

PRESS RELEASE

Democratic Transitions Will Fail without Greater International Support

- ***A new book examines how the international community has responded to recent threats to democracy in seven countries.***
- ***The study provides an in-depth analysis of how EU states, the United States and other international actors can better fulfil their commitments to support democracy.***
- ***Experts call for greater resources, coordination and political will from EU and US and more leadership from newer democracies in Africa, Latin America and Asia.***

Brussels (Belgium), 20 June 2006 – A new report released today by the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) and the Democracy Coalition Project (DCP) finds that democratic movements around the world are faltering and calls on the international community of democracies to coordinate common strategies to support them. The joint publication, *Strategies for Democratic Change: Assessing the Global Response*, edited by **Ted Piccone**, Executive Director of the Democracy Coalition Project, and **Richard Youngs**, Co-director and Coordinator of the Democratisation programme at FRIDE, was presented at a policy forum to European Union policy experts in Brussels.

The book examines what the international community has done recently to advance democratic transition and consolidation in seven specific countries around the world - **Burma, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe** - and how it could do better. *Strategies for Democratic Change* is a timely contribution to the ongoing debate on democracy promotion, in a context in which recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan and the “colour revolutions” have brought this issue to the top of the international agenda. While the growing concern over democracy assistance is leading to a backlash from certain authoritarian regimes determined to block external resources for domestic groups pressuring for democratic change, it is important to underline the role external actors can play in fostering open democratic societies.

The book’s overarching aim is to assess—six years after the Warsaw Declaration creating the Community of Democracies and in the wake of more recent democracy commitments from individual governments and regional bodies such as the European Union, the African Union and the Organisation of American States - how far the democratic community has fulfilled its own promise to accord the goal of democratic change greater priority. What strategies of democracy promotion have been favoured? How different have been the approaches adopted by the various members of the Community of Democracies? Are there clear cases of democratic states acting in a manner inimical to democracy? In which circumstances has the international community found it easiest to influence democratic development, and in which has it most struggled to gain traction?

“We found that, while in nearly every case there are positive signs of international support for democratic reformers, much greater political will and coordination among democratic governments is necessary to make a difference,” said co-editor Ted Piccone. The study found that some rulers, like Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and the military junta in Burma, have successfully evaded external efforts to foster conditions for peaceful political change, while in other cases like Turkey and Ukraine the international influence has played a significant role.

“Our book suggests some key lessons for EU policy, in particular that Europe could be doing more to react to opportunities for democratic reform where these appear, as well as offering better targeted support in the often difficult period after democratic breakthroughs”, remarked co-editor Richard Youngs.

The seven case studies, carefully selected to represent different types of regime from different regions, analyse in detail what role the international community has played in promoting democracy and conclude with specific recommendations for policymakers. In addition to the seven country studies, the editors present a set of general conclusions and recommendations. Key points include:

- International democracy promoters must always follow the lead of domestic reformers when shaping strategies for democratic change.
- Sanctions and other punitive tools are a mixed bag and should rarely be employed in isolation.
- Coordination of democracy assistance among relevant actors both within and among governments remains highly underdeveloped.
- The timeliness of international responses can be a critical factor in tipping the balance in favour of democratic reformers.
- Democracy promoters should engage with a long-term perspective of patiently helping to build the values and infrastructure of democracy, but they should also be ready to rapidly react to shorter timeframes when a window of opportunity opens for democratic change.
- International efforts should move away from a primary focus on direct US and European efforts towards a greater engagement of regional actors
- International reactions have often been strong in times of dramatic change, providing a useful support where political developments were clearly moving in a democratic direction.
- The international community's response to post-transition challenges remains less than impressive. A tendency persists to mark down as "success stories" cases where challenges to democratic quality remain acute, and even sometimes more difficult to address.
- Much more could be done to link development assistance to standards of democratic accountability and transparency in the receiving country.
- While debates amongst the international community of democratic governments have rightly focused on the macro-level questions of diplomacy and political dialogue, much remains to be done in fine-tuning democracy assistance projects at the micro-level.

Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE)

FRIDE is an independent think-tank based in Madrid, focused on issues related to democracy and human rights; peace and security; and humanitarian action and development. FRIDE attempts to influence policy-making and inform public opinion, through its research in these areas.

Democracy Coalition Project (DCP)

The Democracy Coalition Project (DCP) is a nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy relating to democracy promotion policies at the national, regional and global levels. Begun in June 2001 as an initiative of the Open Society Institute, the Democracy Coalition Project relies on an international network of civil society organizations, scholars, foreign policy experts and politicians committed to democracy promotion as an essential element of international peace and human development.

Media Contacts:

BRUSSELS

Nicolas Rougy
Policy Officer, DCP
Resid. Palace, Rue de la Loi 155
B – Brussels BELGIUM
Tel: +32.2.230.33.38
Fax: +32.2.280.20.36
nrougy@demcoalition.org

MADRID

Ana Martiningui
Press Officer & Editor, FRIDE
Felipe IV, 9 – 1º drcha.
Madrid SPAIN
Tel: +34.91.522.25.12
Fax: +34.91.522.73.01
amartiningui@fride.org

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Angel Alonso Arroba
Program Associate, DCP
1120 19th St. NW., 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20036 U.S.A.
Tel: +1 202.721.56.30
Fax: +1 202.721.56.58
aalonso@demcoalition.org

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