FROM RECIPIENTS TO DONORS:
HOW NEW DEMOCRACIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION BUSINESS

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Executive Summary

This paper assesses the effectiveness of one group of emerging democracy promoters, the Eastern European members of the European Union (EEMEU), which have become increasingly active at supporting democratization abroad. The time period covered in this paper is the first two decades after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (1989-2009). The paper argues that despite their limited capacity and inconsistent democracy-promotion efforts, the EEMEU have already made some difference by building on their recent and relevant democratization experience as well as on their familiarity with and commitment to priority recipients.
Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, supporting the diffusion of democratic norms and practices around the world has become a priority of many Western governmental and non-governmental actors.\(^1\) Although democracy support has begun to encounter fatigue within Western policy circles in the last decade,\(^2\) some of the new democracies in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia have increasingly started engaging in such work.\(^3\) These countries, which are going from being recipients to becoming providers of democracy assistance, represent a new generation of international democracy supporters.

Recognizing these advantages of new democracies as democracy promoters, the US policy community has encouraged, supported, and made use of their experience. Yet, their activism has not been carefully studied or assessed. In fact, much of our knowledge about democracy promotion comes from studying the activities of a handful of established Western democracies. This oversight represents a missed opportunity for

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encouraging better cooperation and a gap in the academic and policy literature that this paper seeks to begin addressing.

This paper assesses the effectiveness of one group of emerging democracy promoters, the Eastern European members of the European Union (EEMEU), which have become increasingly active at supporting democratization abroad. The time period covered in this paper is the first two decades after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (1989-2009). The paper argues that despite their limited capacity and inconsistent democracy-promotion efforts, the EEMEUs have already made some difference by building on their recent and relevant democratization experience as well as on their familiarity with and commitment to priority recipients. The EEMEUs have created extensive and deep bilateral and multilateral networks linking them to their recipients and providing them leverage over these recipients. These networks have served to support the diffusion of democratic practices and the strengthening of various constituencies for democratic reform, inspiring and preparing them to tip the balance of power in their favor at opportune moments.

This paper contributes to the policy debates on democracy promotion by examining the efforts of an overlooked but important category of democracy promoters—new democracies. The paper also contributes to the literature on comparative democratization by beginning to assess the impact of an understudied group of external actors—regional actors—on democratization processes around the globe. Understanding their effectiveness and how they compare to Western democracy promoters is crucial for

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understanding the future and the form of the liberal international order, now reinforced and propagated through the efforts of a number of new democracies as well.

**EEMEUs as democracy promoters**

Some of the EEMEUs, such as Poland, Lithuania, and Slovakia, began investing in the democratization of their neighborhood almost immediately after their own democratic breakthroughs. Most of the EEMEUs started supporting democratization abroad within the first decade after the beginning of their own democratic transitions. Democracy promotion became a stated priority for most EEMEUs after their accession to NATO and especially to the EU.

The EEMEUs use bilateral diplomatic channels to pressure and persuade democratic laggards in the post-communist space (and beyond) to observe democratic norms and principles. They have further leveraged their membership into various Euro-Atlantic organizations to keep democracy promotion in the European neighborhood on the agenda of these organizations and shape its implementation. Most of them have transformed their fledgling development aid systems into platforms for democracy assistance. And some civic organizations from these countries are active providers of international democracy support.

It should be noted, however, that EEMEU democracy promotion has at times been inconsistent, ad hoc, and only of low priority. Often, violations of democracy and human rights abroad have been a concern more in rhetoric than in practice. Moreover, only the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia have become noteworthy democracy promoters.
and only in their neighborhood. The democracy promotion commitments of Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania have at times been somewhat feeble, limited in scope, or erratic. Bulgaria, Slovenia, and to a lesser degree Romania have shown little interest in assisting democratization outside their borders.

