

## With or Without Force?

### European public opinion on external democracy promotion

**Interview with Jörg Faust, Head of the Department "Governance, Statehood, Security" German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)**

What is Europe's position on promoting democracy and human rights in other countries? Is it legitimate to use military force to this end? These questions are highly pertinent to the current debate about German and European policy towards the Ukraine and the discussion about *Bundeswehr* missions in Africa. It is often assumed that the European Union and its member states have a distinctive civil identity regarding democracy promotion. Europe, it is said, tends to strive for the position of a normative civil power within the international system. At the same time, military operations such as those in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq often are also geared towards the long-term objective of democratic state-building. At the same time, it is equally clear from the debates in Europe about these and other (potential) missions that European governments have different views regarding the use of military action.

Against the backdrop of these debates, we have barely heard anything so far about where European citizens actually stand on the issue of promoting democracy and the extent to which they support military intervention as a means of doing so. Jörg Faust, from the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), explored this question with Melody Garcia from the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval). They recently published an empirical study on the issue in the renowned *Journal of Common Market Studies*. Jörg Faust summarises the results of this study in an interview with Matthias Ruchser, Head of Communications at DIE.

**RUCHSER: Mr. Faust, which particular aspect(s) of democracy promotion did you study?**

FAUST: Essentially, we analysed the results of representative opinion polls conducted simultaneously in eleven European Union Countries between 2005 and 2008. Those surveyed were asked about their general position on promoting democracy in other countries and also about whether Europe should use military means to do so. These polls made it possible to compare average approval ratings and also to identify individual characteristics of citizens that influenced the way they answered these two questions. We also determined whether the origin of citizens made a difference alongside political orientation and socio-economic standing. That is, whether the interviewees' country of origin influenced them to answer one of the two questions in the affirmative. It may be a while since these polls were conducted, but the fact that the questions were repeated over several years and that a large number of people were surveyed in eleven European countries should provide a more long term robustness of our results.

**RUCHSER: So, what is the attitude of Europeans towards the promotion of democracy and the rule of law?**

FAUST: This is where a significant difference emerges between the average approval ratings of Europeans regarding promoting democracy in general and promoting it using military means. Support for promoting democracy in other countries in general stood at just below 80 percent, but only 30 percent or so of Europeans indicated that the continent should also use military means to do so. This more or less lines up with the results of surveys that concentrate solely on the question of military intervention without making a clear link to the promotion of democracy. These surveys also found that a large majority of people tended to be sceptical about such intervention. Consequently, it is evident that the military intervention component had a far greater bearing on people's responses.



**RUCHSER: Is there equal support for democracy promotion across all European countries?**

FAUST: No. On the one hand, the majority of those surveyed in every country support the promotion of democracy in general, while those in favour of using military means to do so are in the minority in every country too. On the other hand, the interviewees' country of origin affects the way they answer the two questions. For instance, citizens from the United Kingdom are the most likely of all Europeans to agree to use military intervention to promote democracy. Unsurprisingly, Germans are comparatively sceptical towards the use of military means to promote democracy, but a huge majority is in favour of promoting democracy in general.

**RUCHSER: You also mentioned individual differences. Which citizens are in favour of promoting democracy?**

FAUST: At an individual level, we found that citizens were strongly influenced by their political orientation and specific socio-economic characteristics. For example, those with higher professional skills are more likely to support the promotion of democracy. In addition, the more extreme an individual's political orientation, left or right, the more likely they are to be opposed to the promotion of democracy in general. In other words, those of a more moderate political persuasion tend to support the promotion of democracy.

**RUCHSER: What about attitudes towards the use of military intervention in the promotion of democracy?**

The results for this question are very different. On the whole, the further to the right a citizen is on the political spectrum, the more likely they are to support the use of military intervention to promote democracy. Conversely, the older and better educated an individual is, the less likely they are to support such military intervention. City-dwelling respondents also tend to be opposed to the use of military force in promoting democracy.

**RUCHSER: How do your results relate to practical policy and the current discussion about democracy promotion and military intervention, whether in the Ukraine, the Middle East or sub-Saharan Africa?**

FAUST: Our results are a further indication of the widespread view that decisions about long-term military intervention in particular are strongly influenced by domestic political constellations. Foreign ministers and head of state not only look at the international context, but also focus on the potential domestic-policy costs and benefits resulting from their foreign-policy dealings. Accordingly, foreign policy is, to a large extent, domestic policy, which in a democracy means fighting to win votes.

**RUCHSER: Could you elaborate on that statement?**

FAUST: The decision taken under the Gerhard Schröder government not to take part in the Iraq intervention was not based only on purely normative considerations or the interpretation of international framework conditions. In a society like Germany's that is generally sceptical of military intervention, and among potential voters for Germany's social democrat party (SPD) in particular, it is highly likely that abstaining from military intervention in Iraq was very strongly motivated by domestic policy concerns. Things do not appear to be so simple in the present grand coalition, a coalition between social democrats and conservatives. Additionally, the duration of military intervention is dependent at least in part upon the political stripes of the respective European governments. Ultimately, our results reflect the difficulty that Europeans have in agreeing on a common foreign and security policy. Having different ideological positions of European governments, who also need to address their core constituencies makes it even harder to reach a consensus on far-reaching foreign policy issues. I guess that the only way that we will see improvements in the long term is if we take further steps to integrate our foreign and security policy.

Further Reading:

Faust, Jörg / M. Melody Garcia (2014): [With or Without Force? European Public Opinion on Democracy Promotion](#), in: *Journal of Common Market Studies* (online early view)