Jan Hornat: Transatlantic Democracy Assistance. Promoting Different Models of Democracy.

In the recent decades, measures aimed at promoting democracy in foreign countries have been part of the regular toolkit of foreign policy in many countries, especially those belonging to the global North. Despite that, this area has so far remained somewhat under-researched, both in International Relations and in International Law doctrine. Moreover, most scholars who have engaged with democracy promotion have done so from a particular standpoint. Concentrating on the demand side of the scheme, they have discussed the effects and efficiency of various strategies employed to promote democracy. The book under review is one of the exceptions to this rule. Zeroing in on the supply side of the scheme, the author considers what motivates certain States and other actors to promote democracy and which type of democracy they want to promote.

The focus lies on two actors – the United States of America (US) and the European Union (EU). The author seeks to demonstrate that *"the source of the different strategies and tactics applied by the US and EU institutions in promoting democracy is the divergence in the definitions of democracy formulated in their democracy promotion agendas"* (p. 3). The book is based on the PhD dissertation that the author, Jan Hornát (Hornat in the book), who works as an assistant professor in North American Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University and as a research fellow at the Institute of International Relations in Prague, successfully defended at the former institution in 2017.

Whereas the book often refers to democratic promotion, its primary interest pertains to a narrower concept invoked in its very title, that of democratic assistance. Using the scholarly definition proposed by Zeeuw and Kumar (2006: 20 as cited on p. 7), the author defines democratic assistance as *"the non-profit transfer of funds, expertise, and material to foster democratic groups, initiatives and institutions that are already working towards a more democratic society"*. Democratic assistance thus presupposes the presence of pro-democratic forces or pro-democratic moves within the target country, though these forces or moves do not need to be part of the official establishment. Democratic promotion is, on the contrary, a broader concept encompassing "*all activities engaged in by external actors to encourage the development of democracy within the given country*" (Wetzel – Orbie – Bossuyt 2015, as cited on p. 6).[1] Military intervention to oust a non-democratic regime and to build up a new, democratic one, would fall under this latter concept but not under the former. The book is, however, not always consistent in its terminology and the terms democracy promotion and democratic assistance are often used interchangeably.

From the methodological perspective, the author sides with the constructivist approach which *"admits the explanatory and even causal power of ideational (socially constructed) factors in foreign policy-making"* (p. 15). Constructivism accepts that foreign policy can be both material/interest-based and ethical/value-based. It is particularly interested in the latter category. Constructivism assumes that whether and how States promote democracy and what type of democracy they promote is determined by their own identity. This identity, on its turn, is socially constructed through speech acts, discourse and social interactions. When engaging in democracy assistance, States project and at the same time reproduce, and sometimes also revise, their identity. They do so in a dynamic interaction with significant Others, i.e. with the States that are considered morally inferior due to their non-democratic or less democratic nature. While striving to change the identity of

such Others, States reconfirm, or revise, their own identity. Thus, democratic assistance is an important part of setting boundaries between Us and Them and of determining who Us and Them are at any given moment of time.

The author also invokes the concept of ontological security, which has recently become rather influential in International Relations and Security Studies. Ontological security (security-as-being) as opposed to physical security (security-as-survival) relates to the protection of the entity from threats directed against its identity and self-conception rather than from purely material threats.[2] The projection of one's conception of democracy abroad, entailing the effort to make the Other (Them) similar to Us, serves as one of the instruments that help strengthen ontological security.

This theoretical framework explains why States engage in democracy assistance. It does not, however, in itself reveal what type of democracy concrete States (or other actors) seek to promote and to which means they resort while doing so. To find answers to these questions for the two actors under consideration in the book, the US and the EU, the author undertakes three consequential steps. First, he describes, and compares, the US and EU identity as reflected in their respective models of (internal) democracy. Secondly, he shows how these models shape the two actors' approaches to democracy assistance in foreign policy. Finally, he looks for the evidence of these approaches in the key conceptual documents and operative programmes adopted by the US and the EU.

What is somewhat missing in the book is an analysis of how the US and the EU actually perform "in the field". It is true that adding this dimension might shift the focus from the supply side of democracy assistance to the demand side, which is much more diverse due to the plurality of, and differences among, the target countries. It is also true that the actual performance could hardly be studied solely through the methods of desk-based research, on which the book currently relies. Yet, one may wonder whether the US and EU models of democracy assistance can be defined solely in light of what these actors *are* and what they *say*, without taking into account what they actually *do.* In the relational, interactional scheme of identity formation that the author embraces, this *doing* is not limited to a mechanical implementation of pre-conceived models but, rather, implies a creative testing, and potential reassessment, of such models.