**Research agenda and design**

The activism of and the potential demonstrated by the EEMEUs beg an investigation into the effectiveness of their democracy-promotion initiatives. The activism poses a question: What are the strengths and limitations of the EEMEUs as democracy promoters? How does their effectiveness compare to that of Western democracy promoters? And how have the EEMEUs made a difference on the ground?

To answer these questions, this paper follows the consensus among previous democracy-promotion studies on the importance of detailed scrutiny of individual cases as well as the trend in the field of aid evaluation towards the use of participatory methods. Accordingly, this paper offers a recipient-side, meso- to macro-level evaluation of Polish and Slovak democracy promotion efforts in Ukraine. Poland and Slovakia are among the most active democracy promoters within the EEMEU group. They also bring to the table different democratization experiences: Poland—with

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defeating communism (autocracy) and Slovakia—with pushing a hybrid post-communist regime in a more democratic direction. Yet, they are both neighbors of and active in one of the priority recipients for all EEMEU—Ukraine.

Because democracy promotion influences the democratization of a country by influencing the local actors and institutions, these recipients are best positioned to reflect on how they have and have not benefited from such aid. Recipients are also best positioned to discuss and compare the specific positive and negative contributions of individual donors as well as the ways in which those contributions have interacted with other domestic and international political developments influencing the recipient’s democratization. Moreover, this paper focuses on the Polish and Slovak influence primarily at sectoral or thematic level where both measurement and attribution of impact are more tractable and reliable. The paper then discusses the Polish and Slovak influence at the national level, that is, on the overall progress towards or regression from democratization in Ukraine.

The analysis in the paper is based on structured interviews with more than 70 representatives of various state and non-state recipients of Polish and Slovak democracy support. The majority of these recipients (47 of them) have also worked with various Western democracy promoters, so these recipients’ reports about Western efforts inform

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7 Meso-level analysis recognizes that “even if donors provide assistance to a single NGO, this affects a large part or even the entire NGO community and the relationship between the community and the state/government,” which in turn could have a positive effect on the democratization of the country. Schmitter and Brouwer, Conceptualizing Research and Evaluating Democracy Promotion and Protection, Working Paper SPS No.99/9 (Florence: European University Institute, 1999). See also Green and Kohl, “Challenges of Evaluating Democracy Assistance: Perspectives from the Donor Side,” Democratization, 14.1 (2007): 151 — 165.

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the comparison between Western and EEMEU activities in Ukraine. Interviewees were asked several open-ended questions: how visible Poland and Slovakia have been compared to other democracy promoters; in what ways has the Polish and Slovak support been useful; what are some of the limitations of the Polish and Slovak support; what has changed as a result of the Polish and Slovak involvement with their institution and in Ukraine; and what would be different in their institution and in Ukraine, if the Polish and Slovak support weren’t provided. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality and interviewee names are withheld by mutual agreement.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The Ukrainian recipients of Polish and Slovak democracy promotion efforts find that the most important EEMEU merits and comparative advantages, compared to most Western democracy promoters, include: local knowledge, recent and relevant democratization experience, and sustained interest in assisting Ukraine. At the same time, the EEMEU democracy promoters have a number of limitations, related to their capacity and their inconsistent democracy-promotion record. In contrast, many Western donors have invested a lot more resources in supporting Ukraine’s democratization.

**Strengths:**

Poland and Slovakia, like most other EEMEU’s tend to work in their neighborhood, where their own democratization experiences are highly relevant and where they have extensive knowledge of the local socio-political realities. 78% of the Ukrainian recipients interviewed for this paper noted the relevance of the expertise of the
Polish/Slovak democracy promoters as one of their most important strengths and 65% of respondents pointed to the Polish/Slovak understanding of the Ukrainian context. Many of these respondents commented that while Ukraine and most Western donors “just don’t understand each other,”8 “there are no problems of misunderstanding [between EEMEUs and Ukraine]. Polish support is important because Poland is our close neighbor, so for Ukrainians it is easy to understand how change happened in Poland and how to implement similar reforms in Ukraine.”9 Another commonly shared sentiment among many Ukrainian recipients was that “we [Ukrainians] have a lot in common with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia”10 and “they have a better understanding of Ukrainian life and are welcomed by most Ukrainians because of this closeness.”11 This “closeness” has thus allowed the Polish and to a lesser extent Slovak democracy promoters to deeply and broadly penetrate the Ukrainian society.

