, and hence external actor is analysed within an actor-oriented approach in order to assess its functionality as the donor in democratisation processes of non-EU states as recipients.

### **Democratic Principles of the EU**

The EU is consisted of states supporting democracy; thus, it is based on principles such as liberty, freedoms and the rule of law. The institutional transformation and policy formation of the EU as a supranational actor has been a lengthy process. Starting from 1950s, the EU has successfully diffused democratic principles adapting from other prominent IOs such as the United Nations (UN) into its legal framework. This helped the EU to create a union of states that formally adopt and implement essential and necessary conditions of democratic regimes. Among the EU's other principles embedded in its legal framework are the equality before law, protection against discrimination and fundamental freedoms such as freedom of thought, opinion and expression, assembly and association.<sup>4</sup>

The EU has not only requested the implementation of those principles with the idea of 'justice and peace' by its member states; but also has drawn on them whilst promoting democracy at the regional level. As a matter of fact, in the framework of its enlargement policy, the EU has made formal membership conditional upon the establishment of effective democratic political systems at the national level in 1962. Subsequently, the explicit link between democracy and accession to the EU (then European Economic Community – EEC) transpired as a vital element in democracy promotion in the European region.<sup>5</sup> Provided that the EU, through the legalisation and internalisation of its democratic principles into its political, institutional and legal framework, had successfully postulated legitimacy concerning its actor-

---

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948; Council of Europe, *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Lauren M. McLaren, *Constructing Democracy in Southern Europe – A comparative analysis of Italy, Spain and Turkey*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2008, p. 237.

ness as democracy promoter demanding compliance of national actors on pre-conditions for EU membership.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, in parallel with the international and regional developments after the Cold War, the EU became obliged to review and revise the existing Community legal framework. In fact, the ongoing enlargement policy and increase in demand of nation-states within the region for formal membership had compelled the EU to adopt and implement essential policy instruments that would broaden and make the political component of integration at the supranational level more definitive for the target states. It was in this context that the EU outlined four political constituents including human rights, democracy, good governance and decreased military expenditure and exploited them as tools for democracy promotion within its region.<sup>7</sup> Following the legitimisation of the EU's actor-ness as democracy promoter through the institutionalisation and legalisation of democratic norms and principles, the EU further interposed legitimacy in its policy actions and conditionality as its one of the most effective influence mechanisms.

Whilst these internal changes had taken place at the supranational level at that period, the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism in Eastern Europe as well as the reunification of Germany had been among the international developments that forced the Union to reassess its position at the international level. Rather than revising its existing credentials on democracy, the EU instead focused on the mechanisms through which it can pursue its goal on democracy promotion within its region. For instance, the EU had the opportunity to monitor and assess the performances of the member and candidate states based on the measures for the respect for human rights and democracy taken by the Union itself through two fundamental policy instruments of coercive diplomacy and the EU's influence mechanism of conditionality, known as 'carrot' and 'stick'. These instruments essentially put in force subsequent to the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1992, creating a strong motivation among the existing member states and candidate states whilst pursuing progression towards their inclusion and integration to the EU at the same time as continuing their democratisation process.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> McLaren, 2008, op. cit., p. 237; Ergun Özbudun and Ömer F. Gençkaya, *Democratization and the Politics of Constitution-Making in Turkey*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2009, p. 43; Jose I. Torreblanca, "The Enlargement acquis and external strategy: a prelude to deliberative foreign policy?", *CPA Estudios/Working Papers*, 4/2003, 2003, pp. 10-11. Available at: [http://www.uned.es/dcpa/estudios\\_workingpapers/CPAestudios4\\_2003.pdf](http://www.uned.es/dcpa/estudios_workingpapers/CPAestudios4_2003.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Gordon Crawford, "European Union Development Co-operation and the Promotion of Democracy", P. Burnell (ed.) *Democracy Assistance – International Co-operation for Democratisation*, London and Portland, Frank Cass Publishers, 2000, pp. 92-93.

<sup>8</sup> European Union, *Treaty on European Union*, C191, 1992.

Despite the implementation of conditionality effectively, the verity of increasing number of candidate states in post-Cold War period compelled the EU to revise its benchmarks on democracy. As a result, the initial requirements that had appeared to be precise by that time became equivocal later on. This in turn set the scene for searching alternative ways of evaluating and measuring the level of compliance of the concerning states. It is after this occurrence that the membership conditions which had been set previously, were explicitly proclaimed as the 'Copenhagen criteria' at the European Council of Copenhagen in 1993.<sup>9</sup>

The comparative analysis of the EU's enlargement rounds shows that the EU was neither concerned about the democratisation process of states included in the first enlargement round nor found itself under the heavy burden of assisting their harmonisation and integration processes at the supranational level. This outcome is mainly explained by the fact that the concerning nation-states that applied for EU membership in the first enlargement round were consolidated democracies; thus, the non-inclusion of any precondition on democracy during the accession negotiation process in that particular enlargement round.

