

Louder than words?

Connecting the dots of European democracy support

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Foreword

For over seventy years, the Member States of the European Union and its predecessors have been strengthening their democracies on the European continent. From access to information to an independent judiciary, from media freedom to LGBT rights - their defense demands our vigilance every day, but Europe has become a haven of democratic values and human rights compared to many other parts of the world.

Nevertheless, the European Union has a mixed track record on global democracy support. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the accession to membership of the Union was a strong magnet for many Central and Eastern European countries in their quest towards democracy. We saw how complex the democratization process can be, and that the road towards an open democracy has many hurdles. The EU is not always in the position to compel member States to respect their own obligations and engagements, and to help citizens defend the achievements of previous years.

Outside Europe, the picture is equally mixed. For decades, some autocratic regimes have been tacitly supported by the EU. Other regimes, often perceived as lacking geopolitical importance, were confronted with more principled EU action and saw their development cooperation frozen.

Meanwhile, countless human rights defenders and civil society organizations have been supported by the EU, even in extremely difficult situations. The EIDHR and other financial instruments continue to play an invaluable role for those courageous individuals who, across the globe, stand for the very democratic values on which the EU has been built.

Article 21 of the Lisbon Treaty clearly states that the EU *shall* seek to advance democracy worldwide; it is therefore not an option, it is an obligation to be respected in all European policies. In today's context, the urgency is clear. The optimistic years after the fall of the Berlin Wall are behind us. Democratic values are under attack at an unprecedented scale, even by some elected leaders. In the view of Naomi Klein, who is a far-seeing analyst of societal developments, we are perhaps witnessing

the first signs of what she calls 'barbarism': the renewed rise of ideologies that attempt to justify exclusion, oppression and aggression. Klein finds an explanation for this phenomenon in the increasing threats formed by the global climate crisis and the ever harsher competition for natural resources; brutality needs an excuse.

This makes the support of democratic values all the more important. It is only through the respect for the rights of all individuals that we may hope to avoid conflict and violence. No governance system serves this objective better than democracy. However much they may differ, democratic societies are better able to respect human rights and serve the interests of the vast majority. They value checks and balances, and governments are held to account by citizens, by civil society and by a free media. Democracies protect minorities and vulnerable groups, offering inclusive decision making processes and seeking agreed solutions.

The EU needs to give a new meaning and a new reality to its obligation to support democracy and human rights, and it needs to act now. At the start of the mandate of a new European Commission and the definition of the policies and the EU budget for the years to come, the EU and its Member States should be bold in their ambitions to continue to serve and support democratic values worldwide. This demands a genuine EU strategy for the support to democracy. This will also demand more dedicated staff on the issue at the EEAS and the Commission. And all EU institutions, including the European Parliament and the Court of Auditors, need to recognize that there is a specific approach required for supporting democracy. It must be flexible, it needs to have a long term approach, and it needs to acknowledge the option that difficulties will often arise, and that sometimes failure may occur.

With this publication, the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) offers its recommendations on the support to democracy by the EU and its Member States. We are a group of European civil society organizations. Each of us has contributed to the recommendations from our specific expertise on democracy support.

My deepest gratitude goes out to all contributors, and in particular to Ken Godfrey, executive director of EPD, for the tremendous and timely work he and his team have delivered here.

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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSO-LA	Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (as part of the Development Cooperation Instrument)
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COHOM	Council working party on human rights
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
DG CONNECT	Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
DG JUST	Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
EAP	Eastern Partnership
EOM	Election Observation Mission
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EUMS	European Union Member States
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
HRDCS	Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy
ICSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

ISPA	Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PHARE	Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring of Economies
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
RBA	Rights Based Approach
SAPARD	Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
USAID	US Agency for International Development Assistance
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Institute

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Executive Summary

European support for democracy is at a crossroads. The next decade will have a major bearing on what democracy means for the European Union (EU) at a time of increasing awareness of fundamental technological change, climate risks, demographic adjustment and power shifts between and within continents. Democratic governance should no longer be taken for granted within Europe or in European foreign policy. Political choices will need to be made that determine how important democracy is for European states and what to do as a consequence.

It is with these choices in mind that we embarked, 18 months ago, on a review of European support for democracy. This has included several stand-alone papers on democracy support and numerous multi-stakeholder meetings with academics, activists, civil society, donors, experts, policy-makers and think-tanks. The review looked at what European democracy support has achieved (the past), what can be improved today (the present) and where democracy support should be headed (the future). There were some things we expected to find in this review and there were also some surprises.

Democracy offers us the greatest potential for achieving sustainable development, respect for human rights and long-term stability. But democracy is not a perfect political system and can be dominated by powerful interest groups, short-termism, identity politics and the translation of healthy competition into conflict or violence. Today, these challenges are more real than ever.

Past | How successful has European democracy support been until now?

Europe plays a key role in the minds of pro-democracy actors around the world, on the international stage and in terms of both political and financial support. Accession criteria to the EU have been a major success in promoting democratic governance in Europe over the last half century. This spread

of democracy around Europe has been one of the most remarkable changes in governance in recent human history. In the last decade, European states have been at the forefront of assisting democratic development in Ukraine, Myanmar, Colombia, Georgia, the Gambia and many other countries. Yet, our review has shown that it is very difficult to say how successful European democracy support has been overall. This is in part because of the need to look at specific countries to see what democracy support looks like in practice; and in part because there is simply no reliable and comparable data on how much money is spent on democracy support.

A proper policy analysis of democracy support is not possible because most EU member states do not have a clear policy. Neither, it must be said, does the EU. No overarching policy framework means no clear definition, strategy, approach or objectives on democracy support. Comparing the policies or adding up aid figures is also exceedingly difficult, because of the different ways of categorising funding and the diverse characteristics assigned to democracy. It is therefore necessary to look at specific country cases to drill down on what is being achieved.

We looked at four countries. In Armenia, the EU and member states have consistently supported democracy in the country and contributed to a flourishing civic society, yet democracy assistance programmes often failed to tackle the underlying obstacles to sustainable democratisation like a fair judicial system and media independence. In Zimbabwe, European democracy assistance made positive contributions to civil society, the reform of the constitution and the judiciary, but there are indications that EU engagement also had unintended side-effects particularly through the use of sanctions. Tunisia, on the other hand, has seen significant support with limited direct impact from European actors, in part due to the overwhelming focus of engagement on stability through support to economic development and the security sector. In Honduras, European support has had difficulty addressing the rule of law but made a positive contribution in areas where EU member states' activities were complementary, such as human rights and election observation.

There are thus clear success stories from European democracy support in these countries, but the mixed results push us to look at how to learn from challenges and build on successes.

Present | How to consolidate and enhance European democracy support today?

Several specific steps could be taken at both policy and operation level, as well as in the way money is spent. First off, European states need a democracy support policy framework that guides EU democracy support and frames it within foreign policy and development objectives. This framework should consider democracy support as a tool of EU policy rather than democracy as a normative - and

often unfulfilled - principle. An overall framework would tackle several challenges identified in our review, including the need for greater clarity of purpose and improved coordination.

Secondly, an effort must also be made in improving our understanding of what works and what does not - the dearth of policy level analysis is glaring. This needs to be complemented by the systematic collection of comparative data. Development aid is under pressure from greater citizen scrutiny around Europe and it seems as though a certain fear of poor results hinders the development of a stronger evidence base. This is a strategic mistake. Democracy support needs to confront failures, understand successes and build on them before it is too late.

Finally, the way money is spent could be enhanced through focusing on change rather than process. We offer suggestions for doing this, including diverting funds from the executive branch of government when democratic breakdown occurs in a country. On the flip side, reformers need to be supported financially through a rapid financial response following a sudden democratic breakthrough.

Future | What key features could a new democracy support policy be built upon?

Europe must be bold. The international system is changing before our eyes in a manner that is more rapid than ever before and the place of democratic politics looks less certain than a decade ago. We must recognise that supporting democracy is a political challenge - it will take concerted commitment and perseverance.

Citizens should be a core target for democracy supporters, in Europe and elsewhere. Education on democratic principles in schools must not shy away from tackling the negatives of democratic politics. We cannot say that democracy is perfect - but we can teach the importance of working within the system. European states should give serious consideration to the creation of a European Democracy Academy that can improve our knowledge of democratic development and school professionals from different spheres on democratic politics.

Europe is the home of a certain strand of democracy that has morphed and developed over the centuries to what we see today. It will continue to mutate. European states need to be a forefront of this innovation and show global leadership on democratic governance. A global conference on democracy held in Europe on an annual basis with the participation of heads of state is a first step in asserting leadership. The power of political symbols should not be lost in the here and now.





FIVE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen our understanding of democracy support
2. Accord greater importance to democracy
3. Develop a policy framework on democracy support
4. Innovate to match current challenges
5. Dedicate greater resources to manage coordination



1.

Introduction

In early 2018, the European Partnership for Democracy began a process of taking stock of European efforts to support democracy around the world over the last decade. There followed a series of stand-alone papers, countless interviews, numerous workshops and a series of rich brainstorming sessions that attempted to analyse the challenges and opportunities for the future. This final report captures the findings and recommendations from our research.

A Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2018 found that 73% of Europeans want the EU to be more involved in support to democracy and peace in the world.¹ The European Parliament Research Service concluded that “promotion of democracy and peace in the world is a policy area where there is an expectation gap between current and desired EU involvement.”² Democracy is a system that is widely held as beneficial to citizens, even if the nitty gritty of supporting it is a much less frequent subject of discussion.

Analysis of democracy support typically falls within a series of categories that each have their merits and drawbacks. There is a wealth of macro level data on the state of democracy in different countries that allows researchers and policy-makers to track the developments of democratic governance over time. Macro level research on democracy support includes cross-national quantitative analyses that compare development aid and democratisation. In both cases, the data is vital - including for this report - but the research does not tell donors how to spend money or activists how to support democratisation. Cross-country comparative analysis is useful in showing where democracy support has been more successful but often fails to identify what exactly it was that made that support successful.

¹ Based on Eurobarometer analysed by the European Parliamentary Research Service. Zamfir, I. and Doreva, A. EU support for democracy and peace in the world (2019)

² Ibid.

On the other end of the spectrum, democracy support programmes undergo evaluations that look at the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in order to identify lessons for the future. Sometimes these evaluations will use innovative evaluation techniques to try to zero-in on the contribution of a specific programme to particular political outcomes. Nevertheless, the evaluations almost never link to policies or donor priorities in relation to those programmes. In fact, with some notable exceptions, there is a stunning lack of policy level analysis in democracy support. This report attempts to fill the gap in policy-relevant research by mixing country analyses with new quantitative data and a thorough examination of policies and institutional dynamics. As part of our research, we commissioned local researchers to conduct an in-depth analyses of European democracy support in 4 countries: Armenia, Honduras, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. These countries were selected for the diversity in democratic experiences they represent - both positive and negative - as well as the differences in EU approach due to their different locations and varied political realities - including the use of sanctions, differing trade preferences, geopolitical concerns and levels of financial assistance. The researchers were instructed to look at the context of European democracy support, the relevance, consistency, complementarity and impact of European democracy support (summaries of each report are contained in the Annex to this report). We also conducted analyses of EU funding data for democracy support, commissioned a review of academic literature on EU democracy support and compared the democracy support policies of different European governments.

Our goal in writing this report is to contribute to an improvement in European efforts to support democracy around the world. In this, we hope that the findings and recommendations are useful for policy-makers, donors, activists, practitioners and researchers in their own work supporting democracy.

The report focuses mostly on the European Union while noting the vital role played by EU member states in shaping and contributing to European democracy support. We also looked primarily at democracy support in foreign policy while recognising that European actors have a key role to play in supporting democracy within Europe. Several chapters touch on this without looking into the policies and programmes within the Union, particularly because these are far less developed than those facing the world outside Europe. This will certainly change in the coming years.

We begin with a look at the history of the EU and democracy (chapter 2) before moving on to where democracy stands in the world today (chapter 3). The next three chapters are the core of the analysis of all of the research conducted over the last 18 months. Chapter 4 looks at European democracy support policy, the next chapter looks at programming and funding (chapter 5) before we turn to a review of the democracy support architecture in Europe (chapter 6). The final chapter summarises the findings from the research and offers recommendations for dealing with each of those findings in turn, including specific recommended actions (chapter 7).



2.

Setting the scene: the EU and democracy support

Article 2 of the Treaty of the EU asserts that democracy is a founding value of the EU, along with human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The European project is intricately linked to democratic governance and in some senses the steady progress of democracy around the world has mirrored the EU's own expansion. The global plateauing of democracy has come during a moment when EU expansion also seems stuck.

But how did this link come about? And what has the EU done to support democracy so far? This section first looks at democracy itself, its definition and the link to the EU, before moving on to defining democracy support and revisiting the recent history of EU support for democracy.

2.1 Democracy as a concept

What is democracy?

A wide range of conceptualisations of democracy exist in academic spheres, including classical, republican, liberal, direct, elitist, pluralist, socialist, deliberative and cosmopolitan readings.³ A classical Schumpeterian reading of democracy entails the “institutional arrangement for arriving at

³ Vandeputte, N., Luciani, L. *European Union Democracy Assistance: An Academic State of Play* (2018). Available [here](#).

political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people themselves decide on issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will”.⁴ In contrast, deliberative democracy puts more emphasis on the transformation of private preferences via a process of deliberation into positions that can withstand public scrutiny.⁵ As such, other than through representative measures, it seeks the direct input of the citizenry through deliberative polls, e-government or referenda.⁶

Within each of these categories there is also contestation. For example, the liberal notion of democracy through a Lockean reading would emphasise the need for economic freedoms, including private property as the basis for individual and political freedoms. In contrast, a Dahlian reading emphasises political freedom, meaning that democracy can only be reached when citizens enjoy effective participation and voting equality, when equality is extended to all people within the state (i.e. inclusiveness) and when they have an enlightened understanding and control of the political agenda.

The significant variation in understandings of democracy can also be conceptualised through the lens of *thick* and *thin* definitions.⁷ The classical definitions of Schumpeter and Dahl are usually considered to fall within the more minimal thin conceptions of democracy with Schumpeter being less expansive than Dahl. For Dahl the two foundational elements of his concept of ‘polyarchy’ (rule by the many) are political participation and contestation within a representative system.⁸ Both definitions may also be conceived of through the more widely used term of ‘electoral democracy’ which falls on the thin side of the spectrum and contrasts with the term ‘liberal democracy’. ‘Liberal democracy’ tends to be used more frequently in North America than in Europe and captures thicker ideas of democracy that go beyond contestation in elections. These thicker conceptions include other features like the rule of law, the separation of powers, accountable governing institutions and protections for individual rights (including minorities). The variation in conceptions of democracy is neatly captured through the Varieties of Democracy Index that is updated on a yearly basis and includes rankings of countries according to different conceptions of democracy (see chapter 2).

⁴ Schumpeter, J.A., *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1976).

⁵ Held, D., *Models of Democracy* (2006).

⁶ Warren, M.E., *Designing Deliberative Democracy* (2008).

⁷ For a useful breakdown see Weber, M.A., *Global Trends in Democracy: Background, U.S. Policy, and Issues for Congress* (2018).

⁸ Dahl, R., *On Democracy* (1998), gives 7 key elements to polyarchy: elected officials who control decision-making; free, fair and frequent elections; freedom of expression; access to alternative information; associational autonomy; inclusive suffrage and the right to run for office.

All of these conceptions see elections as the core of democratic politics even if there is a growing movement that suggests that elections can be problematic for democracies.⁹ There has also been a small but noticeable shift in political science towards recognising that a functioning democracy requires more than what *thin* notions of democracy entail. In line with this, unless otherwise prefaced with a qualifier (like representative, direct, deliberate etc), this report understands the concept of democracy in broad terms. This is reflected in the definition of democracy agreed to by member states of the United Nations in 2004. The resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly declared:

*“that the essential elements of democracy include respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, freedom of association and peaceful assembly and of expression and opinion, and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic free elections by universal and equal suffrage and by secret ballot guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the people, as well as a pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, respect for the rule of law, the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, transparency and accountability in public administration, and free, independent and pluralistic media”.*¹⁰

While the definition does not reference civil society or the legislative branch directly, it does refer to both indirectly. This report follows the UN definition, agreed to within a multilateral context and thick enough to capture the ‘essential elements’ of a democratic system, as the basis for understanding democracy.

The EU and democracy

Having emerged from the ruins of the Second World War, the EU was founded as a peace project. At the time, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was designed to prevent any future wars and promote reconciliation through economic integration. As the EU member states (EUMS) progressively expanded and deepened their economic cooperation, the ECSC evolved into the European Economic Community. As the first step to a more political union, the Single European Act in 1986 first acknowledged the importance of democracy to the European project, committing EU member states to work together to promote democracy, in the preambles of the document.¹¹

In an atmosphere of optimism about democracy and European integration in the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 expanded on the importance of democracy to EU

⁹ This is epitomised by Van Reybrouck, D., *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy* (2017).

¹⁰ The United Nations, Resolution A/Res/59/201 (2005). Available [here](#).

¹¹ European Parliament, Single European Act (1986). Available [here](#).

member states internally and in EU external engagement. The development and consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms became an objective of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, enshrined in Article J(1).¹² The so-called Copenhagen Criteria for accession to the EU were developed in 1992 and required prospective members to have stable “institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights”.¹³ As a precondition for EU membership, democracy was placed right at the heart of the EU’s identity.

In 2007, the importance of democracy to the European project was fully enshrined in EU law through the Treaty of Lisbon, also called the Treaty of the EU.¹⁴ Democracy was listed as a founding value and Article 21 of the Treaty states that the founding values of the EU will guide all EU external action and that the EU will pro-actively advance these values in its external engagement. It states that:

*“The Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law”.*¹⁵

Since the consolidation of democracy as a founding value, guiding principle and policy objective in the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, EU documents are abundant with references to democracy. Despite the strong rhetorical commitment to democracy, the EU and several EU member states have been criticised for a lack of democratic principles over time. The EU itself has justifiably had to deal with concerns of a lack of transparency and insufficient democratic control and accountability of the European institutions, in particular the European Commission. While the European Parliament has progressively been given and assumed enhanced powers in response to these concerns, a number of initiatives have also been set up to address the EU’s so-called democratic deficit as part of the priorities of outgoing Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

- *The European Citizens Initiative (ECI)*: This instrument was introduced in 2012 and enables 1 million EU citizens from at least seven EU countries to call on the European Commission to propose legislation on matters where the EU has competence to legislate.¹⁶ So far only four

¹² Official Website of the European Union, Maastricht Treaty, Article J(1) (1992). Available [here](#).

¹³ European Parliament, Presidency Conclusions Copenhagen European Council (21-22 June 1993). Available [here](#).

¹⁴ Official Journal of the European Union, Treaty of Lisbon: Treaty of the European Union; Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (2007). Available [here](#).

¹⁵ Official Journal of the European Union, Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union (2016). Available [here](#).

¹⁶ Directorate-General for Communication (European Commission), Guide To The European Citizens’ Initiative (2016). Available [here](#).

ECI's have been able to obtain the necessary amount of signatures from different member states, indicating certain weaknesses in the design of the ECI.¹⁷ The ECI aims to make the EU's decision-making process more participatory.

- Citizen Dialogues: During Juncker's tenure, 1 572 Citizen Dialogues were held in 583 locations, in order to understand citizens' concerns and ideas on the present and future of the EU. The European Parliament and national leaders also organised high level debates on the topic. The Citizen Dialogues identified seven key domains where Europeans expect action from the Union, of which one concerned the need to stand up for the EU's values and identity.¹⁸ Some of these concerns were taken up in the EU's Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024 and the priorities of new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.¹⁹

More recently, EUMS have received criticism for breaching the principles of democracy, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. Since 2015, the governing Law and Justice party in Poland has pushed through measures to weaken institutional checks and balances, amongst others through changes to the judicial system and heightened pressure on media outlets.²⁰ In a very similar manner, the ruling Fidesz party in Hungary has systematically broken down the country's democratic institutions since 2010, by limiting the competences of the judiciary, tight media regulations and ownership, and the adoption of laws restricting non-governmental organisations (NGOs).²¹ Commentators have also expressed concerns regarding the rule of law and an overbearing executive in Romania and the UK in the last year.^{22 23}

In response to the erosion of democratic institutions in Hungary and Poland, the European Commission has triggered the Article 7 procedure regarding rule of law breaches in Poland in 2017, and the European Parliament later triggered the procedure for Hungary in 2018.²⁴ Article 7 of the Treaty of Lisbon was originally introduced in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 as Article F1 in view of the accession of new post-communist democracies. The article imposed political conditionality on EUMS,

¹⁷ European Parliament, "The Added Value Of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), and its Revision" (2018). Available [here](#).

¹⁸ European Commission, Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Consultations, Key Conclusions (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁹ European Council, A New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 (2019). Available [here](#) and Ursula von der Leyen, A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe (2019). Available [here](#).

²⁰ For more information, see for instance Przybylski, W., Explaining Eastern Europe: Can Poland's Backsliding be Stopped? (2018). Available [here](#).

²¹ For more information, see for instance Okotars, Democratic Backsliding and Civil Society Response in Hungary (2018). Available [here](#).

²² Actmedia, Euobserver: Romania faces Rule of Law Criticism in EU Parliament (2018). Available [here](#).

²³ Bowcott, O., Quinn, B., Carrell, S., Johnson's Suspension of Parliament unlawful, Supreme Court rules (2019). Available [here](#).

²⁴ European Parliament, Rule of Law Concerns in Member States: How the EU can act (infographic) (2018). Available [here](#).

by establishing a procedure for suspending certain membership rights from a member state in case of a serious and persistent breach by a member state of the principles of democracy, liberty, respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.²⁵ This is the most serious sanction the EU can impose on a member state, as it may include the suspension of voting rights. In order to suspend voting rights, the European Council needs to unanimously agree on the existence of a breach of EU values, with the member stateMember State under review not voting.

2.2. A short history of democracy support and the EU

What is democracy support?

There are many different types of democracy support as well as many states and actors supporting democracy in a myriad of ways. A linguistic classification of terms that are widely used, and sometimes used interchangeably, is essential for understanding some of the nuances in thinking and action.

Democracy support: the most widespread term used to refer to efforts to reinforce or create democratic development or to halt autocratisation. These efforts may be political or financial. We use this term as the main overarching term for EU action.

Democracy assistance: this can sometimes be mixed up with ‘democracy support’ but we use this term in order to refer to financial flows. This follows in the spirit of ‘international assistance’ as a linguistic proxy for financial aid.

Democracy promotion: the term is often used by academics to refer to the stimulation of democracy abroad by states. It has a more active and often coercive connotation compared to ‘democracy support’. *Support* is something given to existing internal efforts for democratisation while *promotion* does not require any such internal (national) desire. We use this term to highlight more coercive types of democracy support (e.g. at the most extreme this would be military intervention).

In a general sense, democracy support aims to improve democracy through strengthening democratic institutions - such as parliaments, political parties or civil society - and to strengthen democratic

²⁵ European Parliament, Treaty of Amsterdam, Amending the Treaty on European Union, The Treaties establishing the European Communities and Certain Related Acts (1997). Available [here](#).

values such as accountability, participation and transparency. The means for supporting democracy within a state or abroad are varied and include:

- Bilateral and multilateral (including public) diplomacy;
- Assistance programmes (domestic and foreign);
- Sanctions and other forms of conditionality;
- Military intervention;
- Cultural exchange programmes;
- Civic and public education;
- National and international broadcasting.

One can also divide these methods into different categories of low profile activities (training, NGO funding, civic education) and more high profile activities (political conditionality, military intervention).²⁶ The very same techniques may also be used by authoritarian regimes with mirror-like aims of support to autocracy. Authoritarians also use other tactics to actively subvert democracies such as election manipulation or online disinformation.²⁷

International democracy support

Although some organisations and governments were already engaging in activities to promote democratic change in the 1970s and 1980s, it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that democracy support started to play a central role in foreign and development policy. Until then, the Cold War and the security issues that it entailed had prevented democratic governments from engaging in practices that could jeopardise the geo-strategic balance between the two confronting blocs.

The Vienna Conference on Human Rights of 1993 represented a real turning point in this respect. The adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and the establishment of the High Commissioner for Human Rights were seen as the natural evolution of the newfound interest in democracy and human rights. Democracy was, by then, riding the crest of the so-called ‘third wave of democratisation’, spanning from the mid-1970s in Portugal and Spain, to Latin America throughout the following decade, to the end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

This renewed interest in democracy happened to coincide with the realisation by the World Bank, among other major donors, of the shortcomings of its approach towards Structural Adjustment

²⁶ For a similar disaggregation see Dodsworth, S., Cheeseman, N., *Ten Challenges in Democracy Support - and How to overcome them* (2018), as well as Bush, S. *The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion does not confront Dictators* (2015).

²⁷ Yakouchyk, K. *Beyond Autocracy Promotion: A Review*. *Political Studies Review* (2018).

Programmes. The World Bank and others began to realise that bad developmental results were not just the fruit of bad economic policies, but that they could also be attributed to a crisis of governance and all sorts of political obstacles. The resulting upsurge of good governance initiatives introduced a new political dimension into traditional technical cooperation, which until then had been the standard way of addressing development problems.

