

The Community of Democracies and the OSCE

The Community of Democracies' (CD) mission to advance democratic transition is most easily identified with the human dimension of the OSCE, but in fact, the CD's goals are intrinsically linked to those of the other two "baskets" of the Helsinki Final Act – economics and security. A strong body of popular writing has appeared over the past few years seriously challenging the link between these three values. In this short statement, we are putting on the record the arguments to those who question the importance of democracy in promoting economic strength and security.

The North Korean attack on South Korea on November 23 should make clear to the democratic world the threat that authoritarian regimes can pose to neighboring democracies. Military power in the hands of an unchecked authoritarian leader is obviously a menace without parallel. The quest to maintain power at any cost is an extreme challenge for other peaceful states to counter. A system which allows the population to restrain its leadership through election and other democratic institutions is the ultimate guarantor of security.

Despite the obviousness of this factor, the proposition that security must be assured before democracy can be introduced has gained some currency. This idea has emerged in part to perceived failed attempts to "impose" democracy in regions in conflict. Indeed, in violent, unstable situations, threats to the population must be contained and the atmosphere of fear be ameliorated before the work of building democratic institutions can proceed. Moreover, it is rightly pointed out that the desire for democracy must be motivated from within – and cannot be "imposed." However, these viable arguments do not negate the fact that only a democratic system with checks and balances on power can constrain the leadership and build the confidence within the population to trust their governments and their fellow citizens.

Similarly, some authoritarian regimes argue that only tight governmental control is effective in ensuring daily security for the population. While such regimes might be effective in controlling street crime and perhaps organized crime and to some extent terrorism, these regimes make possible the opportunity for the government to be the perpetrator of crime itself. And these crimes that take place in the darkness of authoritarian rule- disappearances, labor camps, assassinations of opposition and journalists - are pernicious and beyond the ability of the population to combat without the shining light of a free press and vibrant civil society.

New, fragile democracies, on the other hand, are often fertile ground for sectarian violence and civil strife. Much of the security concerns of the past decades have been caused by the failure of strong democratic systems to replace collapsed authoritarian regimes. Rather than negating the importance of democratization this observation reinforces the need for the world's established democracies to assist those facing difficulties in making the transformation. This, in fact, is one of the stated priorities of the Community of Democracies.

The link between economics and democracy can be difficult to prove, especially in light of recent global economic and financial developments. Democracy does not guarantee economic development, as the existence of very poor, but lively, democracies shows. And the spectacular Chinese economic development makes clear – at least superficially – that economic growth is not dependent on democracy. However, for many countries, such as those in the OSCE region, real, sustainable growth did not occur before the democratic transition. Those with natural resource riches have attained a certain degree of success, but it is doubtful this development will be sustainable or translated into long term gains for the population at large. Natural resources if they are under the stewardship of a corrupt, arbitrary regime are rarely exploited wisely for the benefit of the population. One can compare neighboring Poland and Belarus to see the difference that democratization can make on the economy. Of course, the financial crisis proved that democracy is not sufficient; economic policy can be faulty even in a democracy. However, the rule of law, strong institutions under the oversight of public bodies and transparency, are vital to long term economic growth – and this are only guaranteed in a functioning democracy. As was discussed in the CD's experts economic panel at the Krakow High Level Democracy Meeting, exceptional Chinese circumstances that are not likely to be replicated elsewhere contributed significantly to the country's impressive economic achievements. The huge domestic market, number of workers, and high savings rate allowed the economic liberalization to reap the benefits of globalizations. Moreover the existing, non-democratic governmental structure might not be able to resolve the looming demographic and environmental problems which in part are a result of autocratic rule.

The Corporate Democracy Forum of the CD will give a voice to the business community on these issues linking democracies and market economies. Closer partnership between civil society, business and government will help make this mutual dependency more striking and overcome the myopic impression that private business can achieve sustainable success under totalitarian regimes.

The mission of the Community of Democracies is to support democratic transition worldwide by assisting fledgling democracies in the development and consolidation of democratic institutions, to promote and enable civil society in all countries, to empower marginalized elements of society and to give a voice to democracy advocates in authoritarian regimes. It will achieve these goals by creating a network of civil society, private business and government representatives to share ideas and best practices, providing opportunities for partnering and coordinating democracy promotion activities.

The Community of Democracies unique contribution in the panoply of democracy promotion entities is the ability to tie together the network of players in various sectors – civil society, governments, and private business sector. In the coming months, we will broaden the civil society component, solidify the nascent Corporate Democracy Forum and expand the Youth Dimension. Changes in the membership and invitation process will both result in greater engagement with countries not yet democratic but interested at the same time, strengthening the voice of those solid democracies committed to enhance the democratic transition globally.. .and thus further contribute to the promotion of global economic prosperity and security.