However, in 1970s, the EU for the first-time compelled compliance on democratic conditions of Greece, Spain and Portugal. These states had troubled history concerning their political systems, and struggled with transition to/consolidation of democracies at the national level. The EU henceforth had to step in as an external actor providing necessary incentives and influence mechanisms that would trigger the institutional transformation and democratisation processes of these states at the national level. As a result, the inclusion of this conditionality-compliance nexus into the exhibited a gradual change in the EU's general requirement framework for full membership, marked a radical turning point for the future enlargement rounds.

Furthermore, starting from the 1980s, the EU developed its conditions and transformed them from being 'formal criteria' into conditions on 'substantive democracy'.<sup>10</sup> This ideally proved the EU's role as a democracy promoter within its region. Through the rigorous set of conditions for accession, particularly in the cases of CEEs<sup>11</sup>, the EU found itself deeply entangled with the national political transformation process of candidate states. Nonetheless, the lack of formal mechanisms to regulate or monitor the

---

<sup>9</sup> European Council, *Presidency Conclusions*, Copenhagen European Council, 21-22 June, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, "The European Union, Democratic Conditionality and Transnational Party Linkages – The case of Eastern Europe", J. Grugel (ed.) *Democracy Without Borders*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

compliance of old member states and the troubled candidate states of 1970s, significantly diminished the EU's commitment to its enlargement policy<sup>12</sup> and hence created hesitance concerning the inclusion of further enlargement rounds into its political agenda.

Nonetheless, until the largest single expansion of the EU in 2004, and despite its reluctance of continuing its enlargement policy, the EU came up with a new strategy on the promotion of human rights and democratisation. The aim of this strategy evolved around developing human rights policy at the EU level, legally and politically binding all the EU member states as well as enforcing compliance of candidate states throughout their accession negotiation process. The EU consequently intended to make this policy a central aspect of its external policy and legal base for the attainment of sustainable development<sup>13</sup> harmonised at the EU level. Ultimately for the EU, this strategy broadened its scope on human rights by extending and linking the field to the wider context of interdependence with the EU's other primary goals and activities, such as the promotion of democracy. This initiative also established closer and stronger links with UN standards; hence, provided a new source of reference for the European stance on democratic principles.

It can be argued that the abovementioned developments in the democratic principles of the EU are crucial steps in the progress of creating a coherent EU policy on human rights and democracy. Since that kind of a policy offers a valid ground for the adoption of structural democratic objectives, the EU's leverage on candidate states in terms of promoting change and expediting reform processes within those countries was reinforced considerably. Furthermore, with these initiatives, the EU has radically advanced itself in terms of operating in consensus, displaying visible procedures and projects on democratic reforms and human rights issues at the supranational level. The increased consensus among the member states of the EU facilitated the Union's development and enhancement of its role in democracy promotion, ultimately proving that the assertion that the level of political integration at the supranational level is more likely to be achieved if democratic conditions are harmonised at the national level.

Central to the EU's approach, initiatives for the promotion of democracy and protection of human rights were successfully integrated into the entire range of Union policies and programmes. This in turn, allowed the EU to provide financial support for related projects; thus, enhanced the reforms on legislation, administration and the judiciary, fundamental to the progression

---

<sup>12</sup> David Phinnemore, "Beyond 25-The Changing Face of EU Enlargement: Commitment, Conditionality and the Constitutional Treaty", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 8, No.1, 2006, pp. 7-26.

<sup>13</sup> European Union, *European Union Observations on an Evolving EU Human Rights Policy*, 2001.

of human rights practices, fundamental freedoms and strengthening democracy, in addition to good governance among nation-states. Among those, the European Initiative for Human Rights and Democracy (EIDHR) stands out as the EU-led programme aiming to develop and consolidate democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Specifically, the EU utilised EIDHR to spread its influence on states wherein fundamental freedoms and human rights practices are most at risk. The scope of EIDHR legitimised the EU's external action on those states that fail or lag behind in enhancing and promoting those rights and freedoms by providing EU Guidelines reaching out to the role of civil societies, conciliation of group interests, issues concerning political representation and participation, electoral processes, reliability and transparency of governmental institutions.<sup>14</sup>

These particular objectives illustrate that the EU with EIDHR puts great emphasis on the importance of fundamental rights such as the right to freedom of thought, opinion, religion, expression as well as the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. By doing this, it aims to help civil society to be more open and pluralistic in order to improve democratic legislation and political representation which in turn will stimulate dialogue between citizens and governments. It also reinforces official dialogues on human rights issues, promotes particular instruments for sustaining the process of consolidation of democracy and contributes to the transparency of elections. All these credentials reaffirm the EU's commitment to strengthening the promotion and consolidation of democracy within an international framework and to build a democratic political culture amongst countries.

