Schools of Political Studies
Thematic meetings during the World Forum of Democracy (3-7 November)

Thematic Group Meeting
"What role for the EU in promoting values in its neighbourhood?"
5 November 2014
Synopsis[1]

The meeting was attended by participants from the Schools of Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic (V4), Greece and Slovakia (V4).

The moderator, Ms **Despina SYRRI**, Director of the Civic School of Political Studies in Greece, opened the meeting and introduced the topic. Over the last 20 years, Europe has experienced **a large number of democratic transformations**. The European institutions have played a very important role in this process, despite several crises that they have encountered during this period. However, today, the European Union is facing challenges to democracy from within and from its neighbourhood, make all the more acute in a globalised world.

The speaker, Dr **André HÄRTEL**, Policy Advisor at the Directorate of Policy Planning of the Council of Europe, started by defining the rationale of the European institutions and their attitude towards values. Values can be described as the emanation of 'civil power' whereby civil society can exert democratic pressure in relation to the emphasis given to values in domestic and foreign policy. Multilateral organisations are bound by their member states when defining the values they stand for, best illustrated by the veto right of any member state on decisions to be taken by the organisation. The content of these values originates from the nature of the (multilateral) organisation. The European Union is a partially multilateral organisation with built-in tension between its bodies. Its rationale is based on mainly economic criteria - convergence, growth and inclusiveness. Although 'deeper' and 'wider' union were the main goals of the European Union for quite some time, it has recently encountered **enlargement fatigue**. The Council of Europe (CoE) differs from the EU, as a legal-technical and only to a lesser extent political organisation. The CoE's main foundation is based on legal standards, diversity and inclusiveness; its main challenges are visibility, credibility and effectiveness. Both the EU and the CoE have evolved from the post-war period and passed through several 'romantic' phases defining the European project, which are different for each Organisation.

The EU '**European Neighbourhood Policy**' is based on the 'civil power'-concept, by disseminating values by means of transferring rules and norms. This policy underpinned the 2004 enlargement in order to help friendly, stable and preferably democratic states with different histories and cultures. Different instruments, like association agreements, are used to foster democratic progress by applying European values to the recipient countries. The European Neighbourhood Policy's normative power towards the recipients is often criticised by researchers. The policy was revised in 2008 following the introduction of the EU Eastern Partnership towards Eastern European countries. In comparison, the Council of Europe remains quite reactive, especially towards its member states from Central and Eastern Europe, and uses other means than the EU in order to transfer its core values, for example, by awareness raising, training and capacity building. Unfortunately, it is constrained by an extremely low budget, preventing it from developing more consistent and comprehensive programmes for certain member states. However, the Council of Europe by its nature is better equipped for the transfer of values than the EU.

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[1] Notes taken by Günter de Schepper, DPP

Ukraine - as one case - is falling into the gaps of European multilateralism and reflects in its current status the asymmetry of the 'European Neighbourhood' project; it is part of a "grey zone" between the EU and Russia and swings back and forth between both regions. The **transfer of norms** by the EU towards Ukraine – by means of an Association Agreement with a highly authoritarian regime - did not work at all. Moreover, the post-Maidan era in Ukraine was not accompanied by an EU-strategy which considered the recipient as being able to make its own choice. Furthermore, the European Union does not seem to be sufficiently aware of its own (un)-popularity in countries with which it wants to enter into an association agreement. Finally, the **values shared by an association agreement between the EU and the recipient country** seem to be understood differently by the recipient itself, as the latter only encounters rules and norms instead of real European values. There is a lack of external EU-strategy towards the Eastern part of Europe.

The speaker concluded that the **current form of civil power** used by the EU seems to be **an excuse for its lack of traditional foreign policy tools**. But there can be no substitute for an EU foreign policy strategy. Nonetheless, civil power does not have to be an empty concept; it should be built on the attractiveness of Europe's values and be materialised in a non-conditional way. Fostering co-operation between the EU and the Council of Europe could lead to the right path for disseminating the core values of the CoE.

The discussion following the presentation revealed the fears of the effects of a **decline of trust** in Europe and its institutions on countries awaiting EU-membership. Some countries are now even moving back from a possible membership, sometimes dictated by means of soft power or civil power. In addition, the economic and financial- crises have enhanced a '**re-nationalising**' tendency, even in older EU member-states. Currently, a European transfer of values is not happening because of the political-economic status of the European Union. Europe is being seen as a 'two-fold' Organisation: one for the elite and the other for the citizens; one part for democracy and the other for bureaucracy; one of solidarity and the other of imposing rules, without any form of solidarity between both parts.

Some participants suggested that Europe's Neighbourhood Policy is **lacking strategy** due to insufficient knowledge of the countries concerned, investment without advanced research, and a negative societal vision towards democracy in some countries. At present the EU is too focused on rules, regulations and imperialistic behaviour; it should transfer values by means **of research-based knowledge and dialogue**. It has to approach its partners on equal based terms, without any form of imperialism.