For many years the international financial institutions had focused their efforts on training selected groups of high-level officials to *understand* the implications of liberal economic policies. It was this focus on the technical aspects of development, which underpinned the creation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1965, through the merger of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, active since 1949, and a Special Fund that had been established in 1958 to channel voluntary contributions to pre-investment projects.

As a result of the aforementioned historic developments, two separate lines of work have been consolidated into what one could describe as fields or specialisations. On the one hand, there are a set of initiatives aimed at promoting, protecting or supporting democracy and democratic values, while on the other, a wide range of programmes pursue the objective of ‘good governance’ through institution-building and rather ambitious and comprehensive projects of administrative or sector reform. This distinction is important to bear in mind as it reoccurs in the policy and programming of many European donors.

European democracy support

Democracy support through enlargement

In the early 1990s, at the time of the aforementioned changes in thinking, the EU was facing a thrilling and unprecedented challenge. A wave of 12 candidate countries were to enter the Union at more or less the same time, presenting a unique test for the EU, not only with regard to managing the integration of this large number of countries, but also when it came to helping the newcomers to reform their own institutions to make them fit for membership. The latter was particularly challenging considering that the prospective members’ institutions had been defined by the powerful nature and consolidated bureaucratic influence of the public administration in post-communist countries. Significant support was required in order to prevent those public administrations from fraying and to prepare them for managing the complexity of adopting the *acquis communautaire*; i.e. the entirety of EU laws and norms.

In view of these challenges, the EU adopted the Copenhagen Criteria for accession in 1993. The criteria were primarily focused on the internal market *acquis* and political stability, but also included a clause on the need for institutions safeguarding democracy, the rule of law and human rights (see

chapter 4 for more detail). As the complexities of the enlargement process became apparent over time, the accession process became more complex from 1997 onwards with new instruments and interpretations to the Copenhagen Criteria. This came with a shift from conditionality on very general and formal democracy criteria, towards a more substantive understanding of democracy and increased attention for human and minority rights.²⁸ Candidate countries were from that point on obliged to live up to democratic standards before membership negotiations could be commenced, contrasting the previous flexibility on democratic standards in the accession of Southern European countries.

The European Commission led the process of monitoring candidate countries' compliance with the accession criteria in great detail, and issued a number of different reports on the progress made, including both general and individual Country Reports, Opinions and Regular Reports.²⁹ In addition, financial aid served to incentivise and support the much-needed reforms. Obsolete procedures needed to be updated to model new managerial principles while the rule of law and market economy needed to be consolidated. The whole enterprise was carried out through technical assistance programmes, either in the form of classical consultancy contracts or through the mobilisation of EU member states' public servants. This innovative approach fostered a series of tools for peer-to-peer exchange, namely Twinning, Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) and Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA).

Some of these technical assistance programmes focused specifically on supporting pluralist democracy through NGOs in all accession countries, primarily through the Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring of Economies (PHARE), and to a lesser extent through the Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development (SAPARD) and the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA). While the amounts dedicated to democracy and non-state actors paled in significance compared to market-oriented financial support to accession candidates, some safeguards were built into all technical assistance. The candidate countries could only receive funding if they could demonstrate their commitment to human rights, a multiparty system and free and fair elections.³⁰ The EU thus used its leverage over accession countries to encourage democratic reforms at an institutional level, while also supporting democratisation through civil society with financial support.

²⁸ Pridham, G. *The Effects of the European Union's Democratic Conditionality: The Case of Romania during Accession*. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Volume 23, Issue 2, p. 3 (2007).

²⁹ De Ridder, E. & Kochenov, D. *Democratic Conditionality in the Eastern Enlargement: Ambitious Window Dressing*, p. 594 (2011).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The importance of the inclusion of democracy as a criterion for accession to the Union cannot be understated, as it had the effect of progressively turning the EU into a democracy support actor. The accession process led the EU to develop a shared understanding of the key tenets of a democracy and new political and financial instruments to support democratisation. In 2003, one year before the accession of the first 10 new EU member states, the European Court of Auditors published a report on Twinning as the main instrument to support institution-building in candidate countries.³¹ This report was interpreted as an endorsement of an overall positive and even “laudable initiative” from the European Commission, which decided to expand the use of these tools to other countries as part of a new ‘European Neighbourhood Policy’ (ENP). This entrenched democracy support within the EU’s external action portfolio.

The European Parliament began to advocate for innovative ways of providing support to dissidents and human right defenders abroad in the 1990s, partly due to the role that civil society played in overthrowing communist rule, with such notable examples as *Solidarność* in Poland and *Charta 77* in Czechoslovakia. The result was the launching of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in 1994, which would later become a fully-fledged financial ‘instrument’, unique in its political ambitions and operational approach. The EIDHR distinguishes itself from every other EU instrument in the fact that it does not require governments’ consent to operate, a feat that enables funds to reach organisations that are under scrutiny precisely because of the nature of their work.

The emphasis placed on democracy by certain central European states (particularly the Czech Republic and Poland) during this period reflected the recent and vivid memories of their own struggles and made them strongly sympathetic towards those countries that were going through similar processes. Realising that the democratic impetus of the third wave of democratisation was slowly fading and that disguised autocracies were settling into a dangerous comfort zone, these new EU member states and others were instrumental in getting approval for the Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations (under the Council Conclusions of 2009) during the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU. This proved to be a key year in democracy support, since the UN Secretary General’s Guidance Note on Democracy of the same year set in motion future developments within the United Nations structure as well (see chapter 4 for more detail).

The evolution of European support for democracy in the last decade

The 2009 Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations provided impetus towards a new era of European support for democracy. These Council Conclusions are important for two reasons. Firstly, as they were agreed within the Council of the EU, all EUMS (27 at the time) endorsed the contents of the document. Unanimity is required for the Council to pass positions on foreign

³¹ European Court of Auditors, Special Report No 6 concerning twinning as the main instrument to support institution-building in candidate countries together with the Commission’s replies (2003). Available [here](#).

affairs and the Conclusions therefore represent not just the policy of the EU institutions but of all EUMS. Secondly, they are essentially the *only* official EU document that has democracy as a sole focus. Democracy is referenced in a plethora of EU documents but usually appears as a sidekick to human rights or as a principle of EU external action or development policy.

Widespread popular uprisings across the Mediterranean Sea in 2011 led EU leaders to take a more pronounced position on political developments in the Arab world that moved away from the functional cooperation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The events led to joint communication on ‘A new response to a changing Neighbourhood’ in May 2011 that recognised that a new approach was needed to *inter alia* ‘build and consolidate healthy democracies’.³² The High Representative for Foreign Affairs (HR/VP) referred to the idea of creating ‘deep democracy’. Although this was a rather poorly defined concept, it was an important rhetorical shift that intended to give democracy a key role in EU policy in the region.³³

These developments came at the same time as the creation of an EU Strategic Framework for Human Rights and Democracy and a subsequent Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2012-2014. The Strategic Framework was notable for the fact that it included a commitment to a so-called Rights Based Approach (RBA) that sought to mainstream human rights in general development cooperation. The Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy was later renewed for 2015-2019, with a whopping 113 ‘actions’.

Following the conflicts in Libya and Syria, the failure of democratisation in Egypt and the large migratory flows in the summer of 2015, the EU shifted its policy prioritisation in its neighbourhood. The annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine played a key role as well, along with the Armenian rejection of the negotiated Association Agreement in 2013 in favour of a customs agreement with the Russian Federation. The second review of the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy put security and migration at the forefront of the new European policy in the region. This new approach was solidified through the Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy in 2016. The Global Strategy aims to promote citizens’ interests by strengthening the resilience of European democracies, acknowledging that the quality of European democracies determines the EU’s external credibility.³⁴ All of the key development documents - the 2006 Consensus on Development, the 2011 ‘Agenda for Change’ and the new European Consensus on Development of 2017 - mention democracy as a principle of European development cooperation, but give varying degrees of prominence to democracy.

³² European Commission, Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions: A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood (2011). Available [here](#).

³³ Felipe Gómez Isa, F., Muñoz Nogal, EU Promotion of Deep Democracy in the Southern Mediterranean: A Missed Opportunity? (2017).

³⁴ European External Action Service, EU Global Strategy, (2016), p. 15. Available [here](#).

The EU institutions have also adopted a number of other documents that relate to democracy support. In 2012, the European Commission released a communication on its engagement with civil society in external relations entitled ‘The roots of democracy and sustainable development’. This was followed by Council Conclusions that highlighted the role a strong civil society plays in democracy and unsurprisingly referenced the role of civil society in the Arab Spring. In 2017, new Council Conclusions updated the EU’s ‘engagement with civil society in external relations’ to take into account the diminished space for civil society in many parts of the world. All of these legal and political documents treat democracy as a vital principle of EU action, but very few provide operational consequences for European democracy support although they may do so for specific sectors or themes.

In the field of media these include the 2013 Council Conclusions on media freedom and pluralism in the digital environment and the 2018 Council Conclusions on the strengthening of European content in the digital economy. The EU also developed the Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline in 2014, which provide political and operational guidance to staff from the EU institutions and EU member states. A number of other human rights guidelines have also been developed over the last decade, including new guidelines on LGBTI rights, freedom of religion and belief and a revision of guidelines on the death penalty.

In recent years, European states have struggled to come to terms with manipulation in the digital sphere, whether this is disinformation, fake news, electoral interference or data privacy. A first effort to address this was the creation of an East Strategic Communication Task Force (known as Stratcom East) in response to Russian disinformation campaigns in 2015. Since then, this has been complemented by two further task forces for the Western Balkans and the Southern neighbourhood. In late 2017, the European Commission set up a high-level group of experts to provide advice on combating fake news and disinformation, resulting in a Communication on tackling online disinformation. The HR/VP and the European Commission released an Action Plan against disinformation in 2018 in response to a call from the European Council to “protect the Union’s democratic systems and combat disinformation, including in the context of the upcoming European elections”.³⁵ The issue of disinformation has thus opened up new debates and areas of action for the protection of democratic systems within and outside of Europe. In terms of democracy within Europe, there is also a significant strand of policies that have, in recent years, looked at the rule of law.³⁶

³⁵ European Council, Conclusions, 18 October 2018. Available [here](#).

³⁶ European Commission, Communication on strengthening the rule of law within the Union - A blueprint for action (2019). Available [here](#).



3.

Democracy today: autocratisation and new challenges

3.1 State of democracy in the world

The late 2000s saw the first signs of an end to the optimism of the post-Cold War period that characterised much of the prevailing analysis of democratisation.³⁷ Cases of uncompleted ‘transitions’ to democracy and political regimes stuck in the ‘grey zone’ between autocracy and democracy as well as the growing influence of China and Russia led to the proclamation of a global “democratic rollback”³⁸ and an “authoritarian resurgence”.³⁹ In parallel, scholars increasingly abandoned the concept of a teleological democratisation process and instead turned to study the complexity and durability of authoritarian (and hybrid) regimes. Cases of democratic breakdown - that is the regression of a formerly democratic regime into an authoritarian one - in a number of countries provided the empirical material for this mostly academic inquiry.

In recent years, related diagnoses, such as the thesis of “democratic backsliding” emerged, with the important difference of emphasising the dangers for so-called consolidated democracies, including

³⁷ Francis Fukuyama’s oft-cited declaration of an “end of history” represents said optimism most prominently.

³⁸ Diamond, Larry (2008): The Democratic Rollback. The Resurgence of the Predatory State. *Foreign Affairs*, 87 (2), 36-48.

³⁹ Gat, Azar (2007): The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers. *Foreign Affairs*, 86 (4), 59-69.

those in North America and Western Europe.⁴⁰ It posits that a significant number of democracies are seeing gradual declines in systemic quality, without therefore qualifying as autocracies. Indeed, while democratic backsliding “does not imply a *change of* the system, [it does imply] a gradual *change within* the system”.⁴¹ Rather than abrupt changes, such as a military coup, it comprises slower but steady attacks on essential elements of democracy, while keeping the façade of democracy intact. The term of ‘democratic backsliding’ has been criticised for several reasons. To begin with, it implies that the process is limited to democracies (as an autocracy cannot undergo “democratic” deterioration). Moreover, the wording suggests an “involuntary reversal back to historical precedents”, which often does not reflect political realities in affected countries, in that the process is often actively pursued by elites and not necessarily in a direction that is similar to the past.⁴² Scholars connected to the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) instead suggest the use of the term autocratisation in a wider sense, encompassing all movements away from a full democracy, sudden and gradual, occurring in all different forms of democracies and autocracies. On this basis, and concurring with the above-mentioned diagnoses, they postulate that since the mid-1990s a “third wave of autocratisation” has begun - as more countries are undergoing autocratisation rather than democratisation. Unlike in the two previous waves, mainly democracies are affected this time around.⁴³

Several indices can be used for an overall assessment of the state of democracy (and autocracy) in the world. For the purpose of this report, the following three will be considered: The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, V-Dem’s Liberal Democracy Index, and Freedom House’s Freedom in the World Aggregate Score.⁴⁴

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index is composed of 60 indicators grouped into five categories, i.e. electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. A final score is given on a 0 to 10 scale. A review of the scores over the last decade indicate that levels of democracy are stagnating. Compared to 2017, the 2018 score remained stable, after having previously fallen for two consecutive years.⁴⁵ The stable score is partly due to improvements in global levels of political participation - the only index category that improved in 2018, while all four others categories deteriorated. The total number of citizens

⁴⁰ See: Bermeo, Nancy (2016): On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (1), 5-19; and Levitsky, Steven & Ziblatt, Daniel (2018): *How Democracies Die*. Crown Publishing, New York.

⁴¹ Gerschewski, Johannes (2018): Autocratization and Democratic Backsliding: Taking Stock of a Recent Debate. In: *Democracy Promotion in Times of Uncertainty*, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt. 7.

⁴² Lührmann, Anna & Lindberg, Staffan I. (2019): A Third Wave of Autocratization is here: What is new about it? *Democratization*, 26 (7), 5.

⁴³ Ibid. 13-14.

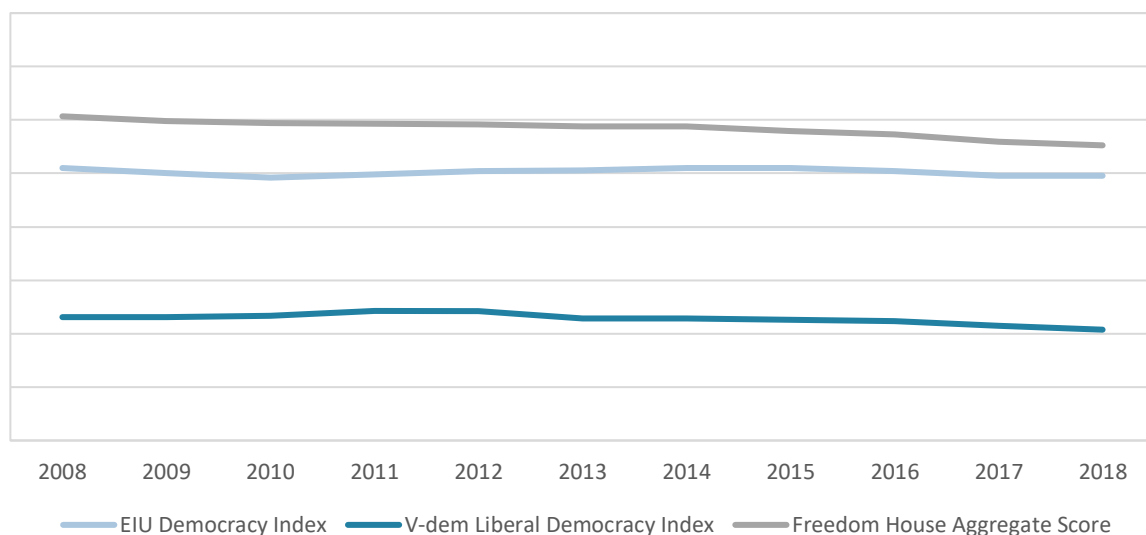
⁴⁴ A range of other options exist, for an overview see: International IDEA (2018): *The Global State of Democracy Indices. Methodology*, 41-42. Available [here](#).

⁴⁵ The Economist Intelligence Unit (2019): *Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy*.

living in some form of democracy fell from 49.3% in 2017 to 47.7% in 2018. Significant deteriorations can be observed in the civil liberties category; indeed, over the last decade, no indicators deteriorated more than those for freedom of expression and freedom of print and electronic media. V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) seeks to measure the extent to which liberal democracy is achieved in a given country. It does so by combining several indicators measuring the protection of civil liberties, rule of law, the independency of judiciary, the effectiveness of checks and balances, and various conditions allowing for fair electoral competition. In 2018, the LDI score has marginally decreased for the fourth year in a row. While the index establishes that democracy prevails in a majority (55%) of countries, it also shows that the number of liberal democracies has declined from 44 in 2008 to 39 in 2018. Nevertheless, it can be ascertained from the data that global levels of democracy are not in free fall.⁴⁶

Freedom House's Freedom in the World survey uses 25 different indicators (derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), for an aggregate score of up to 100 (per country). The different indicators assess political rights and civil liberties enjoyed by citizens (rather than assessing governments or government performance per se). 2018 marks the thirteenth consecutive year of decline in levels of freedom across the world. The accompanying annual report highlighted the continued attack by authoritarian governments on civil society and media, as well as the deterioration in rule of law, separation of powers, and protection of minorities, even in freer countries.⁴⁷

Figure 1: Global levels of democracy from 2008 - 2018



Source: The table represents aggregate scores on an incomparable scale on the basis of data from EIU Democracy Index, V-dem Liberal democracy Index and Freedom House Aggregate Scores.

⁴⁶ V-Dem Institute (2019): Democracy Facing Global Challenges. V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019.

⁴⁷ Freedom House (2019): Freedom in the World 2019. Democracy in Retreat.

In sum, the three indices assert that the prevalence and quality of democracy has been plateauing for most of the last decade and is now falling slightly, i.e. over the last three to four years, deterioration across the main democracy indicators can be observed (see figure 1). Yet, the data also suggests that the notion of a global demise of democracy is exaggerated and that - compared to more drastic up and down swings that have occurred previously - the decrease in the number of democracies (and their quality) is merely gradual.⁴⁸ However, it is both noticeable and worrying that the highest levels of democratic erosion are occurring in those regions with comparatively high levels of democratisation, including Western Europe and North America.⁴⁹ In short, the empirical evidence does support a trend of democratic erosion, yet one that is gradual and modest (for now).

Attitudes towards democracy

In 2016, Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk initiated an academic debate by putting forward the argument that in North America and Western Europe support for democracy among citizens, specifically among those born after 1980 - the Millennial generation - is steeply eroding.⁵⁰ This idea of a 'democratic disconnect' has become a main element of the democratic backsliding argument described above. Foa and Mounk's research was widely received by international media. The disillusionment of young citizens with democratic values and institutions served as a much sought-after explanation of the success of 'populist' political actors in European and American ballot boxes. Foa and Mounk's argumentation was put into question by scholars at multiple levels.⁵¹ One of these critiques, important to emphasise here, is the argument that declining support of democratic values is not primarily caused by those who are consciously critical of the performance of democratic systems (i.e. 'critical citizens' who, despite their disillusionment, remain committed to democracy in principle). Instead, citizens who have 'exited' the social contract and who show transgressive and antisocial attitudes that are not inherently political, seem to have a bigger role.⁵² In other words, citizens that are disconnected from democracy appear to be motivated by an individualistic indifference to society in general and hence reject core elements of collective co-existence altogether. Consequently, strategies aiming to counter the democratic disconnect and to invite these citizens back into the social context would include the provision of effective civic education and

⁴⁸ This is not to say that cases of democratic breakdown did not occur over the last fifteen years. Examples include Venezuela, Nicaragua, or Turkey.

⁴⁹ V-Dem Institute (2019): Democracy Facing Global Challenges. V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Foa, Roberto Stefan; Mounk, Yascha (2016): The Danger of Deconsolidation. The Democratic Disconnect. *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (3), 5-17.

⁵¹ As an example, see Norris, Pippa (2017): Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risk. *Journal of Democracy Web Exchange*.

⁵² Howe, Paul (2017): Eroding Norms and Democratic Deconsolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 28 (4), 15-29.

measures against excessive individualism.⁵³ Of course, dysfunctions observed in today's democracies must be addressed, however, they are not likely to be responsible for the democratic disconnect.

Indeed, while support for democracy *in principle* has declined somewhat, it remains high across the world. Those citizens that are disillusioned with democracy *in practice*, do not necessarily support non-democratic alternatives. In fact, a recent survey suggests that an average of 82% of people in twenty European and North American countries say that democracy is important to have in their country.⁵⁴ At a global level, this figure stands at 79%. A different survey conducted in 38 nations across all continents finds that roughly 70% of citizens are either 'committed' or 'less-committed' democrats.⁵⁵ A minority is open to nondemocratic alternatives to democracy, e.g. rule by the military, a strong leader or experts. This minority exists across all countries, even where the levels of democracy are comparatively high. Yet, these figures indicate that - despite significant dissatisfaction with the performance of many democratic systems (more on that below) - democracy still possesses an overwhelming normative appeal to citizens worldwide.

3.2 Challenges to democracy

Still, the future of democracy is uncertain. The global context has changed and serious challenges to democracy have arisen in recent years. The 2016 presidential election in the United States or the 2016 Brexit vote in the United Kingdom have been frequently used, particularly by Western commentators, to point out such challenges. Considering cases such as the continued attack on the opposition in Turkey or recent political polarisation in Brazil give a more well-rounded assessment of the context in which essential elements of democracy are being attacked.

While it is difficult to pinpoint said challenges in a global context characterised by profoundly complex problems such as violent conflicts, forced migration, growing economic inequality and climate change, the following 6 issues are important to highlight: undermining of democratic institutions, falling trust in politics, anti-pluralist & authoritarian behaviour, polarisation, assertiveness of authoritarian powers, and the digital transformation of society.

Undermining of democratic institutions

Domestic political actors, in particular executive governments, have a track record of contributing to a weakening of key democratic institutions. This includes authoritarian attacks on the system of checks and balances, infringements on civic and political rights, increased control of civil society,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Dalia Research (2019): Democracy Perception Index (DPI). Available [here](#).

⁵⁵ Pew Research Center (2019): Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy. Available [here](#).

attacks on media, restriction of academic and cultural freedom, and political violence. The indices mentioned above all corroborate the fact that over the course of the last decade the freedom of media, the freedom of civil society, and, to a lesser degree, the rule of law, have been under considerable attack by governments. As a result, the freedom and fairness of many elections are also increasingly compromised - even in those cases where the procedural requirements of elections are fulfilled. Such attacks occur in all manner of regime types.

Falling trust in politics

Democracy is weakened by the decline in citizens' trust in political institutions. Data suggests that the functioning of government, or rather the ineffective functioning of government, contributes most clearly to the distrust.⁵⁶ This includes procedural errors in elections, corruption scandals related to public office, low effectiveness of public services and solving domestic problems at the international level. It also covers the influence of economic interests in the political system more generally, including the revolving door between the public and private sphere, as well as intensive political lobbying and rent-seeking. The weakness of political parties around the world also plays a role - especially when politicians from Kenya to the Philippines change parties for opportunistic reasons. Almost all political actors are affected by this falling trust, such as presidents and prime ministers, legislatures, civil servants, and particularly political parties. Political rhetoric that intentionally discredits such political actors and institutions fuels citizens' frustrations even further.

Anti-pluralist behaviour

The rise of political actors across the world, who are essentially anti-pluralist, has been one of the most referenced challenges to democracy in recent years. It has been rightly pointed out that the term 'populism' has been used so pervasively by media and commentators that it has essentially lost its meaning and its ability to accurately classify the broad political force that it intends to describe.⁵⁷ Essentially, identified behaviour can be boiled down to a rejection of democratic pluralism, characterised by a) a rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game, b) denial of the legitimacy of political opponents, c) toleration or encouragement of violence, and d) readiness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including media.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The Economist Intelligence Unit (2019): Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy.

⁵⁷ Democracy Reporting International (2017): False frames. How we undermine democracy with careless language.

⁵⁸ Levitsky, Steven & Ziblatt, Daniel (2018): How Democracies Die. Crown Publishing, New York, 23-24.

Polarisation

Similarly, polarisation has been on the rise in democracies (and is closely connected to the successes of anti-pluralist actors and their communication strategies). More and more political contexts worldwide show signs of “pernicious polarisation”, whereby social differences increasingly reflect a binary logic and citizens perceive the main conflict lines as a matter of “us” vs. “them”.⁵⁹ Prominent cases are the United States, the UK post-Brexit, Hong Kong and Turkey but also countries like Ukraine or Georgia. Over the last decade, the deliberative qualities of democracies (in direct contrast with a polarised political culture) have been under severe stress; more countries have witnessed declining levels of deliberation than improving ones.⁶⁰ This is despite the fact that there is an increasing interest in deliberative forms of governance, such as citizen assemblies.