### **EU as a Democracy Promoter**

The dominant the actor-oriented approach within literature on democratic transitions to a great extent gives emphasis to the conventional role of political actors in explaining any regime change at the national level.<sup>15</sup> This approach indicates that democratisation is determined by decisions of major political actors wherein old political elites are considered to be biggest potential threats to this process<sup>16</sup> as these actors are responsible for showing

---

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Commission Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2009 for the European Instrument for the Promotion of Democracy and the Human Rights*, C (2009) 7082, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy; Toward a Dynamic Model", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1970, pp. 337-363.

<sup>16</sup> Guillermo A. O'Donnell... [et al.] "Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies", G. O'Donnell and P. C. Schmitter (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, Baltimore, MD, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986; Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies. An Essay on Democratic Transitions*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1990; Terry L. Karl, "Dilemmas of

sufficient political will to change the political landscape at the national level. However, as previously noted, with the increasing role of IOs in democracy promotion around the world, an 'international' dimension has been brought into the analysis of democratisation. Hence, democratisation processes can no longer be analysed by focusing exclusively on domestic politics.

Democracy promotion by IOs primarily develops at the regional level since promotion of democratic values and norms become less demanding and more straightforward due to the political interactions between structurally interconnected states and IOs in the same region. In light of this context, the EU is seen as the most 'articulated' and 'intensive' form of those interconnected structures wherein its 'conditionality' strategy comprises the 'essence' of those political interactions where the EU as an external actor impacts upon domestic change and democratisation at the national level.<sup>17</sup> In that respect, the adoption and implementation of conditionality by regional actors, such as the EU, signify the importance given to the promotion and dispersion of democracy in their peripheries.

It is argued that analytical studies on cases of actual and/or potential democratisation in different regional contexts can be advanced by generating hypotheses concerning the impact of international influences. The inclusion of the external dimension into the interaction between IOs and democratisation processes reflects upon the importance of 'regional hegemons' by referring to their contribution to democratic transitions by means of their 'geopolitical and economic power', where their powers are specified by the adoption and promotion of coherent policy options with respect to a wide array of 'incentives' and 'disincentives'.<sup>18</sup>

In this context, regional hegemon is seen as an external actor implementing neutral or moderate pro-hegemon foreign policy within target countries to stimulate transition to democracy or democratisation at the national level.<sup>19</sup> Regional hegemons as external actors of democracy promotion follow the primary condition of political communication with national actors having pro-democracy tendencies. Once this transmission is intact, they start to provide material and social incentives facilitating the adoption of democratic reforms (e.g. adoption and implementation of

---

Democratization in Latin America", D. A. Rustow and K. P. Erickson (eds.) *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives*, New York, Harper Collins, 1990, pp. 163-191.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, 1999, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

<sup>18</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation – Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 73-74.

<sup>19</sup> Renske Doorenspleet and Cas Mudde, "Upping the Odds: Deviant Democracies and Theories of Democratization", *Democratization*, Vol.15, No. 4, 2008, pp. 815-832.

legislative changes); and finalise this phase by monitoring and assessing these reforms.

Regional hegemony utilises conditionality as one of the vital instruments with a high impact factor in compelling political transformation and democratic reform process at the national level. Due to providing essential sources of capacity-building, human rights promotion, legislative amendments as part of democratisation process, conditionality is seen as an act of 'linking by a state or international organisation of benefits desired by another state to the fulfilment of certain conditions'.<sup>20</sup> Specifically in this context, democratic conditionality is regarded as an assessment tool for the effectiveness of the EU in democracy promotion. As Pridham argues 'the EU possesses an institutionalised regional framework which readily transmits the kind of influences and pressures that may affect the course of democratisation, deliberately or otherwise'.<sup>21</sup>

In that respect, it is highly contended that the EU as a democracy promoter and one of the most influential external actor of democratisation, exerts its influence on countries with the help of its strategy of democratic conditionality. In fact, the EU through the preconditions it sets for formal membership, forces non-EU states to adopt a democratic political system and further implement liberal democratic norms and procedures associated with the EU. In a similar vein, Schmitter recaps the lasting influence of the EU as a democracy promoter as follows:<sup>22</sup>

*First, EU membership is expected to be permanent in nature and to provide access to an expanding variety of economic and social opportunities far into the future. Second, it is backed by a 'complex interdependence', an evolving system of private transnational exchanges at many levels and involving many different types of collective action (parties, interest associations, social movements, sub-national governments etc.). And, finally, it engages in lengthy, public, multilateral deliberation and is decided unanimously in the Council of Ministers and by an absolute majority in the European Parliament. This requirement enhances the 'reputation' or 'certification' effect beyond the level attainable via unilateral recognition or bilateral exchanges where other criteria (i.e. security calculations) may override the democratic ones. More than any*

---

<sup>20</sup> Karen E. Smith, "The Evolution and Application of EU Membership Conditionality", M. Cremona (ed.) *The Enlargement of the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> Pridham, 1999, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Phillippe C. Schmitter, "The International Context of Contemporary Democratization", G. Pridham (ed.) *Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1995, p. 524.

