Exporting Revolution: Why Do Only Some New Democracies Support Democratization Abroad?
Part of IERES’s Behind the Headlines Series

with

Tsveta Petrova
Harriman Institute, Columbia University

Supporting the diffusion of democracy around the globe has become a significant element in the work of many governmental and non-governmental actors in international affairs. Therefore, a better understanding of this phenomenon is important; yet much of our knowledge about it comes from studying the activities of a handful of established Western democracies. Would fledgling non-Western democracies support democratization abroad? I answer this question by unraveling the puzzle of the quick turnaround by the Eastern European members of the EU from being primarily democracy promotion recipients in the 1990s to becoming democracy promoters in the 2000s. I conduct an overview of all post-communist EU members as democracy promoters as well as two case studies: Bulgaria and Slovakia. The transition trajectories, democratic commitments, and international contexts of these two countries are very similar; yet, Slovakia is one of the most active democracy promoters in the region whereas Bulgaria has invested little in supporting democracy abroad. I find that the same civic activists who prepared the democratic breakthroughs in each country subsequently worked towards the development of democracy at home as well as abroad. However, only in cases where such norm entrepreneurs represented strong contingents – large and united lobbies that articulated resonant arguments – was democracy promotion incorporated into the foreign policy of these new post-communist democracies. The paper contributes a better understanding of the transformation of certain norm-takers into norm-makers in the context of the diffusion of democracy. It also studies the efforts of previously overlooked young non-Western democracies as democracy promoters.

Tsveta Petrova is a postdoctoral fellow at the Harriman Institute at Columbia University. She received her Ph.D. in political science from Cornell University in 2011. Her research interests include democracy, democratization, and democracy promotion. Petrova’s articles have appeared in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, and most recently, in the *Journal of Democracy*.

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