

ПРОЕКТИ

CIRCUMVENTING THE EAST-WEST CULTURAL IMPASSE: EXPLORING MEANS OF BOLSTERING GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT BY FOSTERING NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION ON DEMOCRACY & HUMAN RIGHTS WITHIN TIME ZONES

A Project developed for the National Endowment for Democracy, USA

Todor Tanev

This project builds on the assumption that rivalry between cultures seriously impedes global democratization process. Cultural conflicts are persistent and therefore difficult to manage. Instead of dialogue between civilizations, it is better to look for opportunities to create networks of parties who have an interest in enacting common policies to support democracy. Such linkages may ease cultural rivalry and strengthen global democratic development. The project outlined is a scientific examination of the prospects for cooperation in certain segments of the North-South axis, which are not challenged by cultural rivalry and offer an innovative means to positively impact democratic development. The project aims at the identification of suitable international communities, such as one of the 24 time zones. The GMT +2 time zone should be explored as potentially suitable as it crosses through several very distinct geopolitical subgroups not bound by historical ties.

ПРЕОДОЛЯВАНЕ НА КУЛТУРНАТА БЕЗИЗХОДИЦА „ИЗТОК-ЗАПАД”: ПРОУЧВАНЕ НА НАЧИНИ ЗА СТИМУЛИРАНЕ НА ГЛОБАЛНОТО ДЕМОКРАТИЧНО РАЗВИТИЕ ЧРЕЗ НАСЪРЧАВАНЕ НА СЪТРУДНИЧЕСТВОТО СЕВЕР-ЮГ В ОБЛАСТТА НА ДЕМОКРАЦИЯТА И ПРАВАТА НА ЧОВЕКА В РАМКИТЕ НА ЧАСОВИ ЗОНИ

Проект, създаден за американската организация National Endowment for Democracy

Тодор Танев

Този проект се основава върху предположението, че съперничеството между културите сериозно възпрепятства процеса на демократизация в световен мащаб. Културните конфликти са устойчиви и затова трудни за управление. Вместо „диалог между цивилизациите” е по-добре да се търсят възможности за създаване на международни мрежи, фокусирани върху общи политики за укрепване на демокрацията. Подобни връзки могат да ограничат културното съперничество и да укрепят демократичното развитие в световен мащаб. Проектът е научно изследване на перспективите за сътрудничество в определени сегменти от оста Север-Юг, които не са обременени от културно съперничество и предлагат иновативни средства за положително въздействие на демократичното развитие. Проектът е насочен към идентифициране на подходящи международни общности, каквато е една от 24-те часови зони. Часовата зона +2 може да бъде определена като потенциално подходяща, тъй като се състои от няколко отчетливо различни подгрупи държави, които не са обвързани с исторически връзки.

Preface

This project builds on the assumption that rivalry between cultures (e.g. Muslims/Christians, Europeans/Immigrants, etc.) seriously impedes global democratization process.

Any attempt at cultural hegemony threatens global democratic development. The modern world faces Huntington's apocalyptic prediction that the clashes between cultures will become the future front lines of global politics¹. History is indeed filled with such clashes, while examples of cooperation are few and far between. Intercultural dialogue has always been the primary countermeasure, but it has proven ineffective. Cultural conflicts are persistent and therefore difficult to manage.

It is false that Islam itself is a problem instead of Islamic fundamentalism². It is a mistake not to take into account the internal cultural divisions present in all civilizations³. The problem is not the clash between "our values" and "their values," but between our declared values and our short-term interests⁴. Sizeable segments of existing cultures can be preserved, however, if they choose the alternative to take part in global cultural development by offering those unique elements, which also represent universal values. Instead of dialogue between civilizations, it is better to look for opportunities to create networks of parties who have an interest in enacting common policies to support democracy. Such linkages may ease cultural rivalry and strengthen global democratic development.

The project is a scientific examination of the prospects for cooperation in certain segments of the North-South axis, which are not challenged by cultural rivalry and offer an innovative means to positively impact democratic development. It does not claim to offer a universal solution. Rather, its aim is to look for opportunities in suitable international communities, such as one of the 24 time zones.

Significance

Dead end needs new ways of restarting and modifying what has been done so far that did not go anywhere.