*other international commitment, full EU membership has served to stabilise both political and economic expectations. It does not directly guarantee the consolidation of democracy; it indirectly makes it easier for national actors to agree within a narrower range of rules and practices.*

In this context, democracy promotion equilibrium points at two forms of strategy followed by regional hegemons. On one end of the equilibrium, regional hegemons impose sanctions (financial or political) as a negative side of external impact. For instance, requirement schemes established by the EU during accession negotiations where non-EU states are compelled to meet conditions ranging from democratic and human rights conditions to various liberal democratic principles constitute the 'demand' side of democracy promotion by the EU. Moreover, 'conditionality' clause posits the EU's utmost share of demands (hence the negative side of its external impact) throughout its democracy promotion practices.<sup>23</sup>

On the opposite end of the equilibrium, the positive form of democracy promotion entails support, incentive, inducement and reward. In fact, the EU by offering various rewards and support (technical or financial), aims to expedite the process of democratisation of non-EU states at the national level. In contrast to the negative side of external impact, these 'democracy aids' offered by IOs – mainly by the EU – is regarded as the 'most common and often most significant tool for promoting democracy'.<sup>24</sup> As a result of the EU's influence mechanisms, it is predicted that regime change and institutional adaptation at the supranational level also becomes inevitable. In that respect, the EU should not only be seen as a new 'level' of governance, but also as an innovator of new 'approaches' of governance.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, it is observed that despite the material costs of accession to the EU, the citizens of candidate states show a high level of support for the accession itself since EU accession in particular significantly contribute to democratic consolidation, as well as to the adoption and promotion of liberal

---

<sup>23</sup> Further on conditionality see: Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Compliance and Conditionality", *Arena Working Paper 00/18*, ARENA/Universitetet i Oslo, 2000; Heather Grabbe, "European Union Conditionality and the Acquis Communautaire", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 23, No.3, 2002, pp.249-268; Tim Haughton, "When Does the EU Make a Difference? Conditionality and the Accession Process in Central and Eastern Europe", *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 5, 2007, pp. 233-246; Arista Maria Cirtautas and Frank Schimmelfennig, "Europeanisation Before and After Accession: Conditionality, Legacies and Compliance", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 62, No.3, 2010, pp. 421-441.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*, Washington, DC, Endowment for International Peace, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Brigid Laffan, "The European Union: a distinctive model of Internationalization", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p. 242.

democratic rules and institutions at the national level.<sup>26</sup> Besides, there is a common tendency among candidate states' leaders and citizens to believe that the EU accession process and further attainment of membership strongly favours a robust democratisation process at the national level..

The main reason for this conviction is that the EU aims to provide necessary tools to endorse democratic political systems in candidate states. It therefore comes to a point where in the absence of these tools provided by the EU, the internal change and democratisation efforts would be either extremely difficult or non-existent. Therefore, it can be argued that EU accession improves the quality of democratic principles and practices within the candidate states since the EU model of democracy embodies benchmarks such as consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, which are crucial for the promotion of democracy in the target candidate states.

### **A Historical Assessment of the EU's Democracy Promotion**

In the 1970s, Southern European states witnessed regime changes where processes of transformation and democratisation have generated improved political, economic and social outcomes. The EU (then European Community-EC) for the first time in its history was actively involved in the transformation processes of these states. For instance, within the scope of accession negotiations, Spain, Portugal and Greece came across with inevitability of democratisation; and had been assisted by the EU's political and economic incentives which helped advancing their political transformation and democratic consolidation at the national level.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, through Europeanisation<sup>28</sup>, the EC have turned itself into a visionary actor setting Europe as a 'symbol of democracy' and 'membership' as an 'anchor of democracy'.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the EEC utilised conditionality

---

<sup>26</sup> Wojciech Sadurski, "Accession's Democracy Dividend: The Impact of the EU Enlargement upon Democracy in the New Member States of Central and Eastern Europe", *European Law Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2004, p. 374.

<sup>27</sup> Kubicek, 2003, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Further on Europeanisation see: Heather Grabbe, "How Does Europeanization Affect CEE Governance? Conditionality, Diffusion and Diversity", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 2001, pp. 1013-1031; Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "Conceptualising the Domestic Impact of Europe", K. Featherstone and C. Radaelli (eds.) *The Politics of Europeanisation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 57-83; Kevin Featherstone, "Introduction: In The Name of 'Europe'", K. Featherstone and C. Radaelli (eds.) *The Politics of Europeanisation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 3-26; Tanja A. Börzel, "The Transformative Power of Europe Reloaded – The Limits of External Europeanization", *KFG Working Papers No.11*, Free University Berlin, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Carlos Closa and Paul M. Heywood, *Spain and the European Union*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 15.

strategy in case of Spain in order to turn the country into a ‘fully functioning democracy’ and produce permanent regime change.<sup>30</sup>