Assertiveness of authoritarian powers

In international relations, authoritarian regimes are increasingly pursuing strategies that intend to shield their systems from external influence - be it in the cultural or political sense. One reoccurring example for this has been the passing of legislation that either prohibits or restricts domestic organisations from receiving international donors’ funds. At the same time, authoritarian states are successfully using “sharp power” to distort the global political environment in their favour - including interference in foreign elections, assuming control of international media outlets, or influencing academic discourse through cultural centres embedded in universities abroad. Democracies remain ill equipped to pre-empt such attacks and have in several instances had to accept clear effects on their political institutions - Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election in the United States being a prime example. Indeed, “leading authoritarians are contesting democracy at the level of ideas, principles, and standards, but this is a contest in which only one side seems to be competing.”⁶¹

Similarly, aside from targeting democracies, authoritarian states have also doubled down on support to other non-democratic states, in their neighbourhoods and beyond. In this, authoritarian regimes are not the only states to support dictatorial governments abroad, as democracies follow similar strategies, but the effect on geopolitics is noticeable. Coupled with a global lack of leadership in support of democracy (due principally to the current administration of the United States) this will likely have an ensuing impact on international norms.

⁵⁹ McCoy, Jennifer & Somer, Murat (2018): *Déjà vu? Polarization and Endangered Democracies in the 21st Century*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62 (1), 1-13.

⁶⁰ V-Dem Institute (2019): *Democracy Facing Global Challenges. V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019*, p. 19.

⁶¹ Walker, Christopher (2018): *What is “Sharp Power”?* *Journal of Democracy*, 29 (3), 10.

Digital transformation of society

Digitalisation has had visible impacts on the public sphere and on the way that democracy functions. It has impacted the production, distribution and consumption of information. Contrary to the monopoly of mass communication formal media channels used to have, citizens were now exposed to anyone's unfiltered opinions and empowered to anonymously share their own thoughts to a global audience. While with the advent of social media the positive effects were frequently highlighted - such as increased access to information, lower barriers to participate in public discourse, lack of editorial or state control - there have been numerous examples of how democracy was threatened by these technological advances. These include, *inter alia*, mis- and dis-information, 'harmful' content, political micro-targeting, echo chambers and online bullying.

While some countries have taken (legislative) initiatives to regulate in the face of new digital realities, the overwhelming majority of democracies continue to be prone to these threats, often exploited by so-called malicious actors (both domestic and external). Moreover, several governments willingly exploit the possibilities offered by the digital transformation in order to implement new, effective ways of controlling and influencing citizens. These forms of digital authoritarianism are most adamantly advanced by China, but exported to other governments that seek to use new means of surveillance and censorship.



4.

Policy

Reviewing the past decade of European democracy support through an analysis of democracy support policies requires getting to grips with the policy framework of EUMS and the EU. We analysed the plethora of policy documents at EU level that are relevant for democracy support and looked at the various implications and challenges for the EU in supporting democracy abroad that stem from those policies. This chapter therefore looks at the EU and EUMS' policies on democracy and considers EU democracy support within the wider context of EU foreign policy - or as it is known in EU circles, 'external action'.

4.1 The search for an EU definition of democracy

Despite countless references to democracy in official EU speeches and policy documents, the meaning of democracy is not clarified anywhere, be it in the treaties, EU legislation, Council Conclusions or official Commission Communications. This lack of definition has major implications on the policy framework and programmes for democracy support. Going over some of the key documents which touch upon democracy issues in Europe and democracy support abroad highlights this point.

To begin with, various documents related to the Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership interpret the accession criterion of "institutions guaranteeing democracy, rule of law and human rights". A careful analysis of these Copenhagen-related documents has attempted to uncover the EU's definition of democracy across the different official documents.⁶² The analysis concluded that the

⁶² Marktler, T. The power of the Copenhagen Criteria (2006). p. 9-10. Kochenov, D. Behind the Copenhagen Façade: The meaning and structure of the Copenhagen political criterion of democracy and the rule of law (2004).

following institutional features - found scattered across official communications - were considered as key tenets for democracy, necessary for qualifying for accession:

- democratic multiparty elections;
- national parliaments with a free and active opposition and minority representation;
- a clear separation of powers;
- transparent decision-making processes;
- a functioning executive with independent public services and administration;
- an independent and well-functioning judiciary;
- effective systems to curb corruption.

While this list of preconditions is rather institutional and top-down in its orientation, it does shed light on the institutional infrastructure the EU considers non-negotiable when it comes to its member states. It also shows the scattered manner in which democracy is defined across different policy documents, mirroring the way democracy support is dealt with in various foreign policy documents.

A similar list of key tenets can be found in those foreign policy documents, with more emphasis on the principles underpinning democracy rather than the institutional framework of the Copenhagen-related documents. The EU Agenda for Action on Democracy is the EU external action document that comes closest to defining democracy in relation to democracy support abroad. It includes a mix of important elements of a democratic system, such as representation, pluralism, participation, transparency and accountability. While these are indeed important elements of a functioning democratic system of governance, they do not help set clear boundaries of what makes a state democratic.

Some more detail can be found in other external action policies. The revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 2011, for instance, describes a number of key elements of deep democracy, including free and fair elections, freedom of association, expression and assembly, free press and media, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, pro-active efforts to tackle corruption, democratic control over the armed and security forces, civil society, gender equality and anti-discrimination.⁶³ These different elements are somewhat more tangible than abstract preconditions like accountability and representation, although it is unclear what differentiates deep democracy from 'regular' democracy.

Documents outlining areas of democracy support shed more light on the EU's understanding of democracy. The regulation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) of 2014 is particularly insightful in this regard. This document details that democratisation includes the

⁶³ European Commission, Communication To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions: A New Response To A Changing Neighbourhood (2011). Available [here](#).

rule of law and the promotion and protection of civil and political rights such as freedom of expression online and offline, freedom of assembly and association.⁶⁴ The EIDHR regulation also notes that the EU supports participatory and representative democracy, without providing any definitions thereof.⁶⁵ The EU's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) also details some key features and actors of democracy in its support programmes.⁶⁶ Elections, democratic institutions, a political and civil society, and human rights are considered essential features of democracy. Important actors are grass-roots organisations, international parliamentary associations, advocacy and watch-dog organisations, electoral bodies, political foundations, parliaments and the media.

Another important trend in this regard is the increasing variety in the EU's democracy vocabulary. Over the past decade, the EU's democracy language has expanded, now including references to representative, participatory, pluralistic, deep, as well as democratic governance and good governance.⁶⁷ The EU's adoption of a "diversity-accommodating and complexity-appreciating democracy support language" indicates a move towards a more substantive conception of democracy and the nature of democratic change.⁶⁸ For instance, the usage of the term deep democracy, introduced in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in the revised ENP, could be considered a sign of the EU's understanding that democracy is more than free and fair elections, and hinges on a number of other conditions.⁶⁹

At the same time, this expanded democracy vocabulary adds further confusion to the kind of democracy the EU is supporting. While the adjectives 'representative' and 'participatory' might shed light on the EU's understanding of democracy, other adjectives like 'deep' add ambiguity to the substance of democracy itself. It begs the question: what kind of democracy is the EU strengthening and willing to support in its external action?

The diversity in language at a political level is somewhat meaningless when it does not come with implications in the programming. EU policy documents such as the Country Strategy Papers do not feature the same descriptive language of 'deep' and 'pluralistic' democracy, but include the technical terms associated with 'good governance' instead. As 'governance' is a more apolitical and uncontroversial term than democracy, many donors prefer such language over democracy or use both

⁶⁴ Official Journal of the European Union, Regulation (EU) No 235/2014 Of The European Parliament And Of The Council Of 11 March 2014 establishing a financing instrument for democracy and human rights worldwide (2014). Available [here](#).

⁶⁵ EIDHR regulation (7)

⁶⁶ European Commission, DG DEVCO, Democracy. Available [here](#).

⁶⁷ Börzel, T. & Hackenesch, C. Small carrots, few sticks: EU good governance promotion in sub-Saharan Africa (2013). *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26(3), pp. 536-555.

⁶⁸ Kurki, M. How the EU Can Adopt a New Type of Democracy Support (2012). Available [here](#).

⁶⁹ Vandeputte, N., Luciani, L. European Union Democracy Assistance: An Academic State Of Play (2018). Available [here](#).

interchangeably. Governance can, however, be both autocratic and democratic, as it refers merely to the manner in which power is exercised over a country. It is thus a rather institutional understanding of how a government is running the country, focused on the state's effectiveness.

Interestingly, the EU does have a definition of good governance. This definition is a list of principles that define 'good governance': openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.⁷⁰ The definition thereby places the emphasis on the state, with principles of openness, effectiveness and coherence, and, to a lesser extent, citizens' role in decision-making processes.

Lastly, most references to democracy are found in a single phrase with human rights and the rule of law, as interdependent and mutually reinforcing principles. Unfortunately, in practice this tends to rid democracy of a meaning in its own right and make an understanding of the term even more elusive. As an illustration, the EU 2012 Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy conspicuously calls democracy a "universal aspiration", while human rights are defined as universally applicable legal norms.⁷¹ Likewise, the 2009 EU 'Agenda for Action' on Democracy Support stresses the inextricable linkages between human rights and democracy, listing a number of different human rights, but omitting any reference to a system of governance.⁷² The lack of clarity on the meaning of democracy thus permeates different EU policy documents.

The UN framework on democracy

While acknowledging the obvious challenges of defining democracy, other international bodies have succeeded in agreeing to a common definition. The United Nations (UN) understands democracy as "a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives," as stated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.⁷³ Democratic governance is defined as "the process of creating and sustaining an environment for inclusive and responsive political processes and settlements" and, as referenced in chapter 2, includes a list of essential elements of democracy.⁷⁴

Unlike the well-established international legal frameworks on human rights, there are only a handful of international legal documents that implicitly set out the fundamental principles of democracy. The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) consider the will of the people as the basis of authority and legitimacy of governments. The International Covenant on Civil and

⁷⁰ European Commission, *European Governance - A White Paper* (2001). Available [here](#).

⁷¹ Council of the European Union, *EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy* (2012). Available [here](#).

⁷² Council of the European Union, *EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support* (2009). Available [here](#).

⁷³ United Nations, *Resolution 60/1 adopted by the General Assembly. 2005 World Summit Outcome*. Available [here](#).

⁷⁴ United Nations, *Democracy: Overview*. Available [here](#).

Political Rights (ICCPR) sets out the international legal basis for democratic principles more elaborately, with articles on freedom of expression (19), assembly (21), association (22), as well as participation in public affairs and genuine periodic elections (25). The ICCPR was created in 1966 and is binding to its signatories, who represent 85% of UN member states. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls for equal political participation for women in public life and decision-making.

The term ‘good governance’ is used to refer to a wide range of different normative principles attached to effective governance. The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) defines good governance as “the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law.” The true test of “good” governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights.⁷⁵ The key attributes are transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness (to the needs of the people). This resembles the EU definition of good governance mentioned above.

A much-debated term without an institutional definition

The UN definition laudably highlights a number of such key elements of a democracy. Yet the UN context is also constrained by the scattered international legal basis committing countries to democracy. The absence of the word ‘democracy’ in the Sustainable Development Goals is telling of the contestation of the term and the universality thereof.

At the same time, the prominence of democracy in the EU treaties and communications requires the EU to provide, at minimum, more clarity on its understanding of democracy. A number of different policy documents stress important key features of democratic systems, however, there is no single document that provides a comprehensive and clear definition of democracy. The different lists of preconditions and key elements to democracy are scattered across policy documents and differ depending on their internal or outward focus. This creates conceptual confusion and a lack of clarity of what the EU’s founding value of democracy actually means to its leaders, member states and citizens.

4.2 The EU policy framework

For a founding value, guiding principle and policy objective of the EU, recited in countless official EU documents and speeches, democracy is conspicuously overlooked in the EU’s body of external action policies.

⁷⁵ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. “Good Governance and Human Rights.” Official Website. Available [here](#).

The 2009 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Action⁷⁶ remain the only official EU policy document dedicated solely to the matter of democracy and it only pertains to external action. A number of other EU policies that touch upon democracy support exist, as detailed in the previous chapter. Looking at these policy documents sheds light on the lack of direction of EU democracy support stemming from the absence of a single, clear democracy support policy framework guiding EU action and communication.

This section first analyses the Council Conclusions on Democracy Support and the resulting pilot exercises, and moves on to analyse other EU policy documents that touch upon democracy support.

Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Action

The 2009 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Action is a short document of 8 paragraphs which details and justifies the EU's commitment to democracy, and lists the instruments, key actors, and principles of democracy support. Based on the EU member states' variety of parliamentary traditions, the document identifies the key actors for democracy support and places democracy support within the wider context of EU foreign policy objectives:

“EU democracy support should therefore aim at assisting efforts and strengthening the capacity of Governments, Parliaments and other state institutions, political actors, civil society organisations and other actors. EU efforts aim at contributing to sustainable development, respect for human rights, democratic governance, security, poverty reduction and gender equality.”

The document also acknowledges the “multidimensional, complex and long term nature of democracy building processes,” and links this to the need for enhanced ownership, partnership, coherence, complementarity and coordination.

An Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations is annexed to these Council Conclusions. It lists the main values, norms and central principles of democracy support. It states that human rights, democracy and development are closely linked, stressing the importance of certain human rights for democracy to flourish. The document underlines the importance of ownership, partnership and dialogue, as well as a holistic approach of mainstreaming democratic governance and human rights in all foreign policy sectors. It also makes a few more substantive points on the need to place special focus on elected representatives and political parties and institutions, independent media and civil society, while taking a full electoral cycle approach. The Agenda calls for broad participation of all parts of society in democracy support, with a special focus on non-state

⁷⁶ Council of the EU, Council conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations (2009). Available [here](#).

actors and NGOs as promoters of democracy. The document represents a clear commitment to supporting a number of key actors in their efforts towards democratisation.

The Agenda for Action then details 6 areas of action to improve the coherence and effectiveness of EU democracy support:

1. *A country-specific approach*
2. *Dialogue and partnership*
3. *EU coherence and coordination*
4. *Mainstreaming*
5. *International cooperation*
6. *Visibility*

The Council Conclusions were adopted in an atmosphere of optimism following the apparent success of EU democratisation efforts towards the new EU member states that joined in 2004 and 2007. As support for democratic governance to the former communist states bore fruit, there was no need to radically overhaul the EU's approach to democracy support. Nevertheless, two issues stand out when looking back with the benefit of hindsight: the now dated approach and the failure to outline a clear strategy.

Firstly, in light of today's challenging policy-context, the 2009 Council Conclusions and Agenda for Action seem rather outdated. When considering today's proactive erosion of civil liberties and competition from undemocratic global powers like China and Russia, the 2009 Agenda for Action is clearly a product of a different time. Officials from the EU and EU member states alike did not see the need to change the EU's seemingly successful approach to supporting democracy. A quote from the Conclusions illustrates this relative lack of ambition well:

"There is no need to renegotiate existing norms, values and central principles as to what constitutes the building blocks of democracy, nor to set out new policies. The Council, however, affirms that there is room for improvement in how existing EU policies are implemented, and that they should be applied more consistently and effectively in order to work better together as mutually enhancing parts of a coherent whole."

The Conclusions and Agenda for Action sit uneasily with today's geopolitical context and the global trend of democratic regressions and autocratisation worldwide, including in Europe. The principles are no less relevant but the guidance in order to achieve these principles has been conspicuously absent at the EU level.

Secondly, the guidelines provide very little clarity as to the purpose and strategy of EU democracy support. This is surely due to the difficulty of getting 27 EU member states⁷⁷ to agree but the costs further down the line are consequential. The Conclusions briefly mention some of the actions and instruments of democracy support, but the document lacks a strategy or long-term goals. There is no well-developed narrative that embeds democracy support within the wider foreign policy agenda, other than a brief and unsubstantiated reference to sustainable development, poverty reduction, security and human rights (cited above).

While the Agenda stresses the interlinkage between human rights and democracy on a conceptual level, it does not shed light on what democracy the EU is supporting and hence what democracy support entails. The Agenda for Action instead details a list of procedural guidelines aimed at enhancing the EU's effectiveness. Democracy is used interchangeably with the term governance, and described as a 'universal value' without providing further details. Democracy is defined by respect for human rights and a brief list of key stakeholders in democratic processes. Other than that, the Agenda for Action does little to set a political direction or strategy for democracy support. The 2009 Council Conclusions was the first policy document dedicated solely to democracy, and was therefore of great symbolic importance. It is therefore somewhat unfair to suppose that such a short document would include a strategy, purpose and definition for democracy support - yet, it is the only EU level document that could do so and is therefore hamstrung by the lack of strategic policy follow-up.

Lessons learned from the pilot exercise on democracy

As an operationalisation of the 2009 Council Conclusions and Agenda for Action, the EEAS together with EU Delegations conducted two generations of pilot exercises (see box below).

⁷⁷ Croatia had not yet joined the EU at the time.

Table 1: Two generations of democracy pilot exercises

	First pilot exercise	Second pilot exercise
Year	2011-2013	2014
Number of delegations	9	11
Countries	Benin, Bolivia, Ghana, Lebanon, Maldives, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines, Solomon Islands	Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Tunisia, Morocco, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Fiji, Timor-Leste, Myanmar/Burma, Paraguay
Actions	Democracy Profiles Democracy Action Plans	Democracy Profiles Democracy Action Plans
Outcomes	Lessons learned used for second exercise	Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies Stocktaking of European democracy support Calls for updating the European approach to democracy support

The EU Delegations in the selected countries were tasked with applying the 6 principles for effectiveness and coherence listed in the Agenda for Action, and analysing EU democracy support along these criteria. EU member states and EU Delegations conducted an in-depth analysis of the political situation in the country, identifying entry points for democracy support programmes. These analyses were called Democracy Profiles, which then provided the basis for the Democracy Action Plans, developed jointly with national actors. The Democracy Action Plans provided an overview of all democracy support from both member states and the EU, including all financial and political efforts towards democratisation.

The Political and Security Committee assessed the pilot exercise in February 2016. The pilot exercises resulted in the incorporation of democracy in EU Human Rights Country Strategies, which were

renamed to Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies (HRDCS).⁷⁸ This entails that all EU Delegations annually report on the state of democracy, ongoing and planned democracy support programmes, and the implementation of the country strategies. The democracy analysis in the HRDCS would then inform the EU Delegation and Member States actions on democracy, including:

- political messaging on democratisation and human rights dialogues;
- programming of democracy assistance in all funding instruments, and in particular Joint Programming;
- the development of a fundamental values assessment and political risk section for the Budget Support risk management framework;
- the follow up on the recommendations of election observation missions (EOMs), and briefing of the observers of EU EOMs;
- as a reference document for CSDP missions.

Separate Democracy Profiles for additional countries would only be developed in cases where there is a clear added value. The Democracy Profiles were important in providing the EU and its member states both at headquarters and delegation/embassy level with an in-depth political analysis and understanding of the incentives for democratic change, the weaknesses in democratic systems, the types of support needed and entry points for support. The pilot exercises more generally showed that democracy support has become more closely linked with other EU external actions, including human rights and civil society support. The process also highlighted some of the continuing difficulties in coherence and coordination both within the EU institutions and between the EU and EUMS (see chapter 6 for more details).

Democracy in other EU policies

While democracy is mentioned briefly in many foreign policy documents, as listed in chapter 2, some other key documents are worth further analysis, as they shed light on how democracy support is conceptualised within the wider context of EU external relations.

Human rights policy

A good starting point is the **EU Strategic Framework for human rights and democracy and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2012-2014**.⁷⁹ The Strategic Framework provides the overarching policy framework for the EU's financial and political support to human rights and democracy. The Action Plan translates these general political commitments into action points

⁷⁸ Stocktaking Democracy Support Pilot Exercise" 6372/16 adopted on 22 February 2016 by the Political and Security Committee. Available [here](#).

⁷⁹ Council of the European Union, EU Strategic Framework for Human Rights and Democracy (2012). Available [here](#).

that vary in the level of specificity, and appoints the responsible EU institution. While the EU Strategic Framework remained, the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy was renewed for 2015-2019 with a new list of 113 actions. At the time of writing, the EU is developing a new generation Action Plan for 2020-2024.

The Strategic Framework was notable for the fact that it included a commitment to a so-called Rights Based Approach (RBA) that sought to mainstream human rights in general development cooperation. This RBA was reiterated in subsequent policy documents such as the new European Consensus on Development of 2017. In principle, the Strategic Framework and Action Plans are all important steps in linking up EU human rights and democracy support, and setting clear policy objectives and priorities for action in this field. However, both the Strategic Framework and Action Plan exhibit an overwhelming emphasis on human rights as opposed to democracy. As mentioned above, the EU Strategic Framework considers democracy to be merely a “universal aspiration,” and is very limited in describing how the EU will support democracy. In just a few lines, the Framework mentions support to freedom of expression, opinion, assembly and association, as well as electoral processes and democratic institutions. This contrasts with the detail with which human rights commitments and actions are described.

The 2012-2014 Action Plan similarly lists only a handful of actions on democracy, which are focused on following up on ongoing policy processes, such as the democracy pilot exercise, the follow up to EU election observation mission recommendations, and the development of new Guidelines on Freedom of expression online and offline. As a result, the Strategic Framework and Action Plan of 2012-2014 provide very little guidance to democracy support practitioners, EUMS and EU officials alike on the types of actions the EU wants to support abroad. The overwhelming focus on human rights rather than democracy in these policy documents is illustrative of the EU’s wider approach of focusing on specific human rights rather than emphasising systemic causes of rights infringement.

Major improvements were made in the subsequent Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2015-2019, which featured democracy support more prominently and included some novel action points.⁸⁰ For instance, the inclusion of actions on political party support and parliamentary strengthening paved the way for programmes to support political parties and parliaments. This was an unprecedented expansion of EU democracy support, made possible by the Action Plan. That being said, democracy support is still underrepresented in the 2015-2019 Action Plan compared to human rights actions in the document, and actions to strengthen democracy are scattered throughout the document. Moreover, action points should rather be viewed as broad objectives, as they are not specific nor actionable enough for the EU institutions to be held accountable for (e.g. there are no indicators or targets).

⁸⁰ Council of the European Union, *Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015)*. Available [here](#).

The **2016 Global Strategy** for Foreign and Security Policy provides a sobering insight on the EU's commitment to democracy support. In line with the shift towards stability and security cooperation in the revised European Neighbourhood policy of 2015, the Global Strategy calls for “principled pragmatism” in pursuing EU interests. Rather than focusing on democracy for its inherent value, democracy is considered as instrumental for security. The term democracy is used mostly in the context of protecting European democracies from external threats, rather than supporting democratic change abroad. Instead, the term ‘resilience’ is used to capture both responsive and accountable governance, as well as states’ ability to deliver on economic growth, ensure stability, prevent irregular migration and adapt to the energy transition. Terms like “societal resilience” and “inclusive and accountable governance” are preferred over the more political term democracy. This disconnects democracy support from the wider foreign policy agenda and derides it of any significance as a foreign policy tool, flying in the face of what is specified in Article 21 of the Lisbon Treaty. Likewise, in the section on the EU's global responsibilities, democracy is conspicuously absent.

The most elaborate overviews of European democracy support are captured in the EIDHR Regulation of 2014 and the European Consensus on Development of 2017. The **EIDHR regulation** of 2014 details the EU's support to participatory and representative democracy through supporting fundamental freedoms such as freedom of association, assembly, opinion, expression and press, independent media, the rule of law, democratic reforms of institutions, political pluralism and representation, political participation, an active civil society, and equal participation, as well as credible and transparent electoral processes through the deployment of election observation missions (EOMs).⁸¹ A particularly important added value of the EIDHR is that support can be provided to civil society without government consent, thereby allowing the EU to support civil society actors and activists in repressive environments. At the time of writing, civil society actors are calling to preserve this funding modality in the next external financing instrument, with both member states and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) supporting these calls.

These types of democracy support are mirrored in the **European Consensus on Development**, be it in more vague and abstract language. While the consensus places greater emphasis of effective and responsive governance for service delivery, it also commits to supporting an enabling environment for civil society, an independent justice system, and inclusive participatory decision-making. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are explicitly recognised as promoters of democracy and the inclusion of youth and women's participation in political processes is also emphasised. Accountable political parties, active citizenship and pluralistic media are emphasised in the context of electoral support.

⁸¹ Official Journal of the European Union. Regulation (EU) No 235/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a financing instrument for democracy and human rights worldwide. Available [here](#).

Within the framework for action on people, planet, prosperity and peace, the Consensus on Development frames democracy support within the promotion of values as preconditions for sustainable development and stability. A missed opportunity here is the lack of discussion on the linkages between democracy support and other types of cooperation such as peacebuilding, for instance. The narrative for democracy support remains scattered and unclear throughout the text. Overall, democracy support is placed within the wider aim of contributing to stability, security and resilience, in line with the 2016 Global Strategy. Democracy is thus considered as instrumental, rather than an inherent value worth pursuing.

Lastly, the EU's **Agenda for Change** from 2011 is perhaps the most ambitious EU policy document when it comes to linking democracy support and the EU's wider support to sustainable development. The Agenda for Change places democracy at the heart of external action as a principle of European development cooperation. It calls for the EU to focus its financial support on democracy, human rights and good governance as one of two main priorities, and calls for a greater prominence for innovative financial instruments. It also calls for greater political conditionality and for linking budget support to the governance situation in the partner country. As the Agenda for Change was heavily influenced by the events of the Arab Spring it meant the operational consequences were blunted by subsequent political events as well as the new focus on Agenda 2030 in the update of the Consensus on Development in 2017.

