

## **CONVERTS TO MISSIONARIES: CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN THE ARAB WORLD**

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The young democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are eager to share lessons from their post-Communist transitions with democratic aspirants. As revolutionary movements swept across the Middle East and North Africa, CEE actors offered their knowledge to help Arab countries, especially Tunisia and Egypt, with their attempted transitions to democracy. But to translate good intentions into real impact, CEE states must move past sharing general transition know-how and distinguish themselves from other aid providers.

### **Findings**

- CEE donors believe they have important comparative advantages in democracy support in the Middle East and North Africa because they were not colonial powers in the region and because of their recent experience with political transformation. In their view, that experience translates into a special peer-to-peer dynamic with Arab partners.
- While revolutionary events unfolded in Tunisia and Egypt, CEE governments threw their rhetorical, diplomatic, and moral support behind the protesters.
- After the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, CEE actors sponsored experience-sharing conferences, seminars, study visits, and training sessions covering a range of issues, from economic and security sector reform to election monitoring and transitional justice.
- Long-term projects have been scarcer due to these countries' small aid budgets, but CEE assistance providers have creatively leveraged their resources and expertise through coalitions with their larger, more established American and Western European counterparts.
- In interviews, Arab recipients report that while CEE assistance has been useful, it has been underfunded and sometimes poorly targeted to local needs.

### **How CEE Governments Can Have a Lasting Impact**

**Promote innovative, decentralized approaches to democracy assistance.** CEE actors should establish an on-the-ground presence in the region and channel their limited funding into local civil society activities, especially to newer, less bureaucratic organizations pursuing more novel approaches, such as youth organizations working on direct democracy, citizen-led watchdogs monitoring corruption and advancing transparency, and grassroots initiatives focused on transforming the political system through bottom-up activism.

**Help facilitate the creation of robust civil societies.** CEE activists should leverage their experiences with civil society building. They should offer advice on how to convert broad opposition movements united against old regimes into representative political parties and responsible civil society actors that can play a crucial role in fostering a democratic transition.

**Adapt CEE lessons to meet recipient countries' unique needs.** CEE governments should demonstrate that they understand better than other external actors how the smart adaptation of lessons from one region to another is what makes democracy support truly valuable.

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