Although transition to democracy and democratic consolidation processes were previously explained by domestic (i.e. national) (f)actors, after the ‘liberalisation’ and/or democratisation of Southern Europe, international actors such as ‘extra regional powers’ became principle actors; and hence the preconditions they set for political transformation became central means of external impact.<sup>31</sup> This inclination towards international context in democratisation processes is evident in case of the EU’s involvement by means of providing necessary financial or political assistance and incentives to assure that the democratic transition in those countries was not interrupted by any problem that might occur at domestic or international level.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, a few scholars argue that democratisation process in Southern Europe initially started at the domestic level<sup>33</sup>; and only after the involvement of the EU in the later stages of democratisation of Southern Europe did the international dynamics start to play role in overall domestic change in the region. In support of this argument, it is claimed that the EU became a ‘symbolic reference point’ in 1970s for flourishing democratisation and it was seen as a moral supporter of democratic values that had an undeniable impact on the countries that wished to become a part of it.<sup>34</sup> In fact, for Spain, the EC membership was seen as a way to break away from ‘traditional isolationism’ that caused Spain to lag behind other Southern European countries and stay marginal to any developments and changes occurred at the international level.<sup>35</sup>

Based on the assertion that democratisation primarily starts at the domestic level, it is crucial that certain ‘essential’ and ‘favourable’ conditions necessary for democratic institutions must be met prior to any external impact asserted on this process by any IOs. The institutions forming the minimum requirements for large-scale democracies include:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Lauren M. McLaren, 2008, op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>31</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter, “An Introduction to Southern European Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Italy, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Turkey”, G. O’Donnell, P. C. Schmitter, L. Whitehead (eds.) *Transition from Authoritarian Rule*, Maryland and London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Laurence Whitehead, *The International Dimensions of Democratisation: Europe and the Americas*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 271.

<sup>33</sup> Linz and Stepan, 1996, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Pridham 1999, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Heywood, “Spain and the European Dimension: The Integrated Market, Convergence and Beyond”, *Strathclyde Papers on Government and Politics*, Vol. 94, 1993, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, New Heaven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 84-86.

- i) elected officials (elected by citizens) who have the constitutional right to rule, and control government decisions on policies;
- ii) free, fair, and frequent elections under limited or no government coercion;
- iii) freedom of expression;
- iv) right to access legally to independent and non-governmental sources of information (including sources that oppose government);
- v) freedom of association (right to form independent associations, organisations, interest groups, and political parties).

In case of Southern European countries efficient political transition could be attained since all the aforementioned political forces within those countries in combination with strong social support for democracy could successfully reinforce new democratic ideas. This in turn, altered the EU's position to a guardian taking action if necessary instead of the being the main facilitator of the democratisation processes in these countries. In contrast to the case of Southern European countries, it is evident that the EU has been significantly involved in the transformation of ex-communist countries. Initially, the EU's principle was to disperse the ideals of prosperity and security, as well as democracy, among those countries. Most of the time the EU's involvement was characterised by being an arbitrator in the democratisation process due to its efforts at delineating common liberal democratic norms and values for domestic and international political actors, as well as developing entrenched institutional structures surrounding these norms and values.

Moreover, it can be argued that the EU, through the use of its enlargement policy, committed itself to the stabilisation of the emerging democracies and endorsement of economic growth. The EU's enlargement requirements incorporate necessary conditions (such as implementation of political and economic reforms) to be fulfilled by those countries in due course. On the other hand, it is also important to stress the willingness of ex-communist countries to become a part of Europe, as this became the main drive for those countries to comply with the EU's rules and conditions by means of implementing various political and economic reforms. Currently, compliance with the EU rules is the main condition of becoming a member of the EU.

The mutual eagerness and efforts of the EU and ex-communist countries on the improvement of democracy resulted in compliance with the EU's democratic criteria;<sup>37</sup> and the success stories belonged to countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. As suggested before, the acceleration of political and economic reform processes in those countries was

---

<sup>37</sup> Kubicek, 2003, op. cit., p. 2.

dependent on potential EU membership as this prospect compelled those countries to comply with its requirements. The democratisation process of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) evidently set the scene for the EU's heavy involvement as an external actor by means of political dialogue and assistance in institution building at the national level.

Furthermore, the Europe Agreements which were seen as approval of the association status of CEECs (also the further status of potential membership) provided the necessary ground for initiating democratisation processes within those countries. In actual fact, the negotiations on a Europe Agreement denote 'the EC's initial response to the CEE countries' desire for closer relations and ultimately membership'.<sup>38</sup> Besides, these agreements explicitly indicated the conditional character of membership offers by emphasising the prerequisite of compliance with its rules regarding the rule of law, respect for human rights, the establishment of multi-party political system, free and fair electoral system, as well as economic liberalisation.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, one must admit that the promotion of democracy cannot be explained only by the EU's efforts. This assumption can be proven by pointing out the countries which have not yet complied fully with the EU conditions. These countries are acknowledged as 'reluctant democratisers' simply because they fall behind or fail to keep up with 'political liberalisation' regardless of the EU's assistance.<sup>40</sup> The commonly-known examples within this category included Slovakia under Mečiar, Croatia under Tudjman and Ukraine in the course of independence. On the other hand, Turkey is also argued to be one of these reluctant countries towards democratisation process, in spite of external pressure asserted by the EU. In fact, it is argued that it would be misleading if one investigates the role of the EU in promotion of democratisation only within the success stories; and therefore the analysis of the relations between reluctant democratisers and the EU as democracy promoter should be taken into consideration since it creates a common ground on which the effectiveness of the impact of external actors on the diffusion of democratic norms and values, and the response of problematic countries, can be analysed from a comparative perspective.