Regional foreign policies

A number of regional policies also stress the importance of democracy. The **Cotonou Agreement** is the EU's framework for cooperation with 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries for 2000-2020.⁸² The Agreement commits the EU to the promotion of democratisation processes and support to institutions for implementing those reforms. It also sets out a list of essential elements of democracy, which stresses the legitimacy and constitutionality of the government, as well as the existence of legislative and regulatory systems, and participatory mechanisms (Article 9.2). The EU tables breaches of these principles in regular political dialogues, and can suspend funding and freeze political relations as a result (Article 96). This gives the EU some leverage to encourage democratic reforms and penalise repressive actions.

The **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP) is the EU's framework for cooperation with its neighbours to the East and South of its borders. The policy was greatly influenced by the accession process leading up to the 2004 enlargement of the EU, and as a result placed some emphasis on support to democratisation. In the 2011 revision of the ENP, "deep and sustainable democracy" became one of the four pillars of the new approach to the neighbourhood. This included a commitment to supporting free and fair elections, freedom of association, expression and assembly and a free press and media,

⁸² Cotonou Agreement, Official Journal of the European Communities (2000). Available [here](#).

the rule of law administered by an independent judiciary and right to a fair trial, fighting against corruption, security and law enforcement sector reform (including the police) and the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces.⁸³ Contrasting the ambition of 2011, the 2015 revision of the ENP shifted the focus right back to stability and security. The principle of a differentiated approach allowed the EU to continue working with un-democratic regimes and to lower their ambitions in the neighbourhood. Over this period, the EU has used an incentive-based approach called “more-for-more” to encourage democratic reforms through the provision of additional funding.

Sector-specific policies of democracy support

The most well-developed and documented sector of EU democracy support is undoubtedly **election observation**. The EU first observed elections in Russia in 1993, after which it observed a number of other elections around the world on an ad hoc basis. A Commission Communication in 2000 systematised the EU approach to election observation.⁸⁴ The 2000 Communication placed election observation firmly within wider support to democratisation, and understood democracy support as a moral imperative and determining factor in sustainable development and lasting peace. Since then, the EU has deployed over 120 election observation missions (EOMs), conducted by independent experts and closely coordinated by the EU. Over time, election observation became a more stand-alone practice led by the EU institutions themselves, with a quarter of the current EIDHR budget of €1.3 billion at its disposal.

A European Court of Auditors report in 2018 called for greater follow up to the recommendations from EOMs, in order to extend their impact on democratisation processes beyond the electoral period. As a result of the report, the Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) adopted Council Conclusions on the EEAS’ progress in following up on the European Court of Auditors’ recommendations.⁸⁵ The Conclusions stress that EOMs do not only aim at improving the electoral framework, but also aim to strengthen the independence and accountability of state institutions, enhance citizens’ participation and support political pluralism. The follow-up on recommendations from EOMs are stated to be a crucial element of the EU’s support to deepening democracy in partner countries, and necessary for enhancing the complementarity between EU electoral support and democracy support.

The EEAS leads on the implementation of the reforms suggested by the European Court of Auditors, and has thus reviewed all new and old recommendations, updating their state of play for EU partner

⁸³ European Commission and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “A new response to a changing Neighbourhood” (2011). Available [here](#).

⁸⁴ Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission on EU Election Assistance and Observation (2000). Available [here](#).

⁸⁵ European Council, Council Conclusions on Special Report No 22/2017 by the European Court of Auditors: “Election Observation Missions - Efforts made to follow up recommendations but better monitoring needed” (2018). Available [here](#).

countries. All EU Delegations of countries where EOMs have been conducted report on the implementation of recommendations in the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies, thereby mapping ongoing democracy support initiatives that deal with issues covered by the recommendations. That being said, there are inherent limitations in this approach. Recommendations can only be made based on international or regional commitments such as the ICCPR or the African Charter on human and peoples' rights. As a result, the recommendations can only cover a limited range of issues and are forced to overlook certain nuances not covered by legal frameworks, such as the internal democracy of political parties.

Calls for a greater focus on the full electoral cycle have been made in multiple quarters for well over a decade and the increased attention to follow-up is a positive step towards a more long-term approach in line with the nature of democratic change. However, this approach still places disproportionate focus on elections, rather than other forms of citizen participation, accountability mechanisms or everyday policy-making. There is thus still some progress to be made in linking electoral support with more long-term democracy support programmes.

The Council adopted two sets of Council Conclusions on civil society's role in development and democratisation, first in 2012 following the Arab Spring, with follow-up conclusions in 2017. The **2012 Conclusions on civil society** were entitled "the roots of democracy and sustainable development" and emphasise CSOs' engagement for strengthening democratic processes, socio-economic development and service delivery. It includes very specific commitments to involving CSOs in the programming cycle and adapting funding and administrative rules to reach the real change-makers on the ground. The Conclusions also call for the development of country roadmaps for EU and EUMS' engagement with civil society with a view of ensuring consistency, synergies and a long-term approach. The commitments of these conclusions were greatly welcomed by civil society, given their specific nature and clarity.

The **2017 Council Conclusions on EU engagement with civil society in external relations** take stock of the actions resulting from the 2012 Conclusions on civil society, and mostly reiterate the commitments and progress made on the 2012 Conclusions. In view of the trend of increasing repression of civil society worldwide, the Council called for stronger support to pro-democracy actors for the protection of democratic space at all levels, amongst others by prioritising SDG 16. Together, both sets of Council Conclusions provide important guidelines for EUMS, the EEAS, the European Commission and EU Delegations in their engagement with and support to civil society.

The EU has published a number of guidelines and Council Conclusions pertaining to media freedom, pluralism and freedom of expression. The 2013 Council Conclusions on media freedom and pluralism in the digital environment mostly stress the need for transparency in media ownership, the importance of media pluralism and freedom for democracy, and the need to support and protect

journalists and media practitioners.⁸⁶ While these Council Conclusions are limited in scope and pertain only to the EU, the EU also has comprehensive **EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline** published in 2014 related to EU external action.⁸⁷ These freedom of expression guidelines provide a detailed overview with the EU approach to freedom of expression, definitions and limitations to freedom of expression, and a description of operational guidelines. These include lists of priority areas of action and how these can and should be operationalised with the political and financial instruments of the EU and EU member states. It also details the legal framework and instruments justifying action in this area.

⁸⁶ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions and of the representatives of the Governments of Member States, meeting within the Council, on media freedom and pluralism in the digital environment (2013). Available [here](#).

⁸⁷ Council of the European Union, EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline (2014). Available [here](#).

Table 2: Overview of EU policy documents linked to democracy

	CORE FOCUS AREAS									
Official EU Documents	Democracy	Human Rights	Rule of Law	Legal	Foreign Policy	Development	Regional foreign policy	Media and Disinformation	Civil Society	Elections
Copenhagen Criteria - Presidency Conclusions (1993)										
Cotonou Agreement (2000)										
Communication on EU Election Assistance and Observation (2000)										
European Neighbourhood Policy (2004)										
Consensus On Development (2006)										
The Treaty of Lisbon (2008)										
The Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in EU External Relations (2009)										
Review of European Neighbourhood Policy - first (2011)										
Agenda For Change (2011)										
The EU Strategic Framework and the first Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2012)										
Communication on 'Europe's Engagement With Civil Society In External Relations' (2012)										
Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline (2014)										
Review of European Neighbourhood Policy - second (2015)										
The Multiannual Indicative Programme of the EIDHR (2014) - <i>a funding document</i>										
Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015)										
EU Global Strategy (2016)										
Council Conclusions on 'EU Engagement With Civil Society In External Relations' (2017)										
New European Consensus on Development (2017)										
Council Conclusions on report on Election Observation Missions (2018)										
Action Plan against Disinformation (2018)										

Democracy support policies of European countries and the UN

Within the broader context of this review, EPD conducted an analysis of 12 European countries' democracy support frameworks which showed that while some countries have separate democracy support policies, even fewer clearly define democracy.⁸⁸ At the same time, several countries consider democracy support as a priority area within their development agenda. Some European countries approach democracy support from a human rights angle, justifying support by the intrinsic value of democracy as a fundamental, universal human right. A majority of European countries under review stress the instrumental value of democracy for achieving development and eradicating poverty, embedding democracy support within the development policy framework. A third rationale for democracy support is the peace and security angle, which frames democracy support through the prism of conflict and national security, thereby linking it more closely with peacebuilding and security policy.

Mirroring the conceptual confusion between democracy and governance in EU documents, many EU member states focus on governance as opposed to democracy support. Policy documents from the countries under review revealed a lack of conceptual clarity between democracy and governance. Definitions of governance sometimes mention all key features of democracy, and at times both terms are used interchangeably. The preference for the more apolitical term 'governance' is clearly not unique to the EU. The largest European donors (France, Germany, the UK) display a visible preference for governance support and more technical, apolitical language. Considering the fact that authoritarian regimes may benefit from governance support, a clearer differentiation between governance support and democracy support is necessary for in-depth policy analysis and evaluations.

Sweden emerges as an example in terms of clarity and consistency in its policy. While other countries have more elaborate and ambitious policy frameworks, Sweden's policy most accurately reflects the funding criteria and gives the most clear and concise definition and rationale of democracy support. The UN Framework on Democracy, created as a guidance note for the Secretary-General by the UN Democracy Working Group in 2009, is another good example.⁸⁹ In addition to elaborating on the international legal framework and definition detailed above, it sets out the principles for effective democracy support (see box below).

⁸⁸ European Partnership for Democracy, *Democracy abroad: Different European approaches to supporting democracy* (2019). Available [here](#).

Twelve European countries are compared in this analysis: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

⁸⁹ United Nations, *Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Democracy* (2009). Available [here](#).

UN Principles for effective democracy support

- *Adopt proactive approaches to threats to democracy* - address both immediate threats to democratic governance and underlying or structural causes for such interruptions, in a proactive and consistent manner;
- *Do no harm* - pre-empt possible negative consequences through careful and well-timed programming;
- *Uphold local ownership* - support legitimate democratic forces and connect these to global knowledge and expertise;
- *Broaden domestic engagement and participation in democracy-building* - take an inclusive approach towards all population groups;
- *Explicitly address the effects of discrimination against women* - empower women and promote women's rights;
- *Develop democracy support strategies with a long-term horizon* - ensure a long-term commitment with realistic objectives and timeframes based on the particular context;
- *Invest in a comprehensive approach to democratization* - focus on building trust across various constituencies, by developing state institutions and nurturing civil society and civic engagement.

Democracy policy vacuum

Reviewing the range of EU policies that touch upon democracy support, there are two points that stand out as problematic for democracy policy itself: the lack of policy framework and the lack of a clear definition.

The lack of a policy framework

A large number of foreign, development, regional and thematic policies deal with democracy support in varying degrees, but there is no single, overarching policy framework for democracy support. The 2009 Council Conclusions remain the main policy document when it comes to democracy support, but it does not connect all the different aspects of democracy support covered in a number of other policies. Different foreign and development policies locate democracy and its rationale differently within the EU's external strategy, and place emphasis on different aspects and approaches to democracy support. Policies on specific sectors of democracy support, such as civil society support, are rather elaborate and well-developed, providing clear guidance to civil servants and practitioners. These sectoral policies nevertheless suffer from a complete disconnect to a wider support framework for democracy.

All these policies result in an incoherent, inconsistent and directionless policy framework. The substance is scattered over a number of different policy documents without an overarching

framework that functions as the glue holding different policies together. Academic studies considering a wider range of documents find the same disorientation on democracy support in external action.⁹⁰ In other words, the content for a strong democracy support policy is there, but it is all over the place.

This has major implications in practice, for programming at the EU, EUMS and EU Delegations level, and for the implementation of programmes by practitioners in partner countries. These individuals are currently left to trawl through a range of documents in order to attempt to understand the EU's vision, strategy, objectives, guiding principles, key tenets and rationale for democracy support. It is like a large beautiful puzzle with many pieces that seem to link up, but no corner-pieces. This makes it impossible to get the full picture and does not provide a stable basis for effective external action.

The lack of a definition

This brings us to the second problem: the lack of a definition of democracy. Academics have argued that the EU's broad conceptualisation of democracy appears to be pluralistic and complexity-accommodating, but thereby allows for multiple contradictory agendas and depoliticises EU action on democracy, by interchangeably adopting a governance and democracy angle.⁹¹ This allows for a more depoliticised and technical approach, overlooking core values and emphasising external conditions such as socio-economic development.

The meaning of democracy and its implications for democracy support are scattered over multiple EU documents dealing with other policy areas. Different key principles and actors are mentioned in different documents, with significant variations across policy areas and geographical scope. With references to *deep democracy* in one document and a very minimalistic institution-centric definition elsewhere, the EU is not only incoherent but at times contradictory in its different definitions of democracy. There is likewise no reason the EU should apply different democratic standards to its own member states than to its partners in the European neighbourhood and ACP countries.

4.3 EU foreign policy: credibility and competition

The lack of a policy framework has contributed to a number of important incoherencies and inconsistencies within the EU's foreign policy more widely, which harms its credibility as a democracy actor. The EU's rhetoric around values and principles does not, for instance, stroke with its close partnerships and continued financial support to authoritarian regimes (see chapter 5 below). This is

⁹⁰ Vandeputte, N., Luciani, L. European Union Democracy Assistance: An Academic State Of Play (2018). Available [here](#).

Timmer, A., Majtenyi, B., Häusler, K. & Salat, O., EU Human Rights, democracy and rule of law: from concepts to practice (2014). *Frame working paper*, 3(2).

⁹¹ Vandeputte, N., Luciani, L. European Union Democracy Assistance: An Academic State Of Play (2018). Available [here](#).

further complicated by a multitude of foreign policy agendas of individual member states and the need for unanimity on external actions in the European Council (for more information, see chapter 6).

The low level of attention accorded to democracy on the EU and EUMS' agendas further leads to inconsistencies in the EU's position on democracy over time and across different countries. Two issues in foreign policy stand out as challenges for the EU. First, the EU's credibility as a supporter of democracy, and second, the growing competition from undemocratic powers within the international system.

The EU's credibility in supporting democracy

The challenges to the EU's credibility in promoting democracy can be further broken down into two problems: the EU's cooperation with undemocratic regimes and the inconsistent commitment of the EU to democracy. These challenges in credibility affect the EU's relations with partner governments, as well as the EU's global position as a value-driven actor. It also impacts the EU's effectiveness in democracy support programmes, as it greatly shapes local actors' perceptions of the EU and EU programmes abroad, and thereby their acceptance and willingness to implement reforms.

EU consistency: the policy level

While the treaties have remained clear on the EU's commitment to democracy, the EU's actions and policies have changed over time following political shifts in priorities. As the policy analysis shows, the 2000s were marked by optimism and ambition on European democracy support following the seemingly successful transitions and accessions of post-Communist states. The pro-democracy protests in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) of 2011 sent a shockwave through European diplomacy. The EU was quick to proclaim a more ambitious, stronger stance on democracy, with a commitment to *deep democracy* in the revised ENP of 2011 and an ambitious communication called the Agenda for Change.

The fragile ambition of 2011 did not last long, however, as 2015 was marked by the EU and EUMS' inability to deal with the surge in migration to Europe, and the concurrent rise of populist politics. A number of terrorist attacks and increasing number of foreign fighters both in Europe and in the MENA region led the EU to further narrow its focus of external action to security and migration management. This is reflected in the 2016 Global Strategy, with its focus on security and resilience rather than rights and values. The ongoing discussions on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2020-2027 in the European Council mirror the desire to direct development funding to migration management and addressing the root causes of migration.

While these developments do not bode well for the EU's consistency and coherence in supporting democracy, efforts within the institutions have been made to improve the impact of democracy support activities. These include the pilot exercise following the 2009 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support and the efforts to follow up on recommendations from EOMs. Likewise, the EU has opened up its approach to also support political parties and enhance its parliamentary strengthening programmes over the past 5 years, illustrating the EU's willingness to strengthen and innovate democracy support.

EU consistency: the country level

At the country level, EU and national political priorities similarly impact the EU and EUMS' commitment to democracy in practice. Democracy is often prioritised when this does not stand in the way of other national or EU interests, such as security, migration and stability. When other short-term interests prevail, the EU and EUMS tend to turn a blind eye to authoritarian repression.

The implementation of political conditionality is particularly poignant in this regard. As detailed in Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, the EU and EUMS can initiate a political dialogue and eventually suspend development funding to African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries in cases of breaches to the essential elements of democracy. This theoretically provides the EU with both a carrot and stick to push for democratic reforms.

The EU has acted upon Article 96 in a number of cases. In some cases, the EU was able to use the leverage of Article 96 to push for democratic reforms through the consultation procedure preceding a potential suspension of funding. In Guinea-Bissau, for instance, the EU opened Article 96 consultations in response to the repeated postponement of elections and finally the coup d'état in 2003. The consultations committed the government of Guinea-Bissau to reforms to re-establish the independent judiciary system and the rule of law, and organise legislative elections. This was incentivised by additional support provided by the international donor community and active diplomatic involvement of neighbouring countries.⁹² In other cases, the Article 96 consultations resulted in a suspension of funding, including in Burundi, Haiti and Fiji.

However, European states have not systematically enforced this clause in cases of serious violations of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in partner countries. For instance, the EU collectively suspended development cooperation to Burundi following the political crisis of 2015, when the President Nkurunziza abolished term limits. However, no such action was taken when Uganda's President Museveni changed the constitution to abolish the two-term limit and age limit in 2017. Preceding the constitutional change, Uganda's security forces used excessive force against political

⁹² Mbangi, L., *Recent Cases of Article 96 Consultations* (2005). Discussion Paper No. 64C, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) p.2. Available [here](#).

opposition protestors on numerous occasions, and the government had cracked down on critical radio stations, incarcerated a number of opposition activists and MPs, and passed restrictive laws on social media usage. The inconsistent enforcement of political conditionality rests on the conflicting hierarchy of priorities for EU member states.

In cases where the EU does enforce political conditionality, its effectiveness hinges on the unity among EUMS. For example, France resumed relations with Burundi in 2019, despite the EU's suspension of relations and ongoing restrictions to political contestation. This is one of many examples where individual EUMS privilege national interests over the EU-coordinated position, thereby harming the EU's credibility. Contrasting these cases are the successes of conditionality when EUMS stand united in their calls for democratic reforms. In Honduras, for instance, the EU enjoys credibility, legitimacy and public support in its democracy support programmes, resulting from their strong and united stance on democratic governance. Even though the suspension of funding following the 2009 coup temporarily decreased the EU's influence in the country, it strengthened the EU and EUMS position in the long run. Chapter 6 further explores the importance of coordination and unity among EUMS for the credibility and effectiveness of EU democracy support.

Another thorny issue is the way sanctions are lifted and relations and financial support are resumed. In the case of Zimbabwe, the EU suspended all direct development cooperation with the government and imposed targeted asset freezes and travel bans on specific individuals in 2002, following a series of human rights abuses. While these sanctions were an important symbolic commitment to democratisation and quite effective in the early years, they have since lost their effectiveness and became instrumentalised by the ZANU-PF regime to fit their anti-imperialist discourse. The sanctions were also a source of disagreement among EU member states, who could not find consensus on when to resume cooperation with the government. Most sanctions were lifted in 2014, without a clear exit strategy, harming the EU's credibility among Zimbabwean citizens.

Cooperation with undemocratic governments

The case of Uganda, mentioned above, is emblematic of the problematic nature of the EU's continued cooperation with undemocratic governments. Located in the Horn of Africa, Uganda is a strategically important ally for the EU and EUMS in managing migration and conflict in the region. Uganda leads the military troops of the African Union peacebuilding Mission for Somalia (AMISOM), which aims to keep in check the growth of terrorist groups in the state. Uganda is also the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, with well over a million refugees from South Sudan (over 800.000 refugees), the DRC, Burundi and Somalia.^{93 94} The EU had suspended budget support in 2013, following a number of

⁹³ Momodu, S., Uganda stands out in refugee hospitality (2018). *Africa Renewal*. Available [here](#).

⁹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. South Sudan Refugee Crisis. Available [here](#).

corruption scandals with EU development funding, but resumed such support in 2018, regardless of the continued crackdown on opposition and breaches in human rights.⁹⁵ MEPs passed a resolution in 2014 calling for funding suspensions under Cotonou Article 96, following new laws criminalising homosexuality.⁹⁶ This process was never initiated. Amid severe irregularities in the 2016 Presidential polls, the EU EOM was somewhat critical, but refused to admit the elections were not free and fair.⁹⁷

The EU's preoccupation with migration management since the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 has led EU development cooperation with countries in the MENA region and Horn of Africa to focus on the 'root causes of migration', offering countries of origin and transit countries financial support aimed at preventing migrants from commencing or continuing their journey to Europe. Some contentious results of this focus on migration are the EU-Turkey deal comprising of a €6 billion budget for humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance to Turkey, at a time of increasing authoritarianism.⁹⁸ Likewise, support to migration management in Libya continues despite flagrant human rights abuses.

Seventeen of the thirty-five countries that the EU prioritises for border externalisation have an authoritarian government.⁹⁹ It is not inconceivable that financial support and surveillance technologies intended to strengthen border management capacities can be misused for repression of dissent. International cooperation with a legitimate partner like the EU also risks serving to legitimise authoritarian governments domestically. In fact, Egypt's authoritarian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has used the EU's willingness to stop migration as a lever to obtain financial aid without political conditions, both at the negotiating table and publicly - thereby entrenching his own power domestically and internationally.¹⁰⁰ European states turn a blind eye when it comes to countries that are strategic allies on issues of stability, security, migration and terrorism - leading directly to accusations of hypocrisy and inconsistency.

Beyond cooperation on migration management, the EU provides financial support to undemocratic regimes through development cooperation. This undoubtedly runs the risk of reinforcing and legitimising the authoritarian regime in place (for more details see chapter 5). At the same time, the EU can play an important role in constructively encouraging democratic openings on an institutional level while also supporting civil society efforts in restrictive political environments. Such constructive engagement with an undemocratic regime may pave the way for top-down institutional reforms. The

⁹⁵ Ampurire, P., EU announces Shs 84Bn Support to Uganda's Justice, Accountability Sectors (2019). *Soft Power News*. Available [here](#).

⁹⁶ European Parliament, Motion for a resolution 2014/2634(RSP) (2014). Available [here](#).

⁹⁷ Cheeseman, N., Lynch, G. & Willis, J., How Election Monitors are Failing 2019. *Foreign Policy*. Available [here](#).

⁹⁸ European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Website. The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Available [here](#).

⁹⁹ Barbière, C., EU increases collaboration with authoritarian regimes to tackle migration (2018). Available [here](#).

¹⁰⁰ Roll, S., Profiteers of Migration? Egypt: Migration Policy and Power Consolidation (2018), SWP Berlin. Available [here](#).

EU's diplomatic presence may also deter repressive actions towards opposition and civil society, as was the case during Armenia's Velvet Revolution in 2018. While these arguments may be valid in some cases, there can be a number of unintended consequences to cooperation and engagement with authoritarian regimes, which need to be factored into EU external policy.

Authoritarian regimes stay in place in part because of their interactions internationally, in particular international financial systems. Similarly, the EU's pursuit of enhanced cooperation and trade agreements with authoritarian countries like China, Azerbaijan and Cuba reinforces these regimes' economic and political clout. The unrestricted sale of European surveillance technologies to authoritarian countries such as Syria, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan quite literally supports these regimes' consolidation of power at the expense of their citizens.¹⁰¹ Continued acceptance of Saudi Arabia's flagrant human rights abuses for geopolitical reasons further reinforces this sense of impunity among authoritarian countries. This is counterproductive for the effectiveness of the EU's democracy support, as well as its long-term global interests. The EU should seriously consider adopting a 'do no harm' principle, which should guide all external action, especially in relation to authoritarian regimes.

Geopolitical context of authoritarian competition

European foreign policy does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by a number of other geopolitical and economic factors. Whereas talk of 'normative power Europe' was still backed up by economic leverage a decade ago, Europe does not enjoy the same global standing today.¹⁰² The rise of populist rhetoric, the democratic erosion in some EU states, and the EU's response to the increase in migration in 2015 have hurt the legitimacy and global standing of the EU as a democracy and values-based global actor. In addition, the EU's economic weight is slowly decreasing, greatly affecting its economic leverage to push for democratic reforms in trade agreements.

Whereas the United States was traditionally a very strong ally of the EU in financial and political support to democracy, the US leadership has become less supportive of democracy support on a rhetorical level. While this does not necessarily dictate decreases in financial support, it nevertheless delegitimises the US' financial cooperation and weakens political support to democratic reforms. This creates an opening for EU leadership on democracy. However, this would require the EU and EUMS to look past short-term interests of migration and security, towards the long-term sustainability of its partnerships and policy priorities.

In the meanwhile, other democratic and authoritarian states are growing in economic and political power. On the one hand, Brazil, India and South Africa are increasingly important economic global

¹⁰¹ See Surveillance Industry Index. Available [here](#).

