



Less talk, more cash

[Helle Dale](#)

Colaboraciones n° 938

May 12, 2006

Do the democracies of Europe have a problem with U.S. goals of spreading democracy around the world? In the drive to raise funds for the brand new U.N. Democracy Fund, which was launched on March 6, the United States and India have emerged as the biggest financial supporters. European countries, on the other hand, have been downright stingy in their response. What's the problem? Isn't Europe in favor of democracy promotion? Now, Europe likes to blow its own horn regarding its record on foreign aid, and Europeans constantly find ways to shame the United States on this issue. British Treasury Secretary (and likely the next prime minister) Gordon Brown are among those who have pushed for each developed nation to commit 0.7 percent of its gross national product to foreign aid.

Few European countries beyond Scandinavia actually attain this goal. But by dint of counting everything from student aid programs to international broadcasting to assistance to former colonies, European governments do look like they are giving more than Washington. As official accounting also mostly fails to add up private international charity, which has a much longer tradition in the United States, the disparity often does look embarrassing. Here, however, is an excellent opportunity for the United States to ask Europeans to put their money where their mouth is.

At the opening meeting in New York, 19 countries pledged a total of \$44 million to the Democracy Fund for projects around the globe. As of the end of April, \$32.48 million had come in. The United States, India and Qatar, the largest donors, have stepped up to the challenge and

each contributed an initial \$10 million. Further, the United States has pledged an additional \$7.9 million for this year. Australia comes next and has been likewise been generous in its response with \$7.5 million.

Despite lip service from the German and French U.N. ambassadors praising the project, and despite the wealth of Europe, Germany has so far contributed just \$1.6 million, Britain \$609,350, and France \$588,100. The figures were compiled by Thierno H. Kane, director of the civil organizations division at the U.N. Development Programme, and were circulated at a meeting in Berlin last week. A number of other European nations have pledged just \$10,000 each year, though it should be noted that many of them are Central and Eastern European countries whose economies are still struggling.

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organizations Mark Lagon has stated tactfully that "Even smaller contributions are important...All donors will form a consultative committee to talk about how the funding ought to be used." This means that the United States will be one of 17 committee members, but at least that is an improvement over the general U.N. system, which does not guarantee U.S. membership on any committee with the exception of the Security Council, despite the fact that the United States accounts for over a quarter of the U.N. budget.

The good news, though, is that the Democracy Fund has gotten off the

ground, a first step towards creating democratic accountability at the United Nations. Here it stands in stark contrast to the Human Rights Council (the revamped Human Rights Commission), which the United States recently chose to stay apart from. The Council has no membership criteria, either in terms of democratic governance or blocking countries under U.N. sanctions from taking a seat.

President Bush first proposed the Democracy Fund during his annual address to the U.N. General Assembly in September 2004, and it was later endorsed by the member nations as part of U.N. reform initiatives. It aims to improve one of the major shortcomings of the United Nations -- that while the organization purports to be a democratic body, any number of the members are not democracies at all. On top of that, a large proportion pay a minuscule, symbolic amount for their right to vote alongside the United States, Japan, Germany and other major donors.

So, a little more enthusiasm from Europe for the U.N. Democracy Fund would be in order if Europeans are serious about improving the United Nations, which they regard with close to religious devotion, and if they are as dedicated to the spread of democracy as they say they are. That is, unless of course they are disinclined to embrace any new idea that comes out of Washington. Sometimes one suspects that might be the biggest hurdle of all.

[Helle Dale](#) is director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation.

©2006 The Heritage Foundation