In light of this context, as in the case of the CEECs, Turkey has also become subject to the EU's formal accession criteria involving its democratic principles since 1999, when it gained candidacy status. Since then the issues of democratisation and human rights have been as major features of Turkey-EU relations. The increasing importance of democratisation and human rights is argued to be a major shift in the focus of Turkey-EU relations which were

---

<sup>38</sup> David Phinnemore, "Romania and Euro-Atlantic Integration", D. Phinnemore (ed.), *The EU and Romania: Great Expectations*, London, The Federal Trust, 2006, pp.39.

<sup>39</sup> Pridham 1999, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Kubicek, 2003, op. cit., p. 3.

predominantly concentrated around economic matters in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>41</sup> After Turkey gained candidacy status, the issues of human rights and democratisation became the focal point of the political affairs between the two actors. It is plausible to argue that the EU's intensive involvement in democracy promotion and intention to spread its democratic principles in non-member or candidate countries, including Turkey, has opened the space for radical initiatives and political reforms in target countries. As a result of this, and in conjunction with Turkey's ever-lasting Europeanisation and/or democratisation efforts and determination to become a member of the EU, a dynamic domestic transformation process is observed at the domestic level.

### Conclusion

In recent years, the EU has made significant efforts to transform into an important international actor in the political domain. Among changes in the EU's political transformation an emphasis has been given to democratisation, human rights and the rule of law greater than before. As part of its enlargement policy, the EU incrementally introduced new democratic political conditions into its policy towards candidate countries. After the introduction of these conditions, candidate countries became formally subject to an assessment on democracy and democratisation in connection with the EU's democratic principles; the failure of which would result in their exemption from EU membership.

In the meantime, EU conditionality – an indispensable aspect of domestic change in candidate countries under the influence of the EU – has undergone substantial advancement over time, comprising extensive democratic requirements. Particularly in the case of CEECs, EU conditionality became a central and proactive component of enlargement process; and hence, a *sine qua non* factor in the study of the EU enlargement and EU democracy promotion, which in turn evoked a growing interest in academic world and political circles in the last decade.

This paper aimed to open up the debate on the role of IOs in democracy promotion in general and the role of the EU in particular. This debate is remarkably important to understanding the democratic template of the EU and to comprehend the ways in which the EU, as a major international actor, intends to spread its democratic norms and values, not only in its member states, but also in candidate or non-member states.

The findings point out that any study on democratisation that do not take the international dimension into account would fail to adequately address the dynamics of domestic change in countries which are directly exposed to external impact. Furthermore, the synopsis of the EU's early

---

<sup>41</sup> İhsan Dağı, "Human rights and democratization: Turkish politics in the European context", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2001, pp. 51-68.

engagements with democracy promotion in Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe also provided invaluable insights on the legal mechanisms the Union developed for the dispersion of its democratic principles.

In fact, in the case of democratisation and liberalisation of Southern Europe in 1970s and Central and Eastern Europe in 1990s, it is observed that international actors such as extra-regional powers had been highly supportive of this transformation; and in this context the EU has become a symbol for flourishing democratisation and moral supporter of democratic values. More specifically, the initiation of the conditionality strategy as part of the EU's enlargement policy showed how the EU has transformed – and more likely to transform in the future – conditionality into being a major influence mechanism on domestic transformation at the national contexts within its region.

## REFERENCES

### BOOKS

BÖRZEL, Tanja A., Thomas RISSE, “Conceptualising the Domestic Impact of Europe”, K. Featherstone, C. Radaelli (eds.) **The Politics of Europeanisation**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 57-83.

BURNELL, Peter, “Democracy Assistance: The State of the Discourse”, P. Burnell (ed.) **Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization**, London and Portland, Frank Cass Publishers, 2000, pp. 3-33.

CAROTHERS, Thomas, **Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve**, Washington, DC: Endowment for International Peace, 1999.

CLOSA, Carlos, Paul M. HEYWOOD, **Spain and the European Union**, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

CRAWFORD, Gordon, “European Union Development Co-operation and the Promotion of Democracy”, P. Burnell (ed.) **Democracy Assistance International Co operation for Democratisation**, London and Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000, pp. 90-127.

DAHL, Robert A., **On Democracy**, New Heaven and London, Yale University Press, 1998.

DI PALMA, Giuseppe, **To Craft Democracies. An Essay on Democratic Transitions**, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1990.

FEATHERSTONE, Kevin, "Introduction: In The Name of 'Europe'", K. Featherstone, C. Radaelli (eds.) **The Politics of Europeanisation**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 3-26.