¹⁰² Manners, I., *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?* (2002).

players and democracies, be it with certain challenges. On the other hand, an increasingly assertive China and Russia pro-actively promote authoritarianism and interfere in democratic processes abroad. This includes, but goes beyond the interference in elections through concerted disinformation campaigns.

While the EU and US were undergoing a severe financial crisis in 2008, China continued its economic rise. Following the accession of Xi Jinping, China has radically uprooted its foreign policy strategy to take a more assertive stance on global fora and in bilateral relations. Today China is undeniably a major global development actor, setting itself aside from traditional donors with the lack of conditionality and rejection of human rights, and the provision of large concessional loans and infrastructure projects.¹⁰³

Along with attractive loans and investment projects, China also promotes an alternative model of development, different from the one promoted by international financial institutions, the US and European donors.¹⁰⁴ The China model allows for a strong and centralised authoritarian state and is therefore an attractive alternative for any leader bent on consolidating power.¹⁰⁵ While China's developmental path will be difficult to replicate for other authoritarian regimes, it has provided other authoritarian regimes with ammunition against calls for democracy as a prerequisite for development. Through governance support and exchange visits, China offers political advice about the model of authoritarian development to undemocratic governments.¹⁰⁶ China also facilitates knowledge transfer on surveillance technology, and promotes the Chinese model and norms through public diplomacy campaigns and Confucius Institutes.¹⁰⁷

In international institutions, China and Russia can use their weight to blunt or block criticism of authoritarian repression. Both countries have at times blocked resolutions against rights abuses in the UN General Assembly, for instance, with the backing of other authoritarian partner countries. Russia has become expert at meddling in other countries' democratic processes, as systematic disinformation campaigns have long been part and parcel of Russia's tactics in its neighbours in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁸

In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have provided ample humanitarian and development assistance for their own strategic geopolitical purposes in the region. Saudi Arabia uses financial

¹⁰³ Cheng, C. The Logic Behind China's Foreign Aid Agency (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁰⁴ Weiss, J. C. A world safe for autocracy? China's rise and the future of global politics (2019). Foreign Affairs, July/August 2019. Available [here](#).

¹⁰⁵ See Ramo, J. C. The Beijing Consensus (2004).

¹⁰⁶ Leininger, J., Democracy Promotion in Africa (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁰⁷ Walker, C., China's international influence on democracy (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁰⁸ Gricius, G., How Russia's disinformation campaigns are succeeding in Europe (2019). Available [here](#).

assistance for ensuring its hegemony in the region and safeguarding itself from democratic influence. In Egypt, for instance, Saudi Arabia provided financial aid to the authoritarian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and pro-Saudi media to quell the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood. Iranian actions in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen mirror Saudi attempts to ensure influence in the region but with significantly less financial largesse. Gulf states continue to vie for influence in Tunisia's democracy through foreign direct investment and political funding.

While global authoritarian competition certainly makes it harder for the EU and EUMS to support democratic forces, it also makes it all the more necessary. Clearly targeted actions with well thought-out strategies are necessary to counter insidious autocracy support programmes and the spread of models of authoritarian development. The EU will thus have to thread carefully, but purposefully in this geopolitical minefield, if it really does care about democracy.



5.

Programming & Funding

5.1 The funding data

Development aid is spent in a variety of different ways and comes in different forms. It is also known by several different names: official development assistance, overseas aid, technical assistance and development cooperation to name a few. The EU tends to use the term ‘development cooperation’, partly as a result of the French roots of the word cooperation but also due to the desire to present aid as a cooperative two-way relationship.

Taken together, the financial support provided by European states to democracy is the highest in the world. OECD data show that when taken together the EU and EUMS fund almost double the amount of the United States to ‘Government and Civil Society’.¹⁰⁹ The problem is that European support is rarely actually calculated as a uniform bloc i.e. with all member states and the EU together. This is likely for good reasons, in that the disparate elements do not always row in the same direction, as seen in Chapter 4 above.

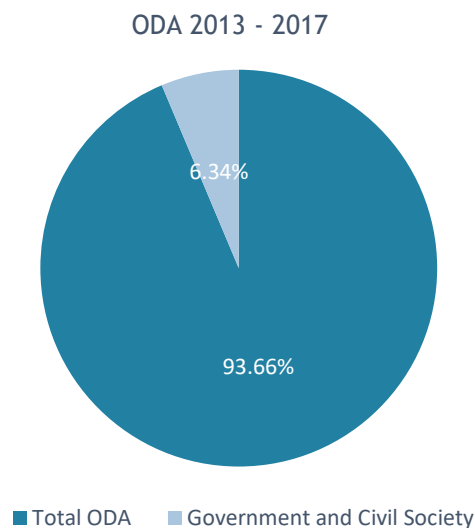
That same OECD data also shows that the amount provided to government and civil society from all OECD member states is minor compared to other priorities (see Figure 2). While funding for these activities is comparatively small, it is still highly significant in monetary terms.¹¹⁰ The same phenomenon is visible when analysing the budget of the European Union but to an even higher degree.

¹⁰⁹ Calculation based on the grouping ‘Government and Civil Society - general’ in OECD statistics. Figures for 2014-2017 for the United States, EU Institutions and DAC-EU Countries.

¹¹⁰ See Barry, J. ‘Democracy Promotion and ODA: A Comparative Analysis’, *Contemporary Politics*, 18 (3), (2012), p. 303-324, for calculations that donors dedicate around \$10bn to democracy annually.

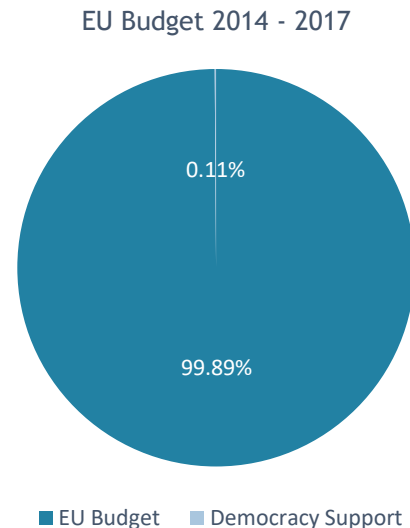
The EU spent only 0.1% of its budget on support to democracy from 2014-2017 - a truly pitiful amount (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Share of government and civil society support out of total ODA



Source: OECD data

Figure 3: Democracy support as share of total EU budget (2014 - 2017)



Source: Calculations based on OECD data and EU data

The first part of this chapter first explores the difficulty of capturing funding data on democracy support before moving to an analysis of funding data for development aid and for democracy support. The second part looks at some of the challenges to the approach to democracy support programming that emerged through our research.

Capturing democracy support data

Funding allocations are an important indicator for specific country and thematic priorities for any donor and should, in principle, reflect policy priorities. In other words, the money should follow the policy. However, the bureaucratic structure of various donors means that this may not be true or that there is a time lag between the two. For example, there is significant discussion in the United States as to why the rhetorical de-prioritisation of democracy by the current administration is not necessarily reflected in democracy support funding allocations (due to the important role of the US Congress).¹¹¹ In Europe, the detailed democracy policy of the Spanish government is not reflected in corresponding funding due to the cuts to overseas development aid following the economic crisis a

¹¹¹ Carothers, T., *Democracy Promotion Under Trump: What Has Been Lost? What Remains?* 2017. Available [here](#).

decade ago. Only \$86m went to government and civil society support (3% of total ODA), down from \$450m in 2008. A similar trend in Polish funding puts into perspective the discrepancy between policy and funding there. Democracy support was part of the very definition of development cooperation in 2011 in policy documents, but has since nearly halved in financial terms, mirroring internal political priorities in Poland.

In addition to this, the choices made by donors are rarely simply technical responses to assessments but have an in-built strategic and political dimension. Likewise, local stakeholders have their own political and economic agendas that influence how they react to external democracy support. This has been referred to as the ‘politics of development’ and has been discussed at length within the development community¹¹² even if it is not as widely acknowledged as it should be, particularly at EU level. It contrasts with the term ‘politics in development’, which refers to the inherently political dimensions of socio-economic development. Again, the development community has been exploring the role of politics in development for several years¹¹³ but it has not been taken up with as much enthusiasm in administrative quarters.

Many other donor priorities are likely to have an impact on democracy because of the intrinsic link between funding for the government and the political system. Indeed, direct financial support to a particular government will have political implications and should therefore be incorporated into any analysis. The typical analysis of democracy support does not necessarily do this, usually for the reasons identified above.

Picture donor X providing funding to the government of country Y in the form of financial flows to the ministry of transport. That funding will provide an (unearned) revenue stream to the ministry that is not subject to the typical accountability mechanism within a state. In many instances the funds provided by various donors can make up a major percentage of the overall budget of a particular state, increasing the share of unearned revenue to overall spending. The choice of assigning the budget allocation to transport priorities is a political decision at the level of country Y and donor X - it will have political consequences. The funding may be used for the public good and improving the technical capacities of the ministry but it could also be used for less obvious political purposes (such as improving the political clout of the transport minister or benefiting a particular region of the country) or for corrupt practices.

Such political consequences are impossible to capture through figures alone and require comprehensive evaluations. Nevertheless, it is vital that any review of democracy support takes such processes into account. As consequence, quantitative studies need to be accompanied by in depth qualitative research.

¹¹² Carothers, T. & De Gramont, D., *Development Aid Confronts Politics. The Almost Revolution*. 2013.

¹¹³ See [Doing Development Differently](#) and [Thinking Working Politically Community](#).

Data limitations

All of the research conducted in the context of this review pointed to the fact that reliable and comparative data for democracy support is extremely thin on the ground.

For quantitative studies, most research is based on OECD data, but this does not include activities aimed at indirectly supporting democracy or undercover, non-disclosed support. For instance, projects that support participatory decision-making processes in different sectors of development are not reported as democracy support. In addition, research is difficult to compare, as all donors have their own understanding of democracy support (different definitions, activities, and instruments) and researchers tend to use donors' understanding of democracy support.

Donors are frequently unable to share precise figures for democracy assistance because of the fact that data is not collected or is unreliable. The research also identified several examples of publicly available figures that were in direct contradiction to other published figures for several European donors. The reasons for this paucity of data are manifold:

- It is hard to define what projects or funding can be characterised as 'support to democracy' due to the lack of a clear definition of democracy for most donors;
- External donor assistance often touches multiple thematic areas, leading to a difficulty of ascertaining what parts of an individual programme or project really support democracy;
- No overarching (OECD DAC) code for democracy funding exists;
- Donors collect data with different interpretations of specific themes;
- Collecting data is time-consuming.

The lack of a definition of democracy permeates the other challenges listed above and to some extent underscores the difficulty of analysing democracy assistance.

Assessing the effectiveness of financing

While democratic development must be driven by national actors, international donors and practitioners have a key role to play if such support is requested (by state bodies or by individuals, such as human rights defenders). And if European states are to continue to support democracy then there must be evidence of a European capacity to do so. Such capacity is hard to measure, even if there is a general consensus among academics that democracy support has a positive influence on democracy in certain circumstances (see section below).

Despite the wealth of macro level literature looking at impact, there are still important challenges to measuring the effectiveness of democracy support. These include the problem of *attribution* -

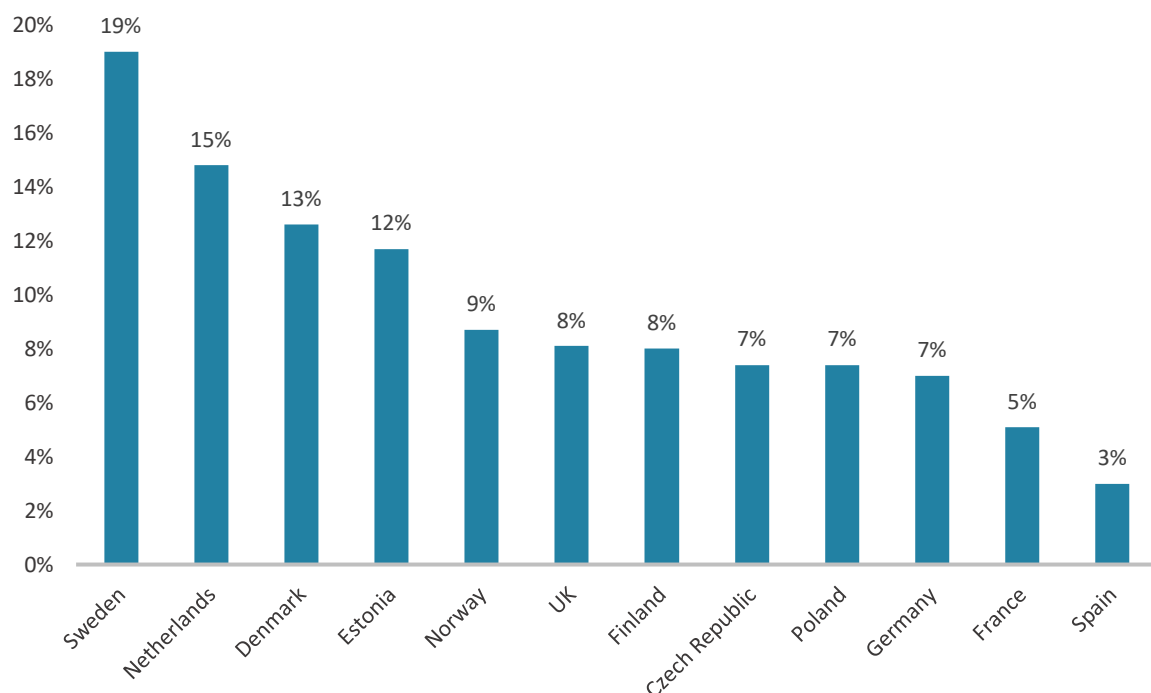
referring to the fact that other activities may have an impact on the same unit of measurement. How can one be sure that it was really X that led to Y and not something else? Another is the impossibility of knowing the *counterfactual* scenario of what would have happened without particular support. Several studies have attempted to mitigate such challenges but they remain vital analytical considerations for this review and for others.

Overall funding for democracy

Despite clear limitations, the funding statistics collected by the OECD are the best available resource for comparative analysis. These figures cover all major donors and allow researchers to analyse specific thematic areas covered by different DAC codes. However, an analysis of a specific government donor that is based solely on OECD data is unlikely to provide clear evidence unless accompanied by an assessment of other official government data and qualitative evaluation.

When it comes to individual EU member states, OECD data for funding to ‘Government and Civil Society’ gives important indications of where priorities lie (NB. the average is 6.3% from 2013-2017 for all OECD donors). First of all, two of Europe’s largest donors, Germany and France, are amongst the weakest supporters of government and civil society as a percentage of their overall ODA. As the two countries make up roughly 36% of the total ODA of the EU and its member states combined, this is significant. That being said, Germany is still the largest provider of ‘Government and Civil Society’ ODA in absolute terms, followed by the UK and Sweden (see Figure 4). Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Estonia all provide more than 10% of their ODA to democracy support activities, with Sweden leading the pack at 19% in 2016. While the priorities of these various European donors change over time there is a clear tendency for Nordic states to provide a higher percentage of ODA to democracy support areas compared to other European donors.

Figure 4: Share of Government and Civil Society support out of total ODA per country (2016)



Source: OECD data

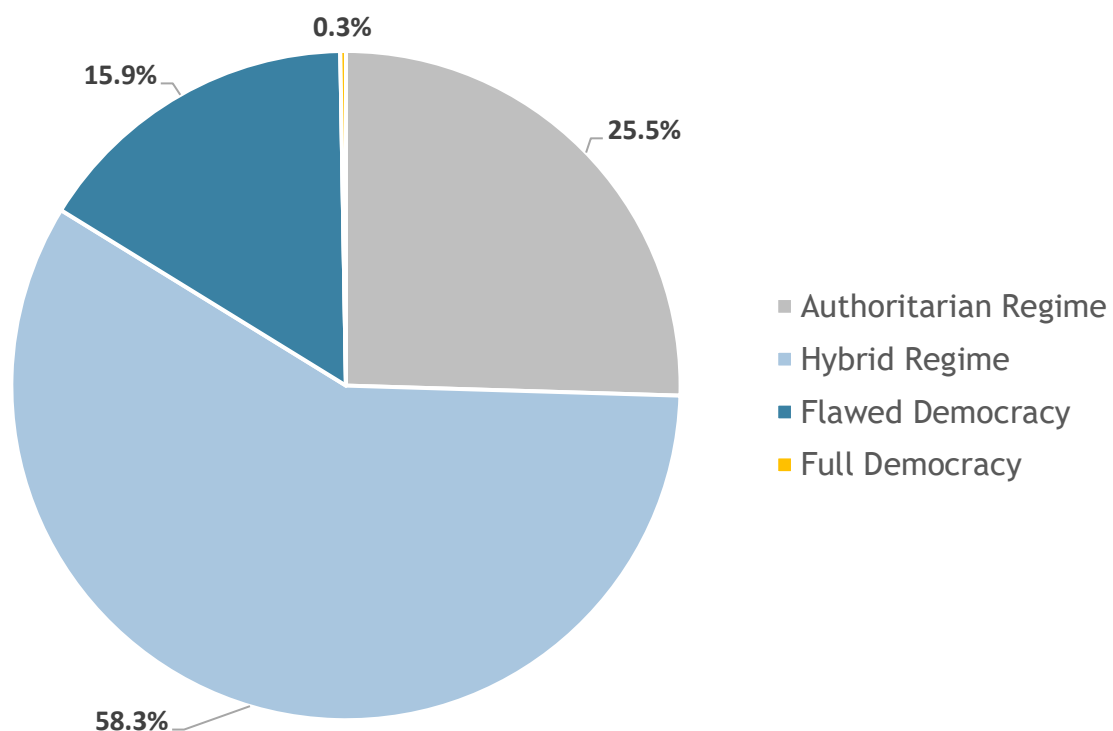
As the figures for the amount of ODA allocated to the sector ‘Government and Civil Society’¹¹⁴ under OECD data provide a barometer of support to democratic governance by specific donors, focusing on the European Union (and excluding member states) allows one to look at the possible reasons for specific funding patterns in a particular donor. Taking this overall funding and linking it to regime type¹¹⁵ (full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes) is a rudimentary but insightful gauge of the link between development funding and democracy. Extending this analysis over time should also point to patterns in funding and the possible links to changes in the state of democracy. The data reveal something significant and troubling - a vast majority of EU funding goes to non-democracies (see figure 5). As argued in chapter 4, EU cooperation and especially financial support to authoritarian regimes comes with a number of risks and potential unintended consequences, which may in turn undermine any EU efforts at democracy support in the country (including in the future).

¹¹⁴ Including all subsectors

¹¹⁵ The Economist Intelligence Unit divides countries into four categories of regime (full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes) through a Democracy Index that is published on an annual basis.¹¹⁵ The annual update to the scores for individual states informs the annual categorisation which provides an indication of the regime type in any given year. Several other organisations also analyse democracy and publish quantifiable data such as Freedom House, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index and the Varieties of Democracy institute. Only Freedom House provides a categorisation in the same manner as the EIU.

Development funding should, of course, focus on eradicating poverty. But coupled with the discourse and rhetoric of European states, the degree of financing heading to non-democracies is highly significant. So, what explains why funding goes predominantly to non-democracies? Certainly, a majority of full democracies are developed economies and are therefore an unlikely destination for development aid. It echoes the link between democracy and development and the high correlation between democratic governance and sound economic performance - in other words, development aid does not go to democratic countries because they are developed. The precise reason for the low level of funding to flawed democracies is harder to decipher but is likely to be due to a variety of reasons linked to the specific priorities of donors. Still, it is nonetheless startling that 84% of EU development aid from 2013-2017 went to countries that are authoritarian or hybrid regimes. The amount of funding to authoritarian regimes is particularly troubling when coupled with evidence from academics of the lack of impact on democracy of funding to authoritarian regimes.¹¹⁶

Figure 5: Total of EU funds distributed per regime type from 2013 to 2017



Source: OECD data and the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index

Looking at the figures in more detail does give a clearer image in several instances. Turkey has received an extremely high amount of funding from the EU (the largest amount in the sample by a

¹¹⁶ Lührmann, A., McMann, K., & van Ham, C. (2017), *Democracy Aid Effectiveness: Variation Across Regime Types*.

significant margin) for many years.¹¹⁷ This major financial assistance has come at the same time as Turkey has autocratised. On top of this, Turkey and the EU signed the high-profile €6 billion deal in 2016 following the wave of migration to Europe.¹¹⁸ In this case concerns over human rights and democracy clearly took a backseat to migration and domestic European politics. As one might expect, EU funding is higher for those countries found in the states surrounding the EU (Tunisia, Morocco, Serbia, Ukraine etc.) and shows a limited but clear connection to population size.

Exploring the link between trends in the political system and aid levels does provide a greater indication of political choices linked to funding. The data shows that in certain cases, the overall funding to a specific country increased at the same time as democratic development occurred. EU funding to Sri Lanka increased from €39 million in 2014 to €117 million in 2015 at the same time as the shift in power, brought about by the surprise victory of the opposition in the 2015 elections. The Foreign Affairs Council of the EU supported this increase, including adding a focal sector for democratic governance and reconciliation.¹¹⁹ In 2015, funding from the EU to Myanmar shot up from €70 million to €120 million and maintained the same level in 2016. This came at a moment of widespread optimism for democratisation in the country in light of the results of the first openly contested elections since 1990 and from the EU side led to increased diplomatic and financial engagement.¹²⁰ Fiji moved from a hybrid regime to a flawed democracy and saw its development assistance from the EU increase from €12.87 million in 2013 to €33.82 million in 2017.

There are also some examples of the EU reducing funding to countries that experience autocratisation. In Burundi, the EU suspended direct financial support to the government in 2016 in response to serious concerns over violence and human rights violations following the breakdown of politics in the country in 2015 due to the abolition of term limits by president Pierre Nkurunziza.¹²¹ The EU suspended financial aid to Honduras in 2009 on the back of the military coup in the country. In Zimbabwe, the EU suspended direct financial support to the government from 2002-2014 due to an erosion of democracy and human rights. In response to serious human rights concerns in Tanzania, the EU froze its annual support to the government in 2018 in order to conduct a ‘comprehensive

¹¹⁷ The EU instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) earmarked €11.5bn for 2001-2013 and continued this for 2014-2020 to the tune of €11.7bn. See [here](#).

¹¹⁸ European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Website. “The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey.” Available [here](#).

¹¹⁹ European Commission, Action Document for “Strengthening Transformation, Reconciliation and Inclusive Democratic Engagement (STRIDE)” (2017). Available [here](#).

¹²⁰ European Commission, Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Elements for an EU strategy vis-à-vis Myanmar/Burma: A Special Partnership for Democracy, Peace and Prosperity (2016). Available [here](#).

¹²¹ Council of the European Union, Burundi: EU closes consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou agreement (2016). Press Release. Available [here](#).

review' of its policies.¹²² Our research also showed correlation between the erosion of democracy in Venezuela and South Africa and lower financial flows from the EU.

The overall numbers do not back-up a systematic or coherent policy of linking development assistance to the level of democracy. It is also hard to prove whether the corresponding shift in funding was directly linked to democracy without an explicit indication from the EU. What the figures do back up is that the funding reflects the lack of a clear policy framework for democracy support. Because democracy is not a development priority of the EU, the funding choices are not clearly linked to democracy.

The specifics of democracy funding

Overseas aid for democracy support can be provided in a number of ways. In general, these are split into different contracting modalities (grants, service contracts, framework contracts) that are awarded in different ways (delegated cooperation, open calls for proposals, tender processes etc.). The modalities chosen are linked to a number of different factors which include the purposes of the intervention. For example, it may be necessary to work with the Parliament of country Y through an organisation with a specific memorandum of understanding with that Parliament, negating the need for a competitive process. In general, the modalities play an important role in the way democracy is supported but are not necessarily determined by the overall priorities of the EU. Nevertheless, in assessments of democracy assistance it is difficult to obtain reliable information in several cases because the information on specific modalities is not publicly available.¹²³

In light of this, we looked at the calls for (project) proposals (published openly by the EU) to identify the different sectors of democracy supported by the EU from 2014-2018. As a consequence, the review did not capture those contracts awarded to organisations through other modalities such as 'delegated cooperation'. The results cover most of the financial instruments (or budget lines) used in EU external action, such as the European Development Fund (EDF), the EIDHR, Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities as part of the Development Cooperation Instrument (CSO-LA), the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The research is therefore not solely focused on those financial instruments that have support for democracy as an objective. The calls for proposals were then divided by thematic sectors ranging from civil society support to elections. It should be noted that a code could not be assigned to certain calls in many instances, in which case the calls were categorised as crosscutting democracy support.

¹²² Council of the European Union., "Declaration by High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU on EU-Tanzania relations" (2018). Press Release. Available [here](#).

¹²³ In addition, the [Financial Transparency System \(FTS\)](#) of the EU is not updated systematically and misses key information.