Civilizational clashes seem to be justified primarily in the context of archaic cultural (not geographical) separation between the individualistic West and the collectivist East. Alleviating the chronic problem of conflicting values by seeking dialogue and preaching tolerance seem ineffective. The approach of seeking "unity in diversity," which does not work even in Europe⁵, is doomed to fail because it presupposes differences and remains closed in its historically burdened context.

Dialogue should be an important auxiliary tool of democratic development, instead of the primary instrument. It simply does not eliminate the social causes of cultural conflict. Dialogue is an element of negotiation, which encourages each side to protect its interests. Therefore, it does not guarantee that parties will remain vested in their cooperation, as well as in their common policies⁶. Outside factors begin to play the primary role: who, how, for how long and for what

¹ "The Clash of Civilizations"

² Bulliet, R., *The Case for Islamo-Christian civilization*, Columbia University Press, 2004

³ Said, E. W. *The Clash of Ignorance*, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance>

⁴ Loy, D. R. *The West Against the Rest? A Buddhist Response to „The Clash of Civilizations“*, <http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/loy-westrest.html>

⁵ Something that Amartya Sen calls "Pluralistic Monoculturalism"

⁶ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

purpose prompts, directs and maintains a dialogue. Ineffective dialogue is more dangerous than the complete lack of dialogue.

Therefore the project should assess (1) the strengths and weaknesses of leading international East-West initiatives, (2) whether the idea of collaboration unbound by historical context can be embedded into one of the major UN initiatives for global democratization, to give it new impetus, or vice versa, whether it can be developed independently as something fundamentally different (3) whether the new approach is realistic and its limitations, (4) the prospect of linking the idea of intra-time-zone North-South cooperation with the existing East-West clashes.

Many initiatives to mitigate the conflict between civilizations exist both within and outside the UN: the Alliance of Civilizations, the UN Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations (2001), UNESCO, the EU, the Anna Lindh Foundation, Cultural Corridors of South East Europe, etc. However, it seems that none go beyond the creation of dialogue between opposing cultures. They do not recognize the limitations of dialogue. Also, because their objectives and activities overlap, they are competitors rather than allies in promoting intercultural dialogue. The idea of strengthening historically unencumbered cooperation should not compete with existing schemes for intercultural reconciliation.

The project particularly focuses on the UN initiative “Alliance of Civilizations” and the extent to which the idea of North-South cooperation can be tied to it.

The Alliance of Civilizations, proposed in 2005 by the prime ministers of Spain and Turkey, was approved by over 70 countries, including the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, both in terms of its structure and its objectives⁷. Its main assumption is that it can reduce the risk of the creation of a “wall of misunderstanding” between the West and the Muslim world by encouraging dialogue surrounding “mutual understanding and respect.” It features measures in four key areas of cultural understanding⁸: education, media, youth and migration. Among its projects is the creation of a UN Institute for the Alliance and a summer school for young people⁹. However, it lacks an established mechanism for decision-making and its source of funding is not secured.

I find that the initiative is reminiscent of a permanent round table between the two worlds under the supervision of Turkey and Spain, led by their national interest to become mediators¹⁰. The initiative has a clear East-West orientation¹¹. “The Alliance” is designed as a partnership between ministries and certain UN departments. Civic and private organizations are included only insofar as implementing centralized government strategies.

More importantly, this initiative is formed by both distant historical elements and more recent chapters in political history including the Cold War. Like most initiatives, this model is based on polarization. The West must cease to be a pole and become assimilated in many key areas, including trade, science and culture. The West should become a partner to the rest of the world rather than attempt to reshape its unique identity and assert its universalism.

Existing initiatives are the works of practicing politicians. In contrast, the scientific analysis of the relatively unexplored prospects for North-South cooperation can provide a basis for innovation and realism.

⁷ information following from interviews with officials at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

⁸ <http://www.mfa.bg/bg/pages/view/270>

⁹ The Regional Strategy for Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation in Southeast Europe is the first regional document within the initiative.