Because of their local knowledge and these personal relationships, the Polish and Slovak democracy promoters also seem to have been able to broach sensitive issues, such as repression, corruption, or engaging civil society in the policymaking process. As one respondent put it colorfully, “When Poland speaks, Ukraine listens; even if Yanukovich doesn’t like what Sikorski has to say, Yanukovich still takes note. And the same goes for other policymakers and state officials, of course.”12 The Ukrainian respondents further explained that criticism from the Polish and Slovak actors frequently feels more like peer pressure and has thus been accepted “much more patiently” than criticism from the

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8 Interview with I. K., Ukrainian activist and former policymaker, 2012.
9 Interview with O. G., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
10 Interview with I. B., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
11 Interview with E. G., Ukrainian activist, 12 February 2012.
12 Interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
West.13 Respondents further reported that “the Slovaks acknowledged what we had done well in Ukraine and then suggested how we can continue to improve things.”14 As a result, these EEMEUs have had the ear of their recipients.

According to 53% of the respondents, the recent Polish and Slovak political transitions also give these democracy promoters first-hand experience, and therefore credibility with recipients as well as valuable expertise that other donors do not have. As one Ukrainian recipient put it, “It’s easier to get excited about a reform that’s been recently tested.”15 And as another explained further, “I don’t like international experts when they talk about democracy in general; we want to hear from practitioners who have done it. […] It really helps to know what it takes and how long it takes to implement certain difficult reforms.”16 Many respondents also emphasized that “Poland has already traveled the road we want to travel, plus they started from a similar starting point, so despite our different trajectories over the past twenty years, Poles still understand the challenges we face.”17 This first-hand experience with democratization thus serves the Polish and the Slovak democracy promoters to inspire and motivate various pro-democracy actors in Ukraine. As a result, many felt that the Polish president is a “moral authority [… and] the opinions of Polish statesmen are in the news all the time.”18 Many respondents also felt that “the Germans have forgotten how their EU integration

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14 Interview with A. T., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
15 Interview with I. B., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
16 Interview with I. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
17 Interview with D. S., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
18 Interview with O. R., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
experience happened and they can’t tell you what to do first, second, or third. The Slovaks, on the other hand, have fresh memories, emotions, and results to share.”

Of course, not all efforts by Western or EEMEU donors were equally relevant to their Ukrainian recipients. For example, 28% of the Ukrainian respondents interviewed for this paper remarked that one or more of their Western partners have “worked in Ukraine long enough and don’t lack local understanding.” Also, 15% of the respondents expressed concerns that especially in some contexts, the Polish/Slovak experience is “just as exotic to Ukrainians [as the Western one].” These frustrations seemed to be the biggest when it came to state-to-state interactions in general, and especially to general Polish advice about EU integration. Still on the whole, given centuries of shared Polish-Ukrainian history together, most Ukrainian recipients found Polish efforts more helpful than Slovak ones.

Finally, 61% of respondents mentioned a sustained general commitment to supporting Ukraine’s democratization as one of Poland’s and Slovakia’s strongest merits as a democracy promoter, again with Poland receiving more praise along this dimension than Slovakia. Many of these respondents explained that “civil society is a fluid institution and you can’t teach it everything it needs to know for the rest of its life in one training,” making a sustained presence particularly important. Many also reasoned that because “Poland is our number one supporter,” its efforts have come to be “accepted by

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19 Interview with E. G., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
20 Interview with O. A., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
21 Interview with T. K., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
22 Interview with I. B., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
many Ukrainians in both political camps” 23 and to have “a practical visibility and substance that are lacking in the activities of many Western donors.” 24 In other words, “given that there isn’t much interest in Ukraine except by Russia and our Eastern European neighbors,” 25 the sustained EEMEU interest in assisting Ukraine has allowed them to multiply the access and reach afforded them by their limited democracy-promotion resources.