The data shows that three sectors stand out as being well funded, with the three remaining sectors receiving significantly lower amounts of funding (see table 3). These findings were also reflected in the country case studies as part of this review. Civil society receives a major portion of EU funding for democracy support. From 2014-2018, civil society support was the subject of calls for proposals (or tender) totalling over €757 million. This is likely to be relatively close to the actual figure for EU support to civil society given the fact that CSOs receive most of their funding from open calls for proposals. The financing comes primarily from the CSO-LA but includes significant amounts from the EIDHR, ENI and IPA as well.

Support to local governance also benefits from the thematic focus of the CSO-LA and certain geographic instruments although not nearly to the same extent as civil society support. This includes cooperation between communities in different cities and towns (known as decentralised cooperation). However, it is important to note that support to civil society and to local governance may in many cases not have a specific ‘democracy’ focus and could, for instance, be dedicated to improved service provision. The research did not take such support into account in an assessment of ‘core’ democracy assistance and therefore intentionally underrates the overall support to both sectors (civil society and local governance).

Support for elections (both election observation and electoral assistance) also receives a considerable amount of EU support. Election observation is mostly subject to open calls for tender and is funded by the EIDHR - including a framework contract which totalled €240 million in 2014 - which is reflected in the figures. Election assistance, on the other hand, is funded primarily through geographic funding and has traditionally been awarded through ‘indirect management’ - meaning the figures are not readily available through calls for proposals. The amounts are therefore not captured in the assessment and the figure from calls for proposals grossly understate the amount dedicated to electoral support overall.

Table 3: Calls for Proposals from the European Union 2014-2018 broken down by sector/theme

Sector	EUR
Political Parties	8 300 000
Parliaments	8 400 000
Elections	268 820 000
Civil and Political rights	170 792 488
Civil Society	756 854 417
Local Governance	265 531 250
Free media	51 620 003
Crosscutting democracy support	312 743 396

Source: EPD calculations based on public data of the European Commission

In contrast to this, support for free media (€51.6m), parliaments (€8.4m) and political parties (€8.3m) lags far behind in terms of funding through calls for proposals. The EU does contribute funding to all three areas through indirect management and other forms of direct funding (e.g. under the IcSP) but not more than for other categorised sectors. Based on discussions with EU staff it is highly likely that this is actually less than for other sectors.¹²⁴ These results are not surprising, as they confirm the findings of studies conducted in all three thematic areas in the last decade but are worth exploring in more detail.

Political parties fulfil a unique role in democratic systems by linking the state and society. Studies from V-Dem have even shown that there is a positive correlation between party institutionalisation and GDP growth.¹²⁵ But despite their critical role and responsibility in improving responsive and accountable governance, political leaders and parties received only 0.1% of ODA a decade ago.¹²⁶ So why the low levels of financial support? By their very nature, political parties take specific positions on policy issues, including sensitive economic, security and identity issues. Donors are wary of appearing partisan through support to particular parties or of trying to influence the democratic process in a foreign country. Such concerns are legitimate, but support to parties tends to be dismissed out of hand too often and donor fears are less concerning for two reasons. One, as shown above, there is a strong case to be made that almost all aid has (unintended) political effects. Support to the institutions of the state can be seen by an opposition party as a political act and support to human rights activists can be seen as political by an authoritarian state. Accusations of politically motivated aid are also political.

Secondly, there are ways in which these concerns can be mitigated through providing non-partisan support to the political party system (known as the multi-party approach). Through this, external actors can help political parties build the trust that is needed to develop an effective party system and reduce competition in areas of mutual interest. In many cases, the approach may not be appropriate and support given to parties with a common ideological platform (e.g. liberals to liberals, social democrats to social democrats or conservatives to conservatives) is more fitting.

Support to parliaments can suffer from the same shortcomings even though parliaments are a core institution in any democratic society. Citizens elect their members of parliament to represent them and translate their needs and aspirations in national policy and decision making. Approximately €330m is spent annually by donors on parliamentary strengthening¹²⁷ - a total that is much lower than one would expect. This may be because those in control of development aid are more familiar with

¹²⁴ EU staff were interviewed in the course of this research and took part in numerous workshops carried out by EPD.

¹²⁵ Bernhard, M., Bizzarro, F., Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Hicken, A., Knutsen, C. H., Lindberg, S. I., & Skaaning, S. Party Strength and Economic Growth (2015). Varieties of Democracy Institute, Working Paper. Available [here](#).

¹²⁶ Lekvall, A., Development First, Democracy Later? (2013). International IDEA. Available [here](#).

¹²⁷ House of Commons International Development Committee, Parliamentary Strengthening (2015).

the institutions of public administration, i.e. the executive branch of government. At the level of the donor and in the partner country, it is possible that the legislative branch is seen as a nuisance, undermining effectiveness, rather than an important cog in a representative democracy. Parliament is also the home of legislative politics and in many states the ostentatious symbol of the competition for power over policy. It is often difficult for donors to get to grips with the workings of parliament, even to identify the correct interlocutor to partner with (e.g. the speaker, secretary general). There is no shortage of expertise on parliamentary strengthening or organisations that work to support parliaments worldwide.

Media support OECD statistics show that ODA for media support made up only 0.4% of total ODA for the year 2016. Germany contributed a major portion of this support to the tune of €225m followed by the UK at €57m. That funding can be divvied up into different subsectors which shows that almost half of ODA in the sector goes to media development projects.¹²⁸ Support to the media is also diverse in terms of the actors involved - ranging from state media outlets to small community radios and independent online bloggers. The wide range of different functions and actors can mean that support for the media is mainstreamed through different donor portfolios, leading to a loss of focus on the sector in general. It also means that media support can be hard to characterise with regards to democracy support but there is general agreement among donors that the health of a democracy is heavily dependent on the state of freedom of expression and media pluralism, including the quality of media institutions.

The infamous case of “Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines” during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide made abundantly clear that a weak media environment can be a fertile breeding ground for the hate speech that can easily trigger communal violence. But one does not need to look at such extreme cases to understand the extent to which a lack of proper regulation and enforcement mechanisms can hamper democracy. Support for free and independent media does however benefit from a wide diversity of donors, with many non-institutional funders recognising the media environment as a crucial and more politically palatable area of support.

Considering the importance of parties, parliaments and media to a representative political system, the figures show that donors should seriously consider a major uptick in funding to all three sectors. If donors do not support *representative* democracy, then a case could be made against increasing support to parties and parliaments. There is, however, no donor that expresses such a position or a prevailing commitment to deliberative or direct forms of democracy.

¹²⁸ The share of ODA for media support spent on each subsector in 2012: 45% media development projects, 19% media infrastructure, 23% public diplomacy, 8% communication for development. Available [here](#).

The thorny issue of impact

Democracy support comes in many forms and various quantitative studies at the macro level have sought to ascertain the effectiveness of such support by looking at governance aid, political conditionality, funding choices or core democracy support. Some also look at links between funding for economic development and democracy.

Through time-series regression models that look at different sectors, researchers from V-Dem found that overall democracy aid is effective and not driven by any democracy aid sector in particular.¹²⁹ The study found that assistance is more effective in situations where aid does not pose a threat to the survival of a regime and where democratic deficiencies are prominent i.e. democracy aid was not effective in authoritarian regimes or full democracies, but moderately effective in hybrid regimes and flawed democracies. Indeed, as far back as 2001, research suggested that democracy aid can make a significant contribution in supporting democracy provided that there is genuine political will and a commitment to democratic reform within the country's political elite and society at large.¹³⁰

Others have found that democracy aid has a positive effect in aid-dependent countries that have political systems that are relatively democratic.¹³¹ Several research papers have also concluded, through multi-country quantitative analyses, that aid targeted at strengthening democracy has a positive impact.¹³² Still, there is no conclusive proof when this is coupled with qualitative research papers that attempt to identify causal links to more macro level findings.¹³³

The country cases described in this report have shown that European states have played a positive role in Armenia and Honduras while having an ambivalent impact in Zimbabwe and Tunisia. The countries covered are from different regions (with different European interests) and have thus benefitted from different types of European support. All four have different types of regimes and fall in the 'grey zone' in-between full democracies and authoritarian regimes. All four were chosen with

¹²⁹ Lührmann, A., McMann, K., & van Ham, C., *Democracy Aid Effectiveness: Variation Across Regime Types* (2017).

¹³⁰ Santiso, C., *International co-operation for democracy and good governance: Moving toward a second generation?* (2001). *European Journal of Development Research*, 13(1), 154-180.

¹³¹ Kalyvitis, S., Vlachaki, I. (2008). *Democratic aid and the democratization of recipients*.

¹³² For some examples see Dietrich, S., Wright, J. (2015) *Foreign Aid and Judicial Independence*; + Jones, S., Tarp, F. (2016) *Does foreign aid harm political institutions?* *Journal of Development Economics*. Volume 118, p. 266-281; Finkel, S.E., A. Pérez-Liñán, and M.A. Seligson (2007) 'The effects of U.S. foreign assistance on democracy building, 1990-2003', *World Politics*, 59, p. 404-439; Scott, J. M. & Steele, C. A. (2011) *Sponsoring Democracy: The United States and democracy aid to the developing world, 1988-2001*. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55(1), p. 47-69.; Kalyvitis, S., Vlachaki, I. (2008).; Dietrich, S., Wright, J. (2012) *Foreign Aid and Democratic Development in Africa*. WIDER Working Paper 2012/20. Helsinki: UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research.

¹³³ For some examples see Bader, J. (2010) *Would autocracies promote autocracy? A political economy perspective on regime-type export in regional neighbourhoods*; Spoerri, M. (2010) *Crossing the line: partisan party assistance in post-Milošević Serbia*; Zeeuw, J. (2010) *Assessing Democracy Assistance: Kenya*.

the recognition that European support is likely to have had the opportunity to influence democracy to a greater extent than in closed regimes or full democracies.

Despite the influence of the Jasmine Revolution on Tunisian politics, democracy support has been much lower down the list of priorities of European states in Tunisia in recent years. This is not surprising given the historical importance of security (including counter-terrorism) and migration controls for the EU and EUMS over the last twenty years. In Zimbabwe, the EU clearly prioritised democratic values in its engagement with the government but was not able to use its leverage to bring about positive political change. It would also be fair to say that European actors did not take a bold approach to this objective given political violence in the early years of this century. Sanctions were not found to have had any clear impact on democratisation.

The credibility of European states in Honduras has allowed the EU to play an important, if limited, role in supporting democracy in the country, particularly through electoral observation and civil society support. This support has been consistent, including the suspension of funds following the 2009 coup d'état. European states also showed consistency in their support to reforms to the political and economic system in Armenia, but were unable to leverage this into a more concerted political approach until, perhaps, today.

All of these studies point to gains in certain areas and failures in others. In general, one can say that support to civil society has been positive while support to democratic institutions has been far more volatile. It can easily be argued that European support to the justice sectors in Armenia, Honduras and Tunisia has not been successful. Moreover, none of the case studies identified any clear link between support for good governance (through budget support, technical support etc.) and an improvement in democracy over a 10-year period. The idea that support for the effectiveness of governance led to improved democratic governance (through development outcomes or otherwise) was not discernible. Further, all case studies identify an insufficient focus on media, political parties and parliamentarians as agents of change and partners in democracy support.

When political scientists look at the effect of general development aid on democracy there is less of a general consensus. Some studies find that aid has no positive effect on democracy.¹³⁴ Even worse, some find that development aid can increase the survival prospects of autocratic regimes.¹³⁵ Several

¹³⁴ See Bräutigam, D. (1992) 'Governance, economy, and foreign aid', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 27(3), p. 3-25; Knack, S. (2001) 'Aid dependence and the quality of governance: A cross-country empirical analysis', *Southern Economic Journal*, 68(2), p. 310-329; Svensson, J. (2000) 'Foreign aid and rent-seeking', *Journal of International Economics*, 51(2), p. 437-461.

¹³⁵ See Bueno de Mesquita, B., Smith, A. (2010) *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 54, No. 4, p. 936-950; Morrison, K. (2009) Oil, Nontax Revenue, and the Redistributive Foundations of Regime Stability. *International Organization*, 63, p. 107-138; Kono, D., Montinola, G. (2009) Does Foreign Aid Support Autocrats, Democrats, or Both? *The Journal of Politics*, 71 (02), p. 704-718.

studies argue that aid transfers can spur competition among different interest groups by increasing the size of available resources and inducing corruption, rent seeking behaviour and other harmful activities that undermine democracy.¹³⁶ Other studies looking at development aid find that in certain circumstances general aid may have a positive impact on democratisation, particularly in states with a higher level of aid dependency.¹³⁷

The objective of our research was to drill down on certain country cases to complement the more general research in order to identify challenges and patterns in European democracy support. The numerous workshops and interviews also helped in zoning in on some of the key challenges that activists, practitioners and donors have to face in programming. The conclusions from this are summarised below and reflect something of a growing consensus among the democracy support community.

5.2 The approach: the state and how change happens

The evidence from the last decade points to two major overarching challenges for European democracy assistance. First, the overwhelming focus on the state, when the state is not the sole locus of change and, second, an incorrect and oversimplified ‘logic of intervention’ of European democracy support. Both of these areas contain different, no-less important, challenges that emerged through the research. The report has grouped the issues into two overarching areas for the ease of analysis but there are several challenges within both that are vital observations for our assessment.

For European democracy support to take a step forward there needs to be a concerted effort to take these challenges seriously and to adapt the methods with which European donors support democracy around the world. If not, it is highly likely that democracy support will become relegated to an afterthought in development and foreign policy.

The focus on the state

There is overwhelming academic consensus that the European Union takes a predominantly technocratic approach to its overseas development aid.¹³⁸ History plays an important part, as EU

¹³⁶ See Grossman, H.I. (1992) ‘Foreign aid and insurrection’, *Defense Economics*, 3, p. 275-288; Svensson, J. (2000). ‘Foreign aid and rent-seeking’, *Journal of International Economics*, 51(2), p. 437-461; Alesina, A., and B. Weder. (2002) ‘Do corrupt governments receive less foreign aid?’, *American Economic Review*, 92, p. 1126-1137.

¹³⁷ For some examples see Kersting, E., Kilby, C., (2014) “Aid and democracy redux,” *European Economic Review*, Elsevier, vol. 67(C), p. 125-143.; Goldsmith, A. (2001) *Foreign Aid and Statehood in Africa*. International Organization, 55 (1), p. 123-148; Dunning, T. (2004) *Conditioning the Effects of Aid: Cold War politics, donor credibility, and democracy in Africa*. International Organization, 58 (2), p. 409-423; Menard, A. (2012) *Why Foreign Aid Does (Not) Improve Democracy?*. Documents de Travail n° 2012 -19. Strasbourg: Bureau d’économie théorique et appliquée (BETA).

¹³⁸ Vandeputte, N., Luciani, L. *European Union Democracy Assistance: An Academic State Of Play* (2018). Available [here](#).

development policy was moulded through the lens of the methods that created the Union itself. Technical expertise in various public and private spheres has been a European calling card for decades, while the oversight of the EU by EUMS means that stringent rules and procedures are part and parcel of the manner in which assistance is provided.

As a major portion of European funding to democratic governance goes to the state, this weighs heavily in any assessment of democracy support. The state is the natural bilateral partner for any donor. It is also the logical partner. Even within ODA for ‘Government and Civil Society’, aid to government structures exceeds support to human rights organisations and democratic institutions.¹³⁹ Around two thirds of good governance funding from the EU is directed at state institutions.¹⁴⁰ Yet, many donors, academics, activists and practitioners have questioned this partnership in particular circumstances. Eyebrows are raised when the EU has given budget support to the governments of Egypt, Ethiopia or other governments with poor human rights records.

Aid flows to a government can be made in the form of direct support to the government budget (budget support) or through specific project funding to the state. Budget support is the major mode with which European donors provide aid to a partner state. This can be provided through general budget support (to the overall budget of the state) or sector specific budget support (dedicated to a particular sector or government ministry). It represents almost one fifth of EU financing to countries outside the Union and accounts for about 40% of the EU’s national cooperation programmes with partner countries in 2017.¹⁴¹ According to the European Court of Auditors, in 2017, budget support represented 18% of total EU aid to non-EU countries from the EU budget and the European Development Fund. By the end of the same year, the EU had concluded 270 budget support contracts for an estimated €12.7 billion.”¹⁴² A majority of EU budget support contracts are sector-specific, although in sub-Saharan Africa (the region with the largest share of budget support) a large amount of funding is disbursed through general budget support.¹⁴³ There are several excellent reasons for supporting governments through budget support, including national ownership, an alignment with domestic priorities and donor harmonisation that chime with the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

¹³⁹ European Partnership for Democracy, *Democracy abroad: Different European approaches to supporting democracy* (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁴⁰ Zamfir, I., *Democracy support in EU external policy* (2018). EP Research Service Briefing, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ European Commission, *Budget Support. Trends & Results 2018* (2019). 7. Available [here](#).

¹⁴² European Court of Auditors, *EU Auditors examine data behind budget support to partner countries* (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁴³ European Court of Auditors, *Performance data for EU budget support in the area of external actions* (2019). Available [here](#).

However, when it comes to democratic governance, there is little evidence that budget support has any positive effect. This is true both for the choices made in funding by the EU (the politics of development) and the way aid is implemented (the politics *in* development).

How state aid is disbursed

There is no clear application of democratic criteria in the award of budget support by the EU despite the presence of guidelines (see for example, the EU's Budget Support Guidelines and Risk Management Framework) that call for democracy to be a key factor in such decision-making. One of the problems with these guidelines is that they do not use an independent measure of democratic development on which to base decisions (such as that produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit or V-Dem). The lack of an independent measure hinders the ability of a donor to be held accountable for funding decisions and creates a risk of disagreements based on interpretation. For a concept such as democracy that does not have a common legal definition, this becomes all the more vital. A second issue is that decisions on funding are based on trends since a prior assessment, meaning that those states that are clearly undemocratic are not penalised as such and the status quo is therefore maintained (i.e. there is no new change in democracy so status quo of existing support is maintained).

There are instances of European donors suspending funds to partner governments as a result of serious concerns regarding democracy.¹⁴⁴ Examples as diverse as Burundi, Honduras and Tanzania demonstrate that when there is no other prevailing strategic interest (related to natural resources or security concerns), European governments do react to the abuse of democracy.

However, many of the countries receiving different forms of budget support (e.g. Vietnam, Algeria, Rwanda) cannot be described as democratic in any form. The decisions on who gets budget support and who does not cannot be seen as linked to democracy in any coherent manner. In practice decisions are made based on a host of different factors, including European political considerations, the extent of media coverage of scandals in recipient countries and a desire to have a seat at the table of high-level political dialogues. As a consequence, the role of budget support as a carrot used by the EU to incentivise democratic reform is negligent. But what about the way this support is implemented?

¹⁴⁴ Hayman, R., Budget Support and Democracy: a twist in the conditionality tale (2011). *Third World Quarterly*, 32 (4,), 673-688.

The impact of budget support

The EU is by far the largest budget support provider worldwide, representing 70% of the overall global total in 2017.¹⁴⁵ Several European donors have downsized their budget support portfolios in recent years, given the higher potential for political fallout from corruption scandals.¹⁴⁶ But good arguments exist that budget support financing represents funds that are well spent: Budget support has been able to deliver in certain result areas - be it increased (pro-poor) public spending, improved performance in public finance management, or increased access to public services.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, budget support remains controversial when it comes to human rights and democratic governance. The EU has proclaimed that budget support aims to “build and consolidate democracies”¹⁴⁸, yet there is limited evidence that this has materialised on a wider scale. While the aid modality can improve transparency of national budgeting processes and increase capacity of supreme audit institutions, the observed effects of budget support on parliaments and civil society are “weak and inconsistent”.¹⁴⁹

As seen above, the case studies commissioned for this report did not find a link between direct state aid and democratic development. Other studies have noted similar trends. In Mozambique, researchers found that:

*“the shift away from project aid towards providing aid in the form of budget support brought a greater coherence to the whole aid agenda and strengthened the capacity of state institutions and thus improved governance in general. This is now the most important source of aid money for Mozambique accounting for nearly half of the state budget. However, paradoxically this improvement in governance has come at the price of a weakening of the political processes and institutions that are required for effective democracy.”*¹⁵⁰

The high-profile corruption scandal in the country in 2019 has highlighted the risks of such an approach in stark detail and led to international donors suspending budget support. It is also

¹⁴⁵ European Commission, Budget Support. Trends & Results 2018 (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁴⁶ Koch, S., Leiderer, S., Faust, J. & Molenaers, N., The rise and demise of European budget support: political economy of collective European Union donor action (2017). Development Policy Review, 35 (4): 455-473.

¹⁴⁷ German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), What we know about the effectiveness of budget support. Evaluation Synthesis (2017).

¹⁴⁸ European Commission, Budget Support Guidelines (2017). p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), What we know about the effectiveness of budget support. Evaluation Synthesis (2017). p. 56.

¹⁵⁰ Manning, C.L. & Malbrough, M. The Changing Dynamics of Foreign Aid and Democracy in Mozambique (2012). WIDER Working Paper 2012/018. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

important to recognise that budget support has important political consequences, particularly in states with a strong link between a dominant political party and the state (such as in Zimbabwe). In Malawi, the incumbent government doubled state spending on a hugely popular fertiliser subsidy programme in the run-up to the 2009 elections. Donor funding for the programme increased fivefold in the same time period meaning that international donors were effectively funding part of the election campaign of the (successful) incumbent.¹⁵¹

European donors have means with which to create additional incentives for reform through budget support such as using a greater portion of variable payments that are dispersed based on the level of performance (as the EU does in the EU neighbourhood), rather than fixed payments that do not provide as strong an incentive to reform. However, these are rarely linked to democratic progress.

A central issue is that a focus on the executive can be problematic at a time where there is increasing evidence of the executive branch of government undermining the separation of powers, independent media and civil society in different states around the world. It is all the more glaring in states which are also guilty of serious human rights abuses. Such cooperation risks reinforcing authoritarian leadership but it also severely undermines the credibility of the EU and European governments as a consequence.

Change beyond the state

In general, there is significant scholarly agreement that the EU puts development before democracy - the manner in which the EU supports democracy suggests that it views economic development as a condition for a healthy democracy.¹⁵² This is the same for many European donors and reflects the primacy of development priorities over democratic governance. The charitable interpretation of the way in which European donors view political change is through the prism of modernisation theory, i.e. as a country becomes more developed, it is likely to become more democratic. While the EU values democracy, the means in which democracy is achieved is guided by a developmentalist and functional approach favouring stability and socio-economic development over confrontational policies. A more critical interpretation would stress the fact that in situations where there is tension between democracy, rule of law and human rights on the one hand and development on the other - democracy, rule of law and human rights lose out. Regardless of the way this tension plays out, it

¹⁵¹ Resnick, D. *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The Limits of Foreign Aid on Malawi's Democratic Consolidation* (2012). WIDER Working Paper 2012/028. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

¹⁵² Vandeputte, N., Luciani, L. *European Union Democracy Assistance: An Academic State Of Play* (2018). Available [here](#).

Wetzel, A. & Orbie, J.(eds.) *The Substance of EU democracy promotion* (2011). *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 16 (special issue).

Wetzel, A. & Orbie, J. *Substance of EU democracy promotion: concepts and cases* (2015). Palgrave Macmillan.

points to an important observation with regards to the way in which European donors view *and* prioritise political change.

Much ink has been dedicated to human progress and development over human history. Various theories - from Marxism to Darwinism - have expounded on how technology, ideas, conflict and competition have impacted human society. Variations of such theories rise and fall in popularity with time, leading, for example, to a greater international focus on free markets in the 1980s and effective public institutions in the early 1990s (as described in chapter 2). Yet it remains true that European donors and most governments around the world view economic change as a higher order priority. Although this has not always been true (e.g. Cold War), there are many important reasons for this to be so, including the widespread agreement of economic growth as positive (contrary to democratic development) and the risk of negative repercussions from political interference. But how do democracies emerge? This question has been the subject of comparative academic analysis for decades. It has been the subject of multiple notable papers that have sought to analyse the links between democracy, development, conflict and culture.¹⁵³ The breadth of scholarly inquiry is impressive but there is no agreement on the precise nature of change other than the fact that it is highly complex. This points to the fact that a focus on economic and systematic factors of change fails to take full advantage of the potential of different actors within the political system to play a key role in change. Evidence suggests that this is unwise.

Several high-profile comparative studies have been published in the last decade that delve into the nature of political change, including how to build strong political institutions. In their book 'Why Nations Fail' Acemoglu and Robinson argue for a framework built on the primacy of politics in development suggesting that political institutions are forged and develop as a result of conflict and in turn shape economic institutions and then innovation and investment.¹⁵⁴ This is, in effect, the opposite vision to modernisation theory. Francis Fukuyama's two books on the 'Origins of Political Order' argue that a prosperous, inclusive and peaceful society requires three components - a strong state, the rule of law and accountable government. He demonstrates that political development is fundamentally a slow process and that political institutions are the key element to development.¹⁵⁵ Duncan Green's book 'How Change Happens' looks at the importance of power and agency, bringing politics to the forefront of how institutions develop.¹⁵⁶ His 'power and systems approach' is directed at activists looking to bring about change - underlining the increasingly important role that those outside the state seem to be playing in political change.