KARL, Terry L., "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America", D. A. Rustow, K. P. Erickson (eds.) **Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives**, New York, Harper Collins, 1990, pp. 163-191.

KUBICEK, Paul J., "International Norms, the European Union, and Democratization: Tentative Theory and Evidence", Paul J. Kubicek (ed.) **The European Union and Democratization**, London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 1-29.

LINZ, Juan J., Alfred, STEPAN, **Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation – Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe**, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

PHINNEMORE, David, "Romania and Euro-Atlantic Integration" D. Phinnemore (ed.) **The EU and Romania: Great Expectations**, London, The Federal Trust, 2006, pp. 38-48.

PRIDHAM, Geoffrey, "The European Union, Democratic Conditionality and Transnational Party Linkages – The case of Eastern Europe", J. Grugel (ed.) *Democracy Without Borders*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 59-75.

PRIDHAM, Geoffrey, **Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe**, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

SCHMITTER, Philippe C., "An Introduction to Southern European Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Italy, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Turkey", G. O'Donnell, P. C. Schmitter, L. Whitehead (eds.) **Transition from Authoritarian Rule**, Maryland and London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 3-10.

SCHMITTER, Phillippe C., "The International Context of Contemporary Democratization" G. Pridham (ed.) **Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe**, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1995, pp. 499-534.

SMITH, Karen E., "The Evolution and Application of EU Membership Conditionality", M. Cremona (ed.) **The Enlargement of the European Union**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 105-140.

WHITEHEAD, Laurence, **The International Dimensions of Democratisation: Europe and the Americas**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996.

**ARTICLES**

BÖRZEL, Tanja A., "The Transformative Power of Europe Reloaded – The Limits of External Europeanization", **KFG Working Papers**, No.11, Free University Berlin, 2010.

BURNELL, Peter, "From Evaluating Democracy Assistance to Appraising Democracy Promotion", **Political Studies**, Vol. 56, 2008, pp. 414-434.

CHECKEL, Jeffrey T., "Compliance and Conditionality", **Arena Working Paper 00/18**, ARENA/Universitetet i Oslo, 2000.

CIRTAUTAS, Arista Maria, SCHIMMELFENNIG Frank, "Europeanisation Before and After Accession: Conditionality, Legacies and Compliance", **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 62, No. 3, 2010, pp. 421-441.

DAĞI, İhsan "Human rights and democratization: Turkish politics in the European context", **Southeast European and Black Sea Studies**, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2001, pp. 51-68.

DOORENSPLEET, Renske, MUDDE, Cas, "Upping the Odds: Deviant Democracies and Theories of Democratization", **Democratization**, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2008, pp. 815- 832.

GRABBE, Heather, "How Does Europeanization Affect CEE Governance? Conditionality, Diffusion and Diversity", **Journal of European Public Policy**, Vol. 8, No. 6, 2001, pp. 1013-1031.

GRABBE, Heather, "European Union Conditionality and the Acquis Communautaire", **International Political Science Review**, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2002, pp. 249-268.

HAUGHTON, Tim, "When Does the EU Make a Difference? Conditionality and the Accession Process in Central and Eastern Europe", **Political Studies Review**, Vol. 5, 2007, pp. 233-246.

HEYWOOD, Paul, "Spain and the European Dimension: The Integrated Market, Convergence and Beyond", **Strathclyde Papers on Government and Politics**, Vol. 94, 1993, pp. 1-31.

LAFFAN, Brigid, "The European Union: a distinctive model of internationalization", **Journal of European Public Policy**, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, pp. 235-253.

McLAREN, Lauren M., **Constructing Democracy in Southern Europe – A comparative analysis of Italy, Spain and Turkey**, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2008.

O'DONNELL, Guillermo A., SCHMITTER, Phillippe C., "Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies", G. O'Donnell, P. C. Schmitter (eds.)

**Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy**, Baltimore, MD, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986.

ÖZBUDUN, Ergun, GENÇKAYA, Ömer F., **Democratization and the Politics of Constitution-Making in Turkey**, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009.

PHINNEMORE, David, "Beyond 25-The Changing Face of EU Enlargement: Commitment, Conditionality and the Constitutional Treaty", **Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans**, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2006, pp. 7-26.

RUSTROW, Dankwart A., "Transitions to Democracy; Toward a Dynamic Model", **Comparative Politics**, Vol. 2, No.3, 1970, pp. 337-363.

SADURSKI, Wojciech, "Accession's Democracy Dividend: The Impact of the EU Enlargement upon Democracy in the New Member States of Central and Eastern Europe", **European Law Journal**, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2004, pp. 371-401.

TORREBLANCA, Jose I., "The Enlargement acquis and external strategy: a prelude to deliberative foreign policy?", **CPA Estudios/Working Papers**, 4/2003, 2003. Available at: [http://www.uned.es/dcpa/estudios\\_workingpapers/CPAestudios4\\_2003.pdf](http://www.uned.es/dcpa/estudios_workingpapers/CPAestudios4_2003.pdf)

#### **PRIMARY SOURCES**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE, **Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**, 1950.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, **Commission Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2009 for the European Instrument for the Promotion of Democracy and the Human Rights**, C(2009) 7082, 2009.