Some of the other merits of the Polish and Slovak democracy promoters, discussed by their Ukrainian recipients include: attention to their needs (39%) and an “idealistic” reputation (22%). For instance, some respondents reported feeling “ownership” of EEMEU-Ukrainian cooptation activities, in which they were treated as “equals” as well as able to help adapt the “imported” Polish/Slovak experiences and shape the “objectives, activities, target audience” of such projects. 26 According to these recipients, this cooperation environment not only ensured that Polish/Slovak support reflects their needs but also that its impact is more sustainable in the long term. In addition, some Ukrainian recipients remarked that many Poles and Slovaks are “even willing to give their help for free” 27 and “do not push for their own agenda,” 28 further disarming Ukrainian opposition and suspicion to their support. At the same time, however, there were also those who found the Polish/Slovak zeal “patronizing” or in line with the

23 Interview with O. R., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
24 Interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
26 Interview with T. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012. See also Shapovalova and Shumylo (2008).
27 Interview with O. A., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
28 Interview with O. R., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
“teacher-student” cooperation model and also reflective of these EEMEUs’ strategic interests in a stable and prosperous Ukraine. 29

Limitations:

The most important limitation of the Polish and especially the Slovak democracy promoters is the fact that their administrative capacity to support democracy abroad is still severely underdeveloped and their financial and administrative resources are still very limited and fragmented. 72% of the Ukrainian recipients interviewed for this paper remarked on this limitation. Its implications are multiple. Many of the respondents commented on the fact that most of the Polish/Slovak projects have been “small and short […] and that] it is hard for such projects to have a meaningful impact.” 30 Not only are concrete EEMEU activities often episodic or intermittent but also Polish/Slovak aid is usually used for a narrow range of activities. For instance, these EEMEUs rarely provide “core support,” 31 support for multi-annual programs, 32 or much funding at the beginning of a project. 33 Some respondents also discussed that Polish and Slovak projects are “less well-funded than most Western projects” 34 and that most of “their funding usually goes to the Polish [and Slovak] entities involved in the cooperation.” 35 Other respondents pointed to the fact that even if they found Polish or Slovak NGO-partners who are eager

29 For example, interview with T. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012; interview with T. K., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012; interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012; and interview with O. R., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.

30 Interview with T. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
31 Interview with N. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
32 Interview with O. G., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
33 Interview with E. G., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
34 Interview with A. S., Ukrainian activist, 2012
35 Interview with S. H., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
to help, given the dependence of these EEMEU activists on external funding, “90% of the time they still need to secure funding to support any cooperation that goes beyond informal exchanges and advice.”

In contrast, the scale of most Western aid, and especially US and to a lesser extent Nordic assistance, has been such that without it, “a whole class of civic activity—political advocacy and activism—wouldn’t exist or at least wouldn’t exist not at its current level.” It should also be noted, however, that about a third of the Ukrainian recipients who commented on the limited Polish and Slovak democracy-promotion capacity also acknowledged that “giving two times more money doesn’t mean getting two times more democracy in Ukraine.” As a result, these respondents were still rather positive on the potential and actual impact of Poland and Slovakia in helping to secure some democratization gains in Ukraine.