¹⁵³ Ross, Michael L., Does Oil Hinder Democracy? (2001) *World Politics*, 53 (3), p. 325-361; Przeworski, A., Limongi, F. *Modernization: Theories and Facts* (1997), *World Politics* 49 (2), p. 155-183; Diamond, J. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997); Huntington, S. P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

¹⁵⁴ Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. A., *Why Nations Fail* (2012).

¹⁵⁵ Fukuyama, F., *Origins of Political Order* (2011).

¹⁵⁶ Green, D. *How Change Happens* (2016).

Mass protests in both democracies and authoritarian regimes have become key political events in recent years, bringing new political dynamics associated with mass mobilisation. Over the last 12 months alone, people around the world have protested on the basis on a wide variety of grievances. Economic motives led to protests over worsening living conditions in Iraq, demands of economic justice from the *Gilets Jaunes* movement in France, and in Russia, protests related to the introduction of a new law delaying the retirement age. In Taiwan, Kashmir and West Papua, protests that have turned violent and deadly at times, have been organised with the goal of achieving (greater) self-determination. Demands for specific rights have led to protests by minorities in India, the Rohingya population in Myanmar and Ethiopian Jews in Israel, among many others. Attacks on freedom of press led to marches in Serbia, Croatia and Bangladesh.

The manipulation of elections and the fraudulent results that ensue, tend to be another reason that will lead people to protest. This has been visible in Malawi with post-election disputes, in Russia when opposition members were stopped from running for the City Council elections, and in Kazakhstan due to a managed transition to a new government. Demands for changes in leadership or regimes have led to long-running protests in Algeria, Honduras, Sudan, Venezuela and Hong Kong many of which have led to significant violence and high profile international coverage.

Revelations of corruption have had a major impact on political change in recent years. Carothers and Carothers have noted that 21 countries experienced corruption-driven leadership change in a five-year period between June 2013 and June 2018.¹⁵⁷ The trend has continued since then. Corruption played a significant part in the defeat of incumbent leaders or parties in elections in Argentina, Benin, Costa Rica, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka.¹⁵⁸ Exposure of corruption by investigative journalists and mass media, e.g. Panama Papers or LuxLeaks, has become a vital mechanism for political change in conjunction with moved by the judicial branch to address cases of embezzlement.

Other elements of the democratic system also have key roles to play. Over one hundred governments, including many in the EU, have in recent years imposed some kind of restrictions on civil society in principle due to the important role played by CSOs in political change.¹⁵⁹ These attacks range from laws against CSOs and their funding to violent attacks on CSO staff to more subtle forms of intimidation. Research on this phenomenon of ‘shrinking civil society space’ has tended to focus on how governments go about shrinking space while also looking at the response of activists and the

¹⁵⁷ Carothers, T. & Carothers, C. 2018. *The one thing modern voters hate most*. Foreign Policy. Available [here](#).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Godfrey, K., Youngs, R., *Toward a New EU Democracy Strategy*. 2019. Available [here](#).

international community. Little research has, however, looked at examples of successful challenges to government attempts to close space, with notable exceptions addressing the role of parliament.¹⁶⁰

While the EU and European governments provide a substantial amount of funding to other elements of the political system besides the state, EU support to actors that could hold executive governments accountable is comparatively weak, conceptually as well as financially, particularly in bilateral funding streams such as the European Development Fund.¹⁶¹ The failure to address issues of accountability can lead to the consolidation of authoritarian rule and represents a missed opportunity for enabling citizens to hold their government accountable.

In our interconnected 21st century world, political change happens through myriad ways, yet the EU often misses opportunities to influence many avenues of change through the outdated and oversized focus on the state as the locus of change. If European donors are serious about supporting democracy they need to seriously re-think the way development aid is channelled to partners, particularly autocratic regimes.

The intervention logic of democracy support

The ‘technical’ approach described above spills over into democracy assistance and causes problems for democracy support programming. If development is recognised by numerous scholars, activists and citizens (and donors) as a political process¹⁶² but practiced as if it is technical then it is not hard to imagine the challenges for those supporting democracy - a profoundly political issue.

Following the end of Cold War, democracy began the turbo phase of the third wave of democratisation, spreading to a number of countries with a history of autocratic rule. This period could be described as the height of the idea of democratic transition, complete with a teleological understanding of democratic development. Subsequent events have shown that it is not sensible to think that states follow a linear path towards a consolidated democracy and that indeed, a consolidated democracy is not a necessary end point to political development. Witness the challenges to representative democracy in Europe today. Still, it can easily be argued that the premise underlining the policies of a number of European donors clings to the idea of linear democratic transition.

¹⁶⁰ Parliamentary approval of laws that seek to restrict or repress civil society is not automatic, as could be witnessed in Kyrgyzstan, where in 2016, the national Parliament surprised many observers by rejecting the proposed ‘Foreign Agents Law’. See Dodsworth, S. & Cheeseman, N. 2018. Defending democracy: when do parliaments protect political space? Available [here](#).

¹⁶¹ European Partnership for Democracy, Who owns the EDF? Ensuring domestic accountability in ACP-EU development cooperation (2017). Available [here](#).

¹⁶² See Adam, C. S., & Dercon, S. 2009. The Political Economy of Development: An Assessment; Rocha Menocal, A., Getting real about politics. From thinking politically to working differently. 2014. Available [here](#).

Democracy would be better described as a long process that develops in fits and starts, reflecting the complexity of politics and human society. In order to recognise this complexity, a greater amount of space needs to be dedicated to human agency and power politics in efforts to bring about change. In a seminal study, the 2017 World Development Report from the World Bank on Governance and the Law concluded that:

“policy making and policy implementation do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they take place in complex political and social settings, in which individuals and groups with unequal power interact within changing rules as they pursue conflicting interests.”¹⁶³

The report underlines the importance of shifting incentives, reshaping preferences and beliefs and enhancing the contestation of decision-making processes as key for change.¹⁶⁴ Insights along these lines have led many development practitioners to adopt a more pragmatic approach to policymaking and implementation. These include groups such as *working with the grain*, *doing development differently*, *problem-driven iterative adaptation* and *thinking and working politically* that have mushroomed in recent years.¹⁶⁵

Research conducted in the context of this report found a series of key practical problems for democracy supporters in the way programming functions that point to the need to review the methods used by European donors. The challenge of uncertainty, systems thinking, learning by doing (including through failure) and giving priority to local knowledge does not tend to sit well with the classic development approach of control, rigid logframes, risk minimisation, and predictable, tangible results.

Short-time frame of success

As democratisation is a complex, lengthy and ultimately uneven process, the results of a particular intervention may take years to actually come to light. Should those results have been particularly successful then it can also be difficult to demonstrate a clear causal link between a project and the result. One may be able to demonstrate some form of contribution but not attribute the result to the intervention - this may be because other programmes support the same institution over an overlapping time period (or before or afterwards) or because of a host of other intervening factors. Politics is not a science lab and evaluations are almost never fair tests.

¹⁶³ World Bank. World Development Report: Governance and the Law (2017). Available [here](#).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ See [Working with the Grain](#), [Doing Development Differently](#), [Building State Capability](#) and [Thinking Working Politically Community](#)

A number of new and more appropriate evaluation techniques are being employed with greater frequency by democracy support organisations, such as outcome harvesting and outcome mapping. Contrary to the classic evaluation methods under OECD DAC looking at relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact, democracy support projects are better suited to techniques that are able to capture the evolving nature of projects, including unintended consequences. Donors should look more favourably on such evaluation techniques, if not promote them more widely - as the Dutch government did with outcome harvesting for its 2016-2020 strategic partners.

A major issue in this instance is that those evaluations frequently take place during the lifespan of a project and therefore fail to capture the full impact. The typical life of a donor-funded programme or project does not exceed five years and is likely to be closer to much less than that. Our analysis of EU funding shows that only in exceptional circumstances does the duration of a grant in an EU call for proposals exceed four years. Short-term projects have an important place in development but are not an appropriate method for supporting political change. In cases where there is demonstrable success there should be a mechanism for extending the budget and lifespan of an intervention without new and cumbersome administrative procedures.

Adapting to local context

Local ownership has been an important part of the democracy support discourse for several years and figures as one of the principles of the 2009 Council Conclusions of EU democracy support. Despite this, there is still a tendency for the ideal type model of democratisation to dominate programmatic thinking based on the models of democratic development of OECD countries.

Most democracy support programmes analysed in this report were a mixture of classic democracy projects that are adapted to country context. The degree to which those projects take into account the specificities of the country depend on basic characteristics such as the nationality of the staff of the project, the resources devoted to analysis and the institutional priorities of the organisations implementing the support. It could be wise for project evaluations to take this into account at a greater degree than is currently the case.

Core funding to democracy support organisations in partner countries would aid in improving adaptation to the local context as would a greater effort to conduct political analysis. Similarly, there is a strong case to be made for giving domestic actors a more prominent role in the formulation of programmes, particularly actors beyond the state. Budget support, for all its pitfalls, does give the public administration a prominent role. The European Commission has tried in a limited number of cases to include civil society in its formulation of budget support.¹⁶⁶ There are also examples of

¹⁶⁶ Some examples include Ecuador and South Africa

linking civil society to the monitoring of programmes between a partner government and the EU but few examples of parliaments receiving funding for similar initiatives.¹⁶⁷

Bringing politics in

While no projects are solely ‘technical’ (as shown above, support to an agricultural ministry can have powerful political effects) or solely ‘political’ (technical expertise is vital in democracy support projects), the political side of the equation is much harder for donors and practitioners to grapple with.

Ever since the turn of the century, a variety of European donors have dedicated significant resources to developing ‘drivers of change’ or power analyses in their development work. By now, most of the main aid agencies have developed frameworks for political economy analysis (PEA) in order to understand how the competition for power and resources impact development outcomes. The expansion of political economy analyses is important for democracy support in that it brings politics to the centre of attention and has “helped to structure and legitimise the tacit knowledge [...] about the way historical trajectories, geopolitical factors, deeply embedded social and economic structures, and formal and informal institutions all shape the political system and the incentives and behaviour of different groups and individuals within it”.¹⁶⁸ A 2019 DFID Governance Position Paper outlines how a shift towards thinking and working politically is necessary for tackling diverse governance problems.¹⁶⁹

However, the use of PEA is not perfect and is only a small part of programming, particularly at the EU. For starters, the conclusions from PEA need to actually be incorporated in programming - which is unfortunately often far from the case. PEA also needs to be updated at regular intervals over the course of a project as politics and reality changes.¹⁷⁰

A reluctance to deal explicitly with politics is a primary cause of the dearth of funding for political parties. It may be that civil society funding is regarded in the same way in future decades - at least that seems to be part of the goal of the recent backlash against CSOs around the world. In practice, dealing with politics requires flexibility, an open mind and an acceptance of a reasonable amount of risk in a programming. Indeed, the use of PEA is not a simple fix-it solution to the necessity of dealing with complexity. There needs to be a set of tools that inform the process of decision-making on

¹⁶⁷ European Partnership for Democracy, *Who owns the EDF? Ensuring domestic accountability in ACP-EU development cooperation* (2017). Available [here](#).

¹⁶⁸ Unsworth, S., *It’s the politics! Can donors rise to the challenge?* Available [here](#).

¹⁶⁹ Department for International Development, *Governance for Growth, Stability and Inclusive Development* (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁷⁰ For a useful study of some of the challenges to PEA see the following World Bank publication: Fritz, V., Levy, B., & Ort, R., *Problem-Driven Political Economy Analysis: The World Bank’s Experience* (2014). Available [here](#).

programme formulation and implementation that enable the required adaptability. Unfortunately, our research found that evaluations of programmes frequently play only a small role in future programme formulation and identification at the European level.

Reacting to democratic change

Looking at democracy through a lens of fits and starts points to something of key practical importance: What to do during a ‘start’ such as the jasmine revolution in Tunisia in 2011 or the change of regime in the Gambia in 2017? While such moments can often bring unreasonable expectations to citizens and donors alike, they represent a catalyst for major political change.

The United States government uses the Transitions Initiatives budget line and the Elections and Political Processes fund to support countries experiencing political transition and instability as well as snap elections or electoral violence. Under these mechanisms, the US Agency for International Development Assistance (USAID) is able to react in an agile manner to opportunities to support both negative and positive democratic developments. The EU is able to address negative democratic developments that threaten peace and stability through the IcSP but struggles to react quickly in many instances of positive change. In Armenia, following the Velvet Revolution in the spring of 2018, the government of the United States funded a rapid response programme that started in June of the same year and continues today.¹⁷¹ In contrast, the €850k ‘Elections for All’ project with civil society organisations and a €1.5m contribution to a UNDP basket fund were signed in November 2018 just before the 9 December elections.¹⁷² While the EU Delegation found ways in which to support democracy in the country, it did so without an easy mechanism to do so, leading to time-lag in delivering financial support.

A funding environment based on minimising risk

Development spending by European governments has been put under pressure by economic and political events in the last decade, most notably the pressure on national budgets as a result of the economic crisis and the rise in nationalist rhetoric. So, while there has been a greater recognition of the importance of complexity in development, it runs counter to the need to showcase tangible and predictable results in order to justify development spending. There is also a case to be made that aid agencies are most comfortable working with logframes, set results and standard evaluations rather than branching out into innovative methods for programming - after all, these bring professional as well as institutional risks.

¹⁷¹ The programme ‘Strengthening Armenia’s Political Transition’ was led by IFES and was replaced by a programme ‘Strengthening Elections and Political Processes in Armenia’ after the elections of December 2018 and funded by USAID. More information [here](#).

¹⁷² European External Action Service, Elections for All: EU allocated EUR 850,000 for three new projects geared towards enhanced civic engagement and oversight as an indispensable tool for democratic electoral process (2018). Available [here](#).

What is strange is that the EU may be the donor which is least able to branch out into innovative methods even though it is most removed from the concerns of voters (over development aid) as a supranational institution. This suggests that it is probably not voters who play such a strong role in hindering an appetite for risk - as seen in the introduction to this report, a majority of EU citizens think the EU should be doing more in support of democracy and peace. For the EU, the major concern is a severe dressing down by EUMS, MEPs or the European Court of Auditors, all of which would do a service to EU development if they recognised the need to take a sensible degree of risk in programming (see Chapter 6 for more information).



6.

Democracy Support Architecture

All European governments have slightly different structures in place in order to support democracy. This is complicated by the fact that the EU also has its own structures and that these can sometimes run in parallel for issues that do not fit within the typical demarcation of internal and external policies. This chapter looks at the institutions that are responsible for democracy support and summarises some of the challenges that our research highlighted as emanating from the institutional architecture.

6.1 Who does what?

Democracy abroad

European governments often have a mix of different ministries with specific mandates covering different elements of democracy support at home and abroad. In the arena of foreign policy, democracy support is usually led by a foreign affairs ministry with support from development departments. In some member states this division does not exist - in Denmark, Danish development aid (known as DANIDA) is controlled by the foreign ministry even if there is a separate Minister for Development Cooperation within the ministry. The Dutch government has a similar arrangement, with a Minister for Trade and Development Cooperation sharing political leadership with the more prominent Minister for Foreign Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Irish Aid is managed by a department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Polish aid programme is housed within a department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although the government has an Undersecretary of State for Eastern Policy, Economic Diplomacy and Development Cooperation.

The French Development Agency, AFD (*Agence Française de Développement*), is a public financial institution that implements the official development policy of the French state. In Sweden, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) does broadly the same thing although under a different set-up. The Czech Development Agency is a government administrative unit that works in cooperation with, and receives its budget from, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The UK has a specific development department, known as DFID, that was separated from the foreign ministry (the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) in 1997. Germany also has a cabinet-level ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development known as the BMZ (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung*) which supports democracy along with the Foreign Ministry.

The EU institutions divide democracy support outside the EU between the EEAS, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) and the Directorate-General for the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). All three are headed by a European Commissioner - the equivalent of a cabinet minister. Alongside these three services, the Council of the EU plays the dominant role in policy-making through COHOM, the various geographical and some thematic working parties, the Political and Security Committee, the Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (COREPER II) and the Foreign Affairs Council. All of these groupings involve all EU member states who prepare policies to be unanimously approved in the Council.

The European Parliament is key for the approval of the EU budget and has two full committees that touch on issues of democracy support in the Foreign Affairs Committee (known as AFET) and the Development Committee (DEVE). There are also two sub-committees with relevance on Human Rights (known as DROI) and Security and Defence (SEDE) respectively. These committees are supported by the Directorate for External Policies (DG EXPO) and by a special grouping of MEPs that oversee the Parliament's work on supporting democracy abroad through the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG).

Democracy within Europe

The European Parliament plays a more prominent role when it comes to supporting democracy within Europe. The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) is responsible for human rights, including data protection issues. It also oversees the work of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) which was inaugurated in 2007. FRA has a wide human rights mandate which includes thematic areas such as the information society, discrimination and access to justice.

In the field of justice and home affairs the member states of the EU vote for a vast majority of issues through Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) within the Council of the EU.¹⁷³ The relevant preparatory bodies are the Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP), other more legal and security related working parties, including the Ad Hoc Working Party on the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania, and the General Affairs Council. Both the Council and the European Parliament play key roles in the legislative procedures for policies within the EU, although because democracy is dispersed as an issue (e.g. between the rule of law, human rights, the digital ecosystem, participation, etc.) the exact roles of both institutions can vary depending on the specific theme.

Within the European Commission, the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) plays the key role in terms of upholding the rule of law and could be said to have the lead on democracy issues within the Union. Although this is not so clear cut. In the 2019 proposals for the new European Commission, a new position of Vice President for Values and Transparency will chair the Commissioners' Group for a New Push for European Democracy and lead on various democracy themes (although this Commissioner will not head a ministry (DG)). While the new position of Commissioner for Democracy and Demography sounds promising, this position will only lead on the new generation of Citizen Dialogues, called the Conference on the Future of Europe, and head the DG for Communication (DG COMM).

In the 2019 proposals, a total of 6 Commissioners will have some link to digital affairs. The DG for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) takes a lead role on digital issues, including the Code of Practice against Disinformation agreed to between the EU and major online platforms. Several other Directorate-Generals are involved in democracy through the prism of digital affairs, including DG Communication.

DG COMM reports to the European Commission on political developments across the EU while also contributing to issues of citizen participation. Both DG JUST and DG CONNECT provide some funding for various pro-democracy initiatives, while the Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) contributes a small amount of funding to research on democracy.

Beyond the EU, other intergovernmental bodies also support democracy in Europe. The Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters, known as the Venice Commission (but officially called the European Commission for Democracy through Law) has been a leading force for the legal framework relating to democratic institutions as well as work on constitutions and electoral codes. While the setting of standards is the central role that the Council of Europe is known for, it also supports democratic participation including through funding. The Office for Democratic Institutions

¹⁷³ For the exceptions and an explanation of QMV, see [here](#).

and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE observes elections and reviews legislations as well as funding democracy initiatives.

The blurring of the boundaries of internal and external policy

Over the course of the past decades, the European Union and European governments have been principally focused on supporting democracy outside the Union. This has changed in recent years, particularly with political developments in Hungary but also Poland, the UK and others. The European institutions noticed worrying signs for Hungarian democracy as far back as 2011 after Victor Orban returned to power.¹⁷⁴ The European Commission also noticed problems in Poland in late 2015.¹⁷⁵ The impact of what has been termed the rise of ‘populism’ in various newspapers and commentaries has also focused minds at the European level due to the potential threat that this poses to the European project. Manifestations of this are present across the political spectrum but more prominent on the right.

It is clear that many European citizens are upset at the status-quo and there are clear parallels between politics in Europe in 2019 and the state of representative government in so-called developing democracies. These include the constraints of globalisation on policy-making, an over-reliance on elections in democratic politics, the weakness of the political party system and the rise of identity politics. The impact of technological change also transcends political boundaries affecting democracies and autocracies all over the world through many-to-many communication, artificial intelligence and new regulatory horizons. All of this calls into question the pre-existing neat division between support for democracy in Europe and abroad. There is too much overlap to deal with both in relative singularity.

The challenges facing democracy in Europe pose additional problems for the European Union and European governments who seek to support democracy and human rights abroad. The first of those problems is the obvious impact on credibility. How can European governments support democracy abroad if their democracies are failing? The second is a thornier issue - the resolve to act on the basis of common values is fundamentally undermined by a system of unanimous voting in the Council of the EU. Financing for democracy support could be put under serious pressure should the leadership of a European government decide that democracy is not a principle worth supporting at all.

At the same time, the recognition of shared challenges around the world can help to bring those supporting democracy closer together, undermine paternalistic attitudes and foster a common understanding. If that is to be the case, then our research showed that two areas of the current

¹⁷⁴ European Parliament, resolutions of March 2011 on media law in Hungary (2011). Available [here](#). & European Parliament, resolution of 5 July 2011 on the Revised Hungarian Constitution (2011). Available [here](#).

¹⁷⁵ European Commission, Commission adopts Rule of Law Opinion on the situation in Poland (2015). Available [here](#).

democracy support architecture need to be revamped. These are the institutional structures and the capacity for coordination.

6.2 The consequences of the institutional set-up

The institutional arrangements of European governments and the EU institutions place significant strain on European democracy support. On the one hand, this is natural given the size of the entities in question but on the other hand, it is apparent from our research that several challenges would benefit from greater concentration of mind. It is also apparent that the institutional arrangements are a significantly under-analysed challenge for democracy support, featuring only fleetingly in much of the research but commonly brought up by personnel working for foreign or development ministries in interviews and closed-door discussions.

Literature on the functioning of bureaucracies points to several issues that can affect the performance of international organisations.¹⁷⁶ These include a lack of governing consensus, the outcomes of power politics of member states (see above), incoherent mandates, leadership deficits, problems of organisational culture, competing norms within bureaucracies, career self-interest and inadequate resourcing. These overlapping external and internal constraints on performance can be problematic for all international organisations and are no less relevant in the case of the EU. When it comes to the operationalisation of democracy support, three issues stand out: operational constraints, incorrect programmatic incentives and the question of risk.

Operational constraints

Most European governments employ only a handful of staff in their effort to support democracy outside of their national boundaries. Many of these members of staff have overlapping mandates, covering a range of related themes (e.g. human rights or development) or specific geographical zones. The ability of European states to adequately support democracy is highly correlated to the human resources dedicated to specific issues, it is also a visible indication of the prioritisation of those issues.

At the European level, the European Parliament is the EU institution with the most staff nominally dedicated to democracy support even though, on paper, it has the least expansive mandate. However, these officials are spread across a range of different issues, from election observation to mediation support. The EEAS currently employs 2 staff dedicated specifically to democracy in a division of 10 staff dedicated to Democracy and Election Observation. DG DEVCO employs 6 people (although this can fluctuate) under the sector of Democratic Governance while DG NEAR employs an

¹⁷⁶ See Barnett, M. and Finnemore, M., *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (2004), as well as Gutner, T. & Thompson, *The politics of IO performance: A framework* (2010). Available [here](#).

official supporting democracy within its Centre of Thematic Expertise on the Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy. The picture for democracy within the European Union is less clear as there is no institutional home or unit dedicated to democracy anywhere. However, there are numerous staff within DG Justice supporting fundamental rights and the rule of law who have a clear link to support for democracy. Sometimes this is a question of framing (and official titles) given the wide scope of democracy as a theme, but it is also a reflection of the historical neglect of democracy as a prerogative of the EU within Europe.

When compared with other themes and priorities at the European level, the absence of EU staff dedicated to democracy is stark. The EEAS has over 14 actual divisions focusing on security - and this does not include military staff. Both DG JUST and DG CONNECT have multiple units dedicated to data (protection, innovation, flows). By comparison, the Internal Audit Service employs close to 150 staff members. In isolation, all of these human resource choices are surely logical, but a reassessment of the manpower dedicated to democracy is due.

Incorrect incentives

An inconvenient truth in development policy is that there is significant pressure on officials to spend the money that has been allocated to them. This can lead to poor decisions towards the end of the fiscal year with little impact on the development challenges in question. The longer-term calculation is that unless money is actually disbursed, the budget for the next fiscal year will be reduced - leading to the need to demonstrate spending. Within the EU there is an important incentive in middle management to demonstrate that disbursements match with annual financial commitments.

Such indicators of success are not unusual in public entities but are frequently the butt of criticism from external actors. Nevertheless, it is difficult in many instances to assess staff performance based on particular developmental outcomes (including democratic progress) due to the limited (annual) timeframe of analysis. Still, when it comes to budget support in a dictatorship, the consequences are clear: the incentives do not point towards turning off the financial tap.

Top-down structures (including bureaucracies) also disincentivise speaking out against one's hierarchy on moral or ethical grounds (as opposed to legal grounds). Again, there are clear Weberian reasons for this based on the need for a strong and efficient state, but the consequences for democracy support are more ambivalent. What can the official of member state X do if they do not agree with a particular decision to fund a dictatorial regime? The individuals cost-benefit calculations do not incentivise undermining the status quo. When the status quo is detrimental to a particular policy then the ability to shift behaviour is far from frictionless.

The question of risk

As we have seen in the chapter above, democratisation does not follow a linear, predictable pattern but is highly complex. In order to get to grips with this complexity, numerous researchers, practitioners and some donors have embraced the need to accept some elements of risk when providing democracy support.