EUROPEAN COUNCIL, **Presidency Conclusions**, Copenhagen European Council, 21-22 June, 1993.

EUROPEAN UNION, **Treaty on European Union**, C191, 1992.

EUROPEAN UNION, **European Union Observations on an Evolving EU Human Rights Policy**, 2001.

UNITED NATIONS, **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, 1948.

## Özet

*Uluslararası örgütler, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde siyasal değişimlerin yaşanmasına ve özellikle Avrupa kıtasında demokratik rejimlerin oluşmasına imkân sağlayan demokratik norm ve değerleri oluşturan aktörlerin başında yer almıştır. Bu bağlamda, demokrasinin uluslararası düzeyde tesis edilmesinde temel aktör haline gelen uluslararası örgütler, sahip oldukları meşru eylem planları ve araçlar sayesinde birçok ülkenin ulusal düzeyde demokratikleşmesine katkıda bulunmaya devam etmektedirler.*

*Nitekim uluslararası örgütler demokratikleşme sürecinin etkin bir biçimde yönetilebilmesi için gerekli olan dış desteği sağlamakta; ülkelerin ekonomik ve sosyal refah düzeyini arttırmak ve demokratik yapılarının işlevsel hale gelmesini sağlamak amacıyla birçok teknik ve mali yardımda bulunmaktadır. Sahip oldukları etki mekanizmaları sayesinde etkileşim içerisinde buldukları ulus devletlerin değişim ve reform süreçlerini doğrudan etkileme imkanı elde eden uluslararası örgütler aynı zamanda meşruiyeti kabul görmüş yasal düzenlemeleriyle, söz konusu tesirlerini sürdürülebilir kılmayı başarmıştır.*

*AB özellikle genişleme ve komşuluk politikaları aracılığıyla sahip olduğu dış politika hedeflerini gerçekleştirirken aynı zamanda bölgesel düzeyde demokrasi tesisini sağlayan en önemli uluslararası örgütlerden biri haline gelmiştir. Bu makale demokrasi tesisi konusunda gösterdiği çabaya bağlı olarak AB'nin bölgesel düzeyde üye olmayan devletlerin demokratikleşme süreçleri ile ulusal düzeydeki siyasal değişimleri üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir.*

*İlk olarak, üyelerini demokratik devletlerin oluşturduğu AB'nin demokratik prensiplerinin ulus-üstü düzeyde oluşum sürecinin 1950'li yıllara dayandığı görülmektedir. BM ve Avrupa Konseyi gibi önde gelen uluslararası örgütlerin demokratik ilkelerini kendi yasal çerçevesine entegre eden AB, temel hak ve özgürlüklerin yasal düzenlemelerle güvence altına alındığı, insan ve azınlık haklarının korunduğu, hukukun üstünlüğü ilkesine sadık olan demokratik kurumların bulunduğu liberal demokratik rejimlerin gelişmesi ve tüm bu unsurların ulus-üstü düzeye de yansıtılması için büyük bir çaba sarf etmiştir.*

*Bu kapsamda adaylık sürecini araçsallaştıran AB, özellikle 1970'li yıllarda gerçekleşen genişleme dalgalarında Güney Avrupa'da yer alan Yunanistan, İspanya ve Portekiz gibi aday devletlerden, demokratikleşmelerine yönelik birtakım taleplerde bulunmuştur. Bu talepler, 1990'lı yıllarda Merkez ve Doğu Avrupa devletleri için daha katı hale gelerek AB'nin dış aktör olarak ulusal düzeydeki siyasal değişim ve demokratikleşme sürecinde daha fazla etkin ve belirleyici olmasına imkan sağlamıştır. Özellikle adaylık sürecinde asimetrik gücü elinde bulunduran AB ulusal, geliştirdiği koşulluluk ilkesi çerçevesinde,*

ulusal düzeye nüfuz ederek, talep ettiği değişimi, siyasal, ekonomik ve sosyal reformlar çerçevesinde hızlandırmıştır.

Demokratik koşulluluk ilkesi bu bağlamda AB'nin demokrasi tesisinde ne kadar etkin bir aktör olduğunu ispatlayan temel unsur olarak görülmektedir. Nitekim AB, bu ilkeyi kullanarak kurumsallaşmış bir bölgesel çerçevede demokratikleşme sürecini tetikleyen gerekli faktörleri hem ulusal hem de ulus-üstü düzeyde yaratarak, dış baskı unsurlarının, demokratikleşme süreci üzerindeki belirleyiciliğini arttırmıştır. Bununla birlikte, genişleme ve komşuluk politikaları devam ettiği sürece AB'nin, koşulluluk ilkesi çerçevesine ulusal düzeyde demokratikleşme ve bölgesel düzeyde demokrasi tesisinin sağlanmasında önemli bir rol oynamaya devam edeceği düşünülmektedir.