The second most important limitation of the Polish and Slovak democracy promoters, discussed by 48% of the Ukrainian recipients interviewed for this paper, is the strategic rationales that influence these states’ activism. Like many Western donors, these EEMEU have often made democracy promotion secondary to other foreign-policy objectives. As a result, both the diplomacy and the assistance provided in support of democracy abroad have been vulnerable to the inconsistencies and biases in the Polish and Slovak broader foreign-policy priorities. For example, some respondents observed

36 Interview with A. B., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
38 Interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
that “Poland tends to play the role of the good cop”\textsuperscript{40} and is often “unconditionally supportive of Ukraine.”\textsuperscript{41} Respondents saw this strategy as counterproductive because Poland is still perceived as biased (in favor of the opposition) and at times as not critical enough of the regime. Other recipients noted that there has been a decline in funding for democracy-related projects in general and that the priorities of Polish Aid recently changed towards favoring micro-projects and projects that had a small-business development component.\textsuperscript{42} Yet a third group of respondents mentioned that a lot more attention goes to the Western part of Ukraine, which is geographically closer to Poland, has a substantial Polish minority, and generally tends to have a more pro-Western orientation. In terms of Slovak democracy promotion, some remarked that given Slovakia’s energy dependence on Russia, the gas dispute between Ukraine and Russia undermined the political support Ukraine received from Slovakia.\textsuperscript{43} Others also pointed to inconsistent use of different democracy-promotion instruments—especially aid vs diplomacy and multilateral vs bilateral assistance—used to support Ukraine’s democratization when administrations turned over in Slovakia.

While some Western donors have been further dismissive of EEMEU democracy promotion because these countries are still themselves grappling with major issues of internal adherence to democratic norms and practices, the Ukrainian respondents did not point to such deficiencies as reasons (or even excuses) for rejecting either Poland’s or

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with J. M., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
\textsuperscript{41} Interview with Y. T., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
\textsuperscript{42} Interview with O. G., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
\textsuperscript{43} Interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
Slovakia’s assistance. Instead, some of the more minor Ukrainian complains included issues that are similar to the criticism many Western donors receive. The Polish and Slovak efforts were criticized when they blindly assumed that their own experiences are relevant to Ukraine. For example, many Ukrainian respondents emphasized that Ukraine’s EU integration is very different from either the Polish or the Slovak one because “the EU is different now and because there is a lot less money and support for acceding states today compared to the early 2000s”. Similarly, many Ukrainian activists were critical of Polish and Slovak projects that simply “recycled” successful domestic programs. In addition, some Ukrainian governmental recipients noted that “Poland isn’t big on coordinating” and that some of the Polish and Slovak programs and advice “are too abstract to be useful.” Ukrainian activists-recipients mentioned that the PolishAid and SlovakAid processes are rather “inefficient.”

Making a difference?

According to their Ukrainian recipients, Polish and Slovak democracy promotion has not been inconsequential. The Polish and Slovak democracy promoters have left their mark by spreading democratic norms and practices and by providing support for the development of various constituencies for democratic reform in Ukraine. As a result,

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44 It should be noted, however, that the US or the EU were not spared of such criticism.
46 Interview with N. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012 and interview with A. B., Ukrainian activist, 2012
48 Interview with T. K., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
49 Interview with I. B., Ukrainian activist, 2012.

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these democracy promoters have helped created a reservoir of pro-democratic elites and masses that could be mobilized to demand democratic change (as they already did during Ukraine’s electoral breakthrough in 2004).

According to the respondents interviewed for this paper, about 20-35% of all Ukrainian participants in various Polish and Slovak cooperation activities have introduced some changes to the work of their institution as a result of such cooperation.\textsuperscript{50} The recipients of Polish assistance mentioned numerous successful projects in youth mobilization, local governance, community organizing, local media development, and EU integration activities. For instance, many (about a third) of the student-parent-teacher groups that Poland, together with the Ukrainian Renaissance Foundation, helped start to improve the educational and other services available to various communities are still working today.\textsuperscript{51} Ukrainian respondents reported the same for many of the apartment building associations created with Polish assistance through the Polish American Ukrainian Cooperation Initiative.\textsuperscript{52} And a final example, almost all of the participants in the various cross-border local government to local government exchanges between Poland and Ukraine (funded by the EU or with Polish resources), implemented in Ukraine some of the practices they observed while in Poland: these ranged from ideas about how to organize a policy dialogue between local and national authorities and between local authorities and local civil society to know-how about collecting and using municipal statistics for the purposes of strategic local-development planning.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Author’s estimate based on the aggregation of respondent estimates.