The institutional structures of traditional state donors do not view risk as an acceptable element of decision-making. Better safe than sorry. Better sure of something than exposed to a potential political scandal. Bureaucrats are criticised enough without having to deal with being slapped across the pages of newspapers for a decision that has spectacularly backfired.

The aversion to risk is both a question of the incentives of personnel and of institutional structures. At the level of individuals, the costs of taking a risk are high, particularly without any institutional back-up from hierarchy. Higher up the bureaucratic food chain, a natural calculation is to avoid the wrong move, as promotion is likely with the benefit of time and good performance, i.e. without the need for outstanding performance that could be brought about by taking a calculated gamble. Unfortunately, this aversion to risk also permeates the process of approval of documentation, where officials can be reluctant to take responsibility for fear of committing errors that come back to bite them.

From the point of view of the architecture of the EU, the European Commission must answer to the European Parliament, Member States and the European Court of Auditors. Experience has shown that none of these entities have the appetite to stomach the consequences of a small degree of risk-taking by the European Commission. The EU member states and the European Parliament are responsible for agreeing to the Financial Regulation applicable to the EU budget.¹⁷⁷ There have been recent attempts to make these more flexible but if certain rules are to be relaxed then it is up to the EU member states and European Parliament to do this. MEPs are also, like in national settings, able to scrutinise the work of the European Commission on specific issues. The audit reports of the European Court of Auditors can send a shiver down the spine of any Directorate-General - their mandate is to ensure that EU funds are spent legally and with sound management. In all instances, a recognition that a sensible amount of risk-taking and flexibility is necessary for certain programmes would go a long way towards improving the modalities for democracy support.

All of these institutional constraints do pose an important question: as bureaucracies are shaped this way, are they the best entities to be supporting democracy? The United States created the National Endowment for Democracy in the 1980s for this and other reasons. Although it took several years,

¹⁷⁷ European Directorate-General for Budget (European Commission), *Financial regulation applicable to the general budget of the Union* (2018). Available [here](#).

the creation of the European Endowment for Democracy helped to respond to several of these constraints at the European level - in particular, the ability to fund smaller and riskier initiatives in short time-frames. Considering the above, European donors would be wise in thinking of innovative mechanisms for supporting democracy in the future that allow them to circumvent these institutional constraints.

6.3 The capacity to coordinate

Coordination at the European level is complicated by institutional arrangements, the low numbers of dedicated staff and the lack of a policy framework. This is compounded by the logical but largely artificial separation of external democracy and internal democracy. In essence, the capacity to coordinate can be broken down into two parallel interlinked challenges: overlapping mandates and diplomatic decision-making.

Overlapping mandates

The complicated power-sharing between EU member states and within the EU institutions themselves in the area of democracy support means it is hardly surprising that the EU has had trouble developing a more pro-active position on democracy support. While each ministry has a clear hierarchical structure, overlapping mandates can lead to a lack of clarity and, in turn, lead to inter-institutional rivalry.

The Democracy Profile exercise of the European Union that emanated from the Council Conclusions of 2009 exposed the differences in the success of coordination between the member states and the EU delegation in specific priority countries. A total of 20 countries were studied throughout two generations of analyses - with the second generation being of vastly improved quality. Successful coordination is highly dependent on good personal relations at the country level, the corresponding workload of different embassies and to some extent a consensus on the general programming priorities of member states. The exercise also highlighted the disconnect between political intelligence and knowledge, and the operational consequences that follow. The democracy assessments (known as profiles) were never mandatorily linked to the Democracy Action Plans which were the operational consequences of the profiles. In other words, the analysis was never officially tied to the support.

The tension between the political and operational arms of the EU and European governments often goes unmentioned in public, even though staff within those same institutions grapple with the tension on a regular basis. The potential for fallout within different bureaucracies is much higher when there is no overarching policy framework to guide different institutions. At the European level, cooperation between different governments and between the EU institutions themselves has clearly improved in

recent years thanks to individual staff dedicated to the issue, but there was widespread agreement in the workshops conducted for this review that it could be further improved.

Unfortunately, the task of coordinating European policy is also an extremely time-consuming endeavour. While the EEAS can play the role of the focal point for information gathering, it relies on information from member states, who sometimes do not have an individual dedicated to the task in question. Indeed, it is worth underlining that coordination requires significant resources and should not be an afterthought of policy. Abroad, coordination at the country level is facilitated by the presence of diplomats in-country, even if more member states increases the barriers to unanimity. Yet at the Brussels headquarters, there is no single institutional home to democracy.

Diplomatic decision-making

The requirements for unanimity in foreign policy are an important part of European states speaking with one voice in matters of ‘external action’. Historically this has meant that the larger states hold more sway through informal pressure and horse-trading, but it still places a significant amount of power in the hands of smaller European states. Member states with an important interest in a particular country also use this to bend the common European position to their will. Logically this whole process means that arriving at a common position takes a significant amount of time on sensitive issues but leads to a powerful message of unity externally. However, it also means that it is sometimes unclear as to who the political masters really are in a given context. Since the Lisbon treaty, EU missions in a particular country have been upgraded to fully fledged diplomatic missions authorised to speak for the entire Union. This has provided incentives for coordination at the local level but means that joint statements can be extremely difficult on particularly sensitive issues.

In recent years, unanimity has come under increasing strain and led to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, suggesting that unanimity should be removed in certain matters of foreign policy in his 2018 state of the Union address.¹⁷⁸ Juncker called for using QMV for sanctions, human rights positions and civilian missions. The European Commission (and several EU member states) had arrived at this conclusion on the basis of several examples of individual member states blocking EU positions based on a fundamental ideological disagreement and more troubling cases where a third country has used leverage to block consensus. Cases include Greece blocking a joint EU statement on China’s human rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2017¹⁷⁹, Hungary and Greece watering down an EU statement on the dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, Italy blocking a joint statement on the crisis in Venezuela as well

¹⁷⁸ Juncker, J.C., *State of the Union 2018: The Hour of European Sovereignty*. (2018). Full speech available [here](#).

¹⁷⁹ Emmott, R., Koutantou, A., *Greece blocks EU statement on China human rights at U.N.* (2017). Available [here](#).

as Hungary and Poland using disagreements on migration to block conclusions of an EU-Arab league summit.¹⁸⁰ There are many other examples in the public domain.

The EU's and EU member states' democracy policy at times lacks coherence as a result of the difficulties of coordinating among member states. The country case studies of Armenia, Zimbabwe, Honduras and Tunisia illustrate the mixed picture. In Armenia, the EU and EUMS remained committed to the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement and democratic reform in the country, even at a time when Armenia enhanced its relations with Russia at the expense of EU-Armenia relations. The EU was able to show commitment to democracy in Armenia in part because of the united stance of EUMS on Armenia. Likewise, a shared interest in democracy in Honduras allowed the EUMS to decisively suspend financial aid to the government following a coup d'état, to reinvest in democratic elections and reforms of the judicial system once political space started opening up.

The difficulties of coordination are evident in the Zimbabwean case and stem from the bilateral engagement of individual EUMS with the Zimbabwean government, thereby harming the effectiveness and credibility of the EU's position. The UK, for instance, has repeatedly been criticised by the opposition and civil society for their close relations with current President Mnangagwa, and their desire to lead the European position as former colonial power. Certain EUMS have also blocked statements by the EU delegation in response to human rights abuses out of national interest. In Tunisia, France has played a key role in determining European priorities reflecting its close ties to the country since Tunisian independence from France. Nevertheless, events across North Africa and Middle East in the last 5 years led to a convergence in terms of prioritising security and stability in the country.

There is an inherent risk in the decision-making structures at European level of a lowest common denominator position. On the one hand, this may lead to fewer diplomatic conflicts with partners but, on the other, it creates profound predicaments when the EU needs to confront a partner on democracy, human rights or other political issues.

Although there are worthy explanations for the intergovernmental nature of EU common foreign and security policy, the result is that there is less policy certainty on issues of minimal ideological disagreement. In the coming years, it is possible that support for democracy falls into this arena of divergence.

¹⁸⁰ Schuette, L., *Should the EU make foreign policy decisions by majority voting?* (2019).

Findings & Recommendations

Our analysis pointed to 5 overarching areas for improving European democracy support. These areas can be thought about through the lens of the questions they pose for Europeans supporting democracy: why, when, what, how, and who. The conclusions and recommendations for each area are listed below and followed by action points that make the recommendations more concrete for policy-makers and funders.

1. KNOWLEDGE | Why are we doing this?

Democracy is a concept without an institutional home. In some senses, this is natural given that representative democracy calls for the dispersion of power among institutions and people, but it creates certain complexities for those that seek to support democracy around the world. People value democracy but cannot define it. Everyone is involved yet only some decide. It is a word sometimes derided in democracies but found in the official name of autocratic states. Democracy is a principle *and* it is a practice. While there is agreement on some key characteristics of democracy, there is no international agreement on a precise definition of democracy.

What is also clear is that there is no unifying purpose for supporting democracy shared by European actors. European support for democracy tends to fall somewhere in between human rights commitments, traditional development policy and foreign policy concerns. Within the EU institutions, democracy is most commonly associated with human rights (e.g. EU treaties, official statements, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights). At the same time, the way in which democracy is supported uses the standard procedures of development policy (e.g. logframes, evaluation criteria for programmes). Yet democracy is also about the way power is exercised by states and is therefore a crucial foreign policy concern. For European governments, our analysis shows that the rationale for supporting democracy mixes the same logic of the intrinsic value of human rights and more instrumental concerns related to peace and development.

There is also a poor evidence base for what works in democracy support and what does not – particularly at the policy level. Most democracy research analyses the state of democracy in specific countries (e.g. V-Dem, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House) or is conducted on specific programmes, but frequently misses the policy level. There is not even reliable data on the funding for democracy support as part of official development assistance. Research on policy is no picnic but our review has attempted to fill an important gap by focusing on specific country examples. Much more is needed.

Recommendation: Strengthen our understanding of democracy support.

In practice, strengthening our understanding of democracy support can be broken down into different elements. There is a need for greater clarity of meaning and purpose (what is democracy support and why are we doing it) and of evidence (what works and what doesn't).

Definition of democracy support

While agreeing to a common European definition of democracy is difficult, identifying the purpose for supporting democracy would help in defining what support for democracy entails. It is likely that this would be more wide ranging than a principled rationale on human rights and therefore touch on many other policy areas, due to the wide array of different actions and actors involved.

Improve the evidence base

Practitioners should seek to cooperate more actively with academics in the assessment of programmes, while greater resources should be dedicated to research at the policy level in EU member states. In the short-term, reliable and comparable data on funding for democracy support needs to be collected. Without reliable data, it is exceedingly difficult to learn and improve. In the long-run, European actors should give serious consideration to creating an academy on democracy in order to provide an institutional home for democracy research and practice.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Develop a definition of democracy support
- Develop a theory of change model for democracy support
- Create a Development Assistance Committee (DAC) code for democracy
- Improve links between academia and practitioners e.g. academics evaluating programmes
- Create a European Democracy Academy

2. PRIORITISATION | When should democracy be prioritised?

Democratic governance is being challenged around the world. In Europe, these challenges manifest themselves through attacks on independent media and civil society, the undermining of democratic institutions but also increasing protests and calls for greater participation. Several academic studies have underlined that there is a slow but steady process of autocratisation (or democratic backsliding) within the EU. At the same time, there has been a noticeable shift towards a greater focus on security and migration in EU foreign policy in recent years. These changes are less radical than many suggest - democracy has always been a lower order concern for most European states - but they do point to an emerging trend that risks undermining the long-term goals and credibility of the EU.

European engagement with dictatorships is nothing new - and it continues to undermine credibility and the coherence of EU policies. Yet, one cannot simply ignore or fail to engage with autocratic regimes. What is new is that there is greater competition in development policy from undemocratic powers. A host of different authoritarian regimes (China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, UAE, Iran) have become far more assertive in recent years particularly as donors or creditors to various countries around the world. The conditions and amounts are often more attractive for rulers and political elites than what Europeans can offer. If this is the case, then what actually separates European engagement from others? What is the added value?

The increasing assertiveness of undemocratic powers also manifests itself in the difficulty of reaching consensus in multilateral fora. There is a reason democracy is not found in the definition of Sustainable Development Goal 16 of peace, justice and strong institutions. Democratic partners are more likely to support human rights and tend to be much easier to work with on global challenges. The United States, for better and for worse, has linked support for democracy to foreign policy in a far more explicit manner than most European states. Given the concerns within Europe and the changed international environment, it is time for the EU to get serious about the importance of democracy in terms of its own short and long-term interests.

Recommendation: Accord greater importance to democracy in policy.

Democracy should feature higher up the list of policy priorities of European states for reasons of principle but also self-interest. This not only involves pro-democracy policies but, crucially, avoiding supporting authoritarian regimes inadvertently.

Get serious about democracy

Democracy is not just a slogan, it is something that must be actively strengthened and defended - often at the expense of other priorities. This is true in all regions of the world, including within the

European Union. Foreign policy will always involve trade-offs, but overlooking democracy has become an increasingly risky endeavor in recent years. The new geopolitical reality means that democracy is even more vital for the long-term prosperity and security of European nations. Member states should make this clear.

Adopt a “do no harm” principle to guide external action

Conversely, authoritarian governments should not be unintentionally reinforced. Such regimes are often strengthened both economically and in terms of legitimacy through engagement with other global actors and the international financial system. The principle of “do no harm” should guide all external action, meaning the EU should carefully consider the impact engagement with a country has on democratic processes and refrain from actions that may strengthen authoritarian regimes (e.g. direct financial support).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Organise a global high-level conference on democracy on an annual basis to make a political statement on the importance of democracy and facilitate exchange
- Advocate for democracy as a key element of the mandate of the new High Representative of the EU
- Improve the use of direct financial support by ensuring the use of independent democracy indicators in the assessment and approval of such donor support.

3. POLICY | What should be done?

Search for the word democracy in policy documents and it will appear in various different guises, sometimes dressed up through European values, sometimes stripped down to good governance. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union provides that the EU is founded on the values of freedom and democracy (among others), while Article 21 notes that EU external action is guided by those same principles. Indeed, democracy is frequently referenced as a principle in external action documents rather than as a policy goal - with some notable exceptions.

In 2009, all EU member states agreed to an ‘Agenda for Action’ on democracy support in external relations - the first such commitment from the EU. This was followed up by a Strategic Framework

and Action Plan on human rights and democracy in 2014. An updated Action Plan for human rights and democracy was agreed in 2015 and another from 2020 onwards is in the pipeline. The legal documentation associated with the EIDHR provides different descriptions of the scope of many activities of EU support for democracy.

Nevertheless, there is no overarching document that outlines the strategy, objectives or approach for European democracy support. This has resulted in a dispersal of activities, which has ultimately led to process-oriented, technical and depoliticised programmes that miss some key obstacles to democratisation. This is a missed opportunity for strategic engagement, for effectiveness and for complementarity between EU and EU member states' democracy assistance. Despite all the talk of democracy, there is thus no policy framework that can guide the EU institutions or EU member states.

Recommendation: Develop a policy framework on democracy support.

An EU policy framework should set out the strategy, objectives and approach of European democracy support. The EU can take inspiration from Sweden's development cooperation policy, which outlines the rationale for supporting democracy, the long-term policy direction, a definition of democracy, and the types of actions that constitute democracy support. At EU level, the policy framework on cyber security support or on transitional justice could serve as examples of a comprehensive policy document.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Create a core guiding document for European democracy support
- Create guidelines on democracy for EU staff
- Build democracy assessments into other frameworks for assessing policies e.g. ensure good governance projects have a section on democratic impact

4. FUNDING | How to do it right?

The EU and EUMS have taken significant steps forward in recent years in order to address certain funding gaps such as financing to small scale initiatives, unregistered entities and human rights defenders in autocratic states. Our analysis has shown that while a majority of funding goes to the state - the natural bilateral partner - there have been substantial investment to other actors within

the democratic system. Yet, a focus on the executive can be problematic at a time where there is increasing evidence of the executive branch of government undermining the separation of powers, independent media and civil society in different states around the world.

It is unrealistic to expect change to come from the top. Change happens in a variety of different ways that are not predictable and there is a growing realisation among donors and lenders, including institutions such as the World Bank, that development is a fundamentally political process. While many European states clearly understand this and ‘think’ politically, it is much harder to find those who ‘do’ things with a politically aware mindset. The challenge of uncertainty, systems thinking, learning by doing (including through failure) and giving priority to local knowledge does not tend to sit well with the classic development approach of control, logframes, risk minimisation, and predictable, tangible results. Democratic development is even more of a political process but is still, broadly speaking, subject to the same approach.

Recommendation: Innovate to match current challenges.

In practice, funding mechanisms could be updated through a greater focus on change and the recognition of the specificities of democracy support through special funding rules.

Programming focused on change

Donors need to embrace complexity without becoming consumed by a lack of predictability. In an authoritarian context, fundamental change is not likely to occur from a change of heart at the top without significant pressure from below. Donors must shift any direct financial support to government towards non-state actors in cases of autocratisation. In other circumstances, this means linking political intelligence to programming decisions in a more systematic manner.

Specific funding rules for democracy support

Democratic development is not linear and occurs in fits and starts. This requires adaptability and patience. Like conflict prevention, which benefits from specific funding modalities at EU level, it may also call for rapid reaction in the case of democratic breakthroughs. Donors should therefore give serious consideration to specific rules for democracy support programmes. These should include building in means for extending successful programmes, the provision of long-term institutional funding to key national actors, a mechanism for rapid response and the use of new evaluation methods.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Develop a mechanism to shift funding towards non-state actors in cases of democratic breakdown
- Rapid reaction mechanism to seize opportunities for democratic change
- Enable the provision of long-term and institutional funding
- Promote evaluation methods adapted to the reality of democratic development.

5. COORDINATION | Who does what?

The more people involved, the harder it is to coordinate. At the level of EU member states, democracy support can be the preserve of a foreign ministry, shared with a development ministry, or sometimes also shared three ways as part of a trade related ministry. This is compounded by the ambiguous position of democracy in relation to development, peace and human rights. Naturally, one finds that where tasks are divided there is usually an element of inter-institutional rivalry that plays a role in undermining coordination. And that is just democracy support outside of Europe. There is an increasing recognition that one cannot divorce the challenges for democracy abroad from those within Europe, particularly in the digital sphere.

Finding the right balance for effective coordination is no walk in the park and is compounded by the fact that the EU operates with 28 such models in cooperation. Coordination for EU diplomats is therefore a much thornier task than for those working for EUMS. Nevertheless, the upgrading of European Commission delegations under the TEU into full diplomatic missions authorised them to speak for the entire Union in particular countries, which has helped provide incentives for coordination. Other such measures should be considered.

Recommendation: Dedicate greater resources to manage coordination.

A clearer line of coordination on democracy issues should be established among member states and the EU institutions. This should serve two purposes, to a) manage policy priorities and b) coordinate democracy aid. Dedicating more human resources towards democracy is an important first step in both cases. There are different means of supporting this: for instance, through a democracy coordinator in the Council who would be able to straddle democracy inside and outside Europe or a

permanent democracy grouping bringing together key actors. At country-level there is still a need to coordinate democracy support programmes to ensure complementarity between member states.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Create the position of democracy coordinator at the Council of the EU
- Expand the mandate of the EU Special Representative on Human Rights
- Increase the number of staff dedicated to democracy at the European External Action Service and in EUMS (as well as in other EU services)
- Develop a mandatory donor matrix in specific countries for coordination purposes
- Create a permanent democracy group for coordination, involving EUMS, the EU institutions, civil society, think tanks and academia.
- Ensure a more prominent role for the European Parliament, for instance through the Democracy and Election Observation Group, in the oversight of democracy support policies.



Annexes

Annex 1: Armenia ¹⁸¹

History & state of democracy in Armenia

Since the 2000s, Armenia has witnessed varying degrees of political freedom under a largely authoritarian system of governance. The period from 2000 to 2008 under President Robert Kocharyan was characterised by limited freedom of information and press, suppression of criticism and opposition, and fraudulent elections. President Kocharyan relied on the support of the two major political parties, the Prosperous Party and the Republican Party. Following allegedly fraudulent elections, the Republican Party candidate Serzh Sargsyan succeeded Kocharyan as President, violently suppressing protests against his election and censoring media coverage of the deadly events. Under Sargsyan's presidency, the Republican Party consolidated its grip on power, but also allowed some limited criticism, media freedom and protest regarding socio-economic issues from 2010 onwards. Elections continued to be fraudulent regardless of international election monitoring and increased EU-Armenia engagement.

Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union and the rapprochement to Russia in 2013 came with an increased clampdown on democratic freedoms. At the same time, citizen movements increasingly mobilised, staging peaceful protests on a range of socio-economic issues, such as the rising cost of public transport. The widespread discontent with the economic and political system culminated in the Velvet Revolution in the spring of 2018. Enabled by much-contested constitutional changes in 2015, President Sargsyan used the Republican Party's parliamentary majority to secure his continued rule as Prime Minister. This triggered mass action by an alliance of opposition leaders, civil society organisations and activists, who mobilised people to march to Yerevan and block the streets of the capital. The non-violent protests successfully led to the resignation of former president

¹⁸¹ Grigoryan, H. & Grigoryan, S. 2019. European democracy support in Armenia: a case study reviewing European democracy support. Available [here](#).

Sargsyan as prime minister, and snap elections that saw opposition party leader and leader of the revolution Nikol Pashinyan take up the role of prime minister.

Despite positive steps towards democratic reform following the Velvet Revolution, a number of challenges to democracy remain. The newly installed parliamentary system is still weak and requires stronger programmatic political parties that are less oligarchic and less focused around individuals and more on policies. At the same time, there is a high concentration of power in the person of the prime minister and the ruling party, which harms the separation of powers. The justice system and local authorities, in particular, are directly influenced by the executive through appointment and budgetary procedures. Likewise, most media platforms cannot take up an oversight role due to issues of media ownership and TV bias towards the government. At the same time, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh remains central to the ideology of political parties and the overall political discourse, which decreases support for resolving the conflict with Azerbaijan that has plagued Armenian politics for decades. Armenia also continues to exercise a balancing act between close relations with Russia and the EU. Diplomats have argued Armenia's close ties to Russia form a major obstacle to the consolidation of democracy in its institutions.

European engagement with Armenia

The EU and EUMS have assisted Armenia both economically and politically over recent years. In the 1990s, assistance from Europe was often humanitarian in nature. It also included assistance aiming to diversify Armenia's economy in support to its transition to a market economy. From the mid 2000s, assistance from the EU and EUMS followed a more value-based agenda aimed at political cooperation. This is reflected in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, which was signed in 2009 and which, inter alia, stimulates civil society development and cooperation through the EaP Civil Society Forum and the Special Envoys and Ambassadors visits. Later in 2017, the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed. It provides the main framework for relations between Armenia and the EU.

In light of the hybrid nature of the regime, several European governments have sought to assist different actors in the country. Overall, priority areas of the EU and EUMS frequently dovetailed with those of the government of Armenia, which often included supporting the judiciary, strengthening local government bodies and promoting the political freedoms and economic welfare of citizens. Democracy support was mostly allocated to state institutions in order to promote transparency in the activities of the government, the independence of the judiciary, and the police's compliance with the rule of law. Financial assistance was also provided to electoral processes and civil society, and to a lesser extent to local authorities, media platforms, and peace-building.

Complementarity and consistency of European engagement

The research for the case study showed a noteworthy level of consistency on the part of the EU and EUMS as well as effective levels of European coordination. When the need for reform in a certain sector had been identified, the EU and EUMS would strive to assist all involved stakeholders in that sector with individual projects or through joint programmes. The joint visits of the EaP Ambassadors and Special Envoys are exemplary of the complementarity and coordination of actions by EUMS. Likewise, the EU and EUMS also coordinated their activities with other international actors through meetings and, occasionally, joint programmes. The EU and EUMS have clearly acknowledged the importance of civil society as a driver for democratic change in Armenia in the EaP and the CEPA. Although the CEPA provides the EU with leverage to further encourage the Armenian government to involve civil society more systematically in policy processes, this commitment remains to be implemented more effectively in practice. The CEPA and the EaP thus exemplify the EU's commitment to stimulating the development of civil society and the involvement of civil society in policy processes and dialogues with Armenia. However, they also shows the limitations of such an approach if public authorities are not on board.

The EU and EUMS have been quite consistent in their engagement with Armenia and their support to democratic reform, despite Armenia's continued close relations with Russia. When in 2013 Armenia refused to sign the EU-Armenia Association Agreement and instead joined the Eurasian Economic Union, the EU continued insisting on signing the CEPA and also continued financial cooperation. While such consistency is considered a strength by some, others have interpreted it as a sign that the EU's vested interests in a trade agreement have overruled their commitment to democratic reform in Armenia. Some EUMS, in contrast, decreased financial assistance or phased out support in response to these weakened EU-Armenia relations.

With the rise in civic movements from 2010 onwards, the EU and EUMS complemented their formal support for democratic reforms with statements supporting the protestors' agenda for democratic reform and defending citizens' freedom of speech, expression and assembly. During the Velvet Revolution, as well as many earlier protests, the EU