¹⁰ Republic of Turkey, Alliance of Civilizations, National Strategy

¹¹ <http://africa.mfa.gov.tr/mopy-sunusu.en.mfa>

Hypothesis

The project is based on a hypothesis resulting from the dramatic changes in the effectiveness of instruments used in the development of democracy in the current era of globalization.

The first aspect of the leading hypothesis is that international East-West relations are jaded by an unproductive cultural and historical context, unlike most North-South relations; therefore, the shift in balance between the two axes, i.e. activation of various North-South interactions, can be used to gradually reduce cultural tensions along the East-West axis. Can the strengthening of beneficial common practices along the North-South “Axis of Cooperation” discourage its participants from continuing to fight their futile cultural battles along the East-West “Axis of Confrontation”? In what areas should we look for such opportunities? Which aspects of the relations along the North-South axis have a realistic potential to turn it into an “Axis of Cooperation”?

Another aspect of the hypothesis is that in a globalized environment intercultural dialogue loses its effectiveness as a tool to strengthen democratic development. Therefore, it is productive to seek alternative means. Globalization, in fact, brings a growing scope of opportunities in this respect. Cooperation within certain organizations involved in the implementation of joint policies becomes essential. Could the creation of dynamic supra-national organizations pave the way for an integrated networking society of the future to replace the current model of isolationist cultures?

The hypothesis has yet another aspect. Intercultural dialogue relies on intellectual tools, such as education. Meanwhile, the relations surrounding history and culture could rest on a wider foundation of interaction amongst the government, private and civil sectors. Is it conceivable to organize joint annual meetings of governments, public and private partnerships or business initiatives, which aim to strengthen democratic development?

Last but not least, instead of pushing dialogue between conflicting parties, in the modern world, it is now possible to engage in active public diplomacy. Is it possible to include international academic and intellectual circles in the propagation of democratic best practices, separately from the routine actions of foreign ministries?

The project involves both scientific and practical research: to ask questions in the context of the issues described and seek their answers.

Limitations

The aim of this project, unlike many existing initiatives, is not to strive for universal applicability. Not all North-South relations are devoid of cultural confrontation (e.g. relations between North and South America, Russia and the Caucasus & Central Asia region, China and South-East Asia contain historical traps). The study is based only on appropriate and relevant exemplary sectors of the North-South axis. In addition it would focus not only on relations between states but also relations between the public, private and civil sectors of unbiased societies.

Thus the constructed model will be limited to examples from the time zone GMT +2. This is one of the largest zones with 29 countries, which is particularly suitable for the conceptual design. This time zone crosses through several very distinct geopolitical subgroups: starting with the Baltic States (Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), former European USSR members (Belarus, Ukraine) to the north, through parts of the Balkans (Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria) and the Middle East (Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Libya) and down to a large swath of Sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo; and finally South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia. Each subgroup has historically been affected in its own way by the traditional East-West conflict. But from a North-South perspective, it is hard to

find traces of this conflict between the North and South groups of countries within the zone. Specifically, no group has dominated over the other. This fact contains a significant and still not used potential for the emergence of new practices of reinforcement of global democratic development. This potential exists despite the uneven history of neighboring nations within some groups, the existence of dictatorships, quasi-democracies and different degrees of human rights protections in that zone.

The project does not necessarily place the emphasis on states but rather focuses on the unused capacity of business, scientific and public circles, specifically organized for this purpose. This may be a first step towards common academic programs and even a common elite in the area.

Besides the model of cooperation in the time zone that is supportive to global democratic development the project must define the principles that govern cooperation between public, private, public and international institutions in future initiatives (e.g. interagency cooperation, joint meetings of governments, etc.), as well as the balance between them and the ways in which future initiatives will be generated (e.g. annual international contest).

Main topics in the questionnaire for interviews with experts from U.S. think-tanks, representatives of international organizations and political advisors, organized with the help of NED will be: (1) what are the guiding values, priorities, vision; (2) how to relate the project with existing international initiatives; (3) what should the balance between public, private and civil society initiatives in the north-south cooperation be; (4) priority areas for the development of networks and common policies; (5) influence of North-South cooperation on democratic stability and international security.

Impact

The project has a definite practical character. If it demonstrates satisfactory results following the self-assessment procedure, its findings may be proposed later to politicians and statesmen for debate, modification, planning and implementation.