\textsuperscript{51} Interview with T. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.

\textsuperscript{52} Interview with O. G., Ukrainian activist, 2012.

\textsuperscript{53} Interview with O. T., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
Similarly, a number of respondents mentioned successful Slovak projects in citizen policy and political activism, youth mobilization, local governance, and EU integration activities. For instance, a series of fruitful exchanges between several Slovak think tanks and the Ukrainian Democratic Initiatives Foundation led to the development of a Ukrainian Democratic barometer, which became very influential in shaping public and elite perceptions in Ukraine and which was inspired by and modeled on a similar initiative for assessing the quality of democracy in Slovakia. Respondents also discussed that with Slovak assistance and encouragement, key election- and media-monitoring groups linked to the Yellow Pora movement were set up and are still working in Ukraine. And a final example, several recipients also noted the success of Slovak support in youth mobilization through a program of EU studies in schools, which emphasized Europe’s core liberal values.

Respondents also reported a number of, if fewer, examples of EEMEU-Ukrainian cooperation activities that were unsuccessful or that produced mixed results. For instance, Karat-Poland, which had experience with working with the Optional Protocol for CEDAW to advocate for gender rights, provided training and manuals to several Ukrainian groups interested in pursuing gender-discrimination cases at the UN. Karat’s experience inspired one of the Ukrainian participants to file such a case but it was summarily blocked by the Ukrainian state and thus confirmed the suspicions of the other Ukrainian participants that Karat had misjudged the potential effectiveness of this.

54 Interview with I. B., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
56 Interview with T. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
mechanism in Ukraine. Consider also the following example of a Slovak group and its Ukrainian partner, who chose to remain anonymous: the Slovak activists reached out to the Ukrainian group to help with organizing a series of street youth human-rights events. The Ukrainian activists reported learning a lot about working with the police to allow such events to proceed. The Slovaks, however, had very limited funding and the Ukrainians were more of a research organization that remained unconvinced of the power of public mobilization in helping to win human rights cases, so the Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation remained episodic.

Finally, according to their Ukrainian recipients, most of the Polish and Slovak democracy-promotion success stories were at the local and civil-society levels, where there is more demand for external assistance and where the stakes in reform are generally lower. Most respondents also noted a general lack of interest and even reluctance on the part of most politicians and state employees to reform and to learn from the Polish and Slovak reform experience, even during the more liberal period between 2005-2010. Such state employees and politicians generally remarked on the “usefulness” of learning about other nations’ political models in order to pick the best model for Ukraine but provided few concrete examples of practices that they had borrowed from abroad, with some notable exceptions such as some parliamentary procedures and even bits and pieces of law drafts, the idea of an ombudsman (from the Polish experience) and of a National Convent (modeled on the Slovak one) to mention a few.

57 Interview with N. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
So what do these various Polish and Slovak assistance efforts add up to? According to their recipients, the Polish and Slovak democracy promoters have 1) created extensive and deep transnational ties to various actors in Ukraine that provide them with encouragement and know-how to make democratization progress and 2) have further helped embed these Ukrainian actors in various European regional networks, which increase the Polish/Slovak democracy-promotion linkages to and leverage over Ukraine. Also, according to respondents, due to its size and historic involvement in Ukraine, the Polish impact has greater than the Slovak one.