As noted above, the primary ambition of the book is to show, and explain, the differences in the models of democracy assistance assumed by the US on the one hand and the EU on the other hand. The author shows sensitivity to the distinct natures of the two actors, one being a State and the other a supranational organization. Yet, he assumes, and rightly so, that these distinct natures do not make the policies that the two actors engage in, incommensurable. For the purposes of the comparison, he introduces a triple typology of approaches to democratic assistance – along the lines of political vs. developmental, top-down vs. bottom-up, and substantive vs. procedural. Whereas the first typology primarily relates to the type of democracy the actors intend to promote abroad, the other two concentrate more on the means and processes through which they plan to do so.

Political approaches build on a narrower conception of democracy as a system which is centred around political participation. The emphasis lies on ensuring an equal access to this participation through a set of the first generation, i.e. civil and political, human rights. Developmental approaches rely on a broader conception of democracy in which procedural equality (equal participation) should be matched with substantive equality (equal opportunities). Here, attention is shifted to the socio-economic context and to the second generation, i.e. economic, social and cultural, human rights. The relationship between democracy and human rights would deserve closer scrutiny in the book, which seems to treat the two concepts as inter-related (that is warranted) or even virtually identical (that would not be warranted).

The distinction between the top-down and bottom-up approaches stems from a different understanding of *"the dynamics that drive the process of political transition"*

(p. 32). Whereas the former stress the role of political elites, the latter see the main driving force in grassroot movements and civil society. This optic determines which entities in the target State become the main partners in, and beneficiaries of, the programmes of democracy assistance. The third typology, that between substantive or maximalist and procedural or minimalist approaches, is the least clearly explained in the book. It seems to closely mirror the first typology (political vs. developmental) but to do so on an operational level. Procedural approaches are thus oriented on elections as the main tool of political participation, and substantive approaches are directed towards *"a political system that ensures a multitude of rights and services"* (p. 42).

The author argues that the two actors discussed in the book, the US and the EU, embrace two different models of democracy assistance and that the differences stem from their diverging preferences with respect to the three pairs of approaches. The US opts for the so-called *empowering* model, which relies on the political, bottom-up, procedural approaches. The EU on its turn favours the so-called *embedded* model, which is based on the developmental, top-down, substantive approaches. The author repeatedly recalls that the two models herald general preferences and default settings rather than exclusive modes of action. The two actors can therefore at instances resort to measures that fall under the model predominantly held by the other, without negating, or frustrating, their own primary choices. As the sections dealing with the conceptual documents and operative programmes reveal, such "deviations" are not that uncommon. Reality, as is often the case, defies clear categorizations. What actors say is already much more diverse than what they would be expected to say based on the argument presented in the book. What they do might be even more diverse. It is in this context that an insight into the actual practice could be particularly helpful. It could confirm that the "deviations" are simply natural variations from the argument reflecting the multifarious nature of reality rather than signs indicating that the argument has a somewhat limited explanatory power.

That the US and the EU adhere to non-identical models of democracy assistance results, in line with the constructivist approach introduced above, from the different identities of the two actors. As Simoni (2010: 30 as cited on p. 16) aptly puts it, *"the Transatlantic partners simply have different preferences due to self-defined identities within the larger international and transatlantic context"*. Building on Simoni, the author, in quite a comprehensive and persuasive way, explains how these identities have been shaped and reshaped on the two sides of the Atlantic. He contrasts the US self-image of an entity constructed from the ground up and endowed with a special democratizing mission, with the self-image of the EU, which sees itself as a cautious civilian power built primarily from the top (so far). He also argues in what is one of the most interesting sections of the book that the two actors have to a large extent intentionally sought to form their own identities in contradistinction to each other, not so much to compete with, as, rather, to complement each other. This argument gives rise to interesting questions as to whether, and how, this complementarity operates in the field of democracy assistance. Such questions, though not completely unaddressed in the book, could be elaborated upon in more details.

The book under review is an important contribution to the emerging research in democracy assistance. Despite the fact that it introduces certain complex concepts, it is easily accessible to readers, including those from outside the International Relations discipline. The author makes clear and at the same time nuanced arguments. When seeking to substantiate these arguments, he proceeds in a well-organized and logical way and relies on compelling evidence. One may have doubts about certain facets of the argumentation, especially those which would merit closer scrutiny in the book (see above). This, however, does not diminish the overall value of the book, which will certainly be of great interest not only for scholars and students of International Relations but for anyone who wants to understand how value-based or value-promoting foreign policy works. Provided that the

Czech Republic has traditionally portrayed itself as an ardent champion of such policy, the book will certainly resonate especially well with the audience in the author's home country. This country would, in fact, be an interesting case study in case the author decides to expand his analysis to individual EU (or other) States and to ponder how the identities of these States shape their foreign policies or what their foreign policies bespeak about their identities.

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[1] The reference does not indicate the place of the quotation in the original article.

[2] See Rumelili, Bahar (2013): Identity and and Desecuritisation: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security. *Journal of International Relations and Development,* Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 52–74, cit. in the reviewed book, p. 17.

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