As the discussion above illustrated, the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian and especially Polish-Ukrainian democracy-promotion ties link not just the political elites but also the civil societies and even ordinary citizens in these countries. Most recipients (67%) ranked Poland as the second most active democracy promoter in Ukraine, after the US, if one considered Poland’s visibility among Ukrainian civic and political elites and as number one, if one considered Poland’s visibility among ordinary Ukrainians. Consider also that about 40% of all international cooperation programs of the Ukrainian civil society are with Poland (according to a study done by Ukrainian academics). Consider also that more than a fifth of all Ukrainian municipalities are involved in some cooperation with one or more Polish municipalities, making Poland the most active democracy promoter not just within Ukraine’s civil society but also at the local level.

Such bilateral Polish and Slovak networks have been particularly important in shaping the expectations of Ukrainians about what is possible and beneficial in terms of further reforms. As respondents explained, such exchanges have helped “change our

59 Interview with D. S., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
mind about many [democratization] issues” because “we see with our own eyes how change is possible.” Also, since “with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, there is a real connection with Ukrainian life,” such cooperation usually serves to convince the Ukrainian participants that “if they can [democratize], so can the Ukrainians.” As a result, these Polish and Slovak democracy-promotion activities are “very effective in democratizing Ukraine from the bottom up because they add up.” Respondents also commented that the resultant “long-term change and success [are meaningful], as the new generation is being prepared” to create in a more democratic policy.

In addition, the Polish and Slovak democracy promoters have used their country’s membership in various Euro-Atlantic regional organizations to further support the democratization of Ukraine. Keeping these organizations engaged has been “very important” because they have big carrots and sticks and enjoy the support of most of Ukraine’s citizens. Both Slovakia and especially Poland have advocated for enhanced cooperation between these organizations and Ukraine. Most Polish and Slovak democracy-promotion recipients interviewed for this paper believe that “Slovakia has been very supportive of Ukraine within the EU and NATO” and that “Poland the strongest supporter of Ukraine within the EU.” Slovakia and especially Poland have not been “afraid to raise the questions of Ukrainian membership in the EU and NATO” or to lobby for more aid to Ukraine, successfully—if marginally (for the moment)—

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60 Interview with O. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
61 Interview with O. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
62 Interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
63 Interview with D. S., Ukrainian journalist, 2012.
64 Interview with I. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
65 Interview with O. T., Ukrainian activist, 2012 and interview with O. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
influencing the distribution of EU democracy aid in favor of Ukraine and especially of various Ukrainian non-state actors.\textsuperscript{66} It was, however, only after the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine (seen by some as a step back in the country’s democratization) that the European Parliament approved an EU membership prospective for the country. Just as importantly, Poland has served as a “very important intermediary between Ukraine and the EU,” especially when it comes to sensitive questions, such as the lacking or negative reform progress in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{67} In these situation, Poland has been “the best at passing the message between the EU and Ukraine\textsuperscript{68} – a non-trivial undertaking because “the EU has its own language and Ukraine speaks its own, different language, so Poland is important to keep the two talking and not past each other.”\textsuperscript{69}

According to their recipients, the Polish and Slovak investments in developing these bilateral and multilateral ties to various Ukrainian actors have paid off, not immediately or gradually, but rather when Ukraine reached a critical point in its post-socialist history. Building on their earlier democracy-promotion efforts, both Poland and Slovakia were able to play a crucial role in inspiring and preparing the pro-democratic forces in Ukraine to tip the balance of power in their favor through the country’s electoral breakthrough in 2004.\textsuperscript{70}

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\textsuperscript{66} Interview with I. Z., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
\textsuperscript{67} Interview with R. K., Ukrainian journalist, 2012.
\textsuperscript{68} Interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
\textsuperscript{69} Interview with I. K., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
\textsuperscript{70} Electoral breakthroughs are defined here as attempts by opposition leaders and citizens to use elections in combination with political protests to defeat illiberal incumbents or their anointed successors, to bring liberal oppositions to power, and to shift domestic regimes in a more democratic direction. (Definition borrowed from Bunce and Wolchik 2011).
The different Polish democracy-promotion activities before 2004 helped strengthen the civic and political forces that would mobilize to defend Ukraine’s democratic constitution. Also, following the domestic and international reports of gross election irregularities, Poland denounced the results and tens of thousands of Poles took to the Polish streets “in solidarity with Ukrainians” or crossed the border to participate in the growing massive Ukrainian protests against the rigged vote. Most importantly, both the illiberal incumbent and the opposition leader “invited [the Polish President] to help.”71 The Polish President, Alexander Kwasniewski, invited the Lithuanian President, Valdas Adamkus, and the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to help mediate between the warring parties at a roundtable, modeled on the Polish Roundtable of 1989. Because of Poland’s previous significant involvement in Ukraine and because of his pre-existing ties to all key Ukrainian players, the Polish President was able to make a meaningful contribution to the mediation and as a result to pushing Ukraine in a more democratic direction.72

Despite its smaller size and less extensive linkages to Ukraine, Slovakia was also able to contribute to the 2004 electoral breakthrough in Ukraine by building on the democratization momentum created through the wave of electoral breakthroughs in the post-socialist world in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which were inspired by and modeled on the Slovak electoral breakthrough in 1998.73 The Slovak civic democracy promoters were “instrumental” in training the Ukrainian opposition (and especially its

71 Interview with O. R., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
73 See also Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik (2011) Defeating authoritarian leaders in postcommunist countries (New York: Cambridge University Press).
Yellow Pora wing, which even used a slogan created in Slovakia – “I vote, therefore I am”). In addition, the Slovak government provided support for the activities of the Slovak activists in Ukraine, worked to unite the political opposition in the country, and called on the Ukrainian regime to guarantee free and fair elections.

Outside of Poland’s role in the Ukrainian electoral breakthrough in 2004, most respondents assessed Poland’s “overall impact” as “important,” “considerable,” and “crucial.” Many respondents (39%) also firmly believe that “the Polish influence is so great that without it, Ukraine would have been a different country,” “more like Belarus” and “in customs union with Russia with all the political implications of this association.” Slovakia’s impact has been more modest: overall, many respondents (53%) assessed Slovakia’s democracy promotion as “important” and “helpful.”

It should be noted, however, that some of the democratization gains that Poland and Slovakia have helped secure have been rather short-lived. The modest but positive trend toward democratization following the Ukrainian electoral breakthrough of 2004 was reversed after the 2010 elections, when power turned over to the unreformed successors of the pre-2004 illiberal regime. Still, some of the local government and civil-society changes affected by the Polish and Slovak democracy promoters have been accumulating over time, creating a reservoir of pro-democratic forces that could again be mobilized to demand democratic change.

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74 Interview with O. T., Ukrainian activist, 2012.
75 Interview with T. K., Ukrainian activist, 2012; interview with S. S., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012; and interview with A. T., Ukrainian policymaker, 2012.
Conclusion

While most existing studies on the external factors in the process of democratization have focused on global players such as the US and the EU, this paper shed some light on the role of regional actors – the new democracies born in the third wave of democratization. They represent a new generation of democracy promoters, who are striving to avoid some of the mistakes for which Western democracy promoters have been criticized. The paper examined the effectiveness of one group of such emerging democracy promoters, the Eastern European members of the European Union by studying the efforts of Poland and Slovakia as perceived by their Ukrainian recipients. As Poland and Slovakia are two of the most active EEMEU democracy promoters and Ukraine is a priority recipient for both, this paper presented the best-case scenario for the effectiveness of the EEMEUs. The study thus demonstrated the potential of these democracy promoters – despite being relatively small and new donors, they have already made some difference by leveraging their recent and relevant democratization experience and their familiarity with and commitment to their recipients. Moreover, many of the EEMEU limitations as democracy promoters can be overcome by forging democracy-promotion partnerships with more established democracies since the comparative advantages of these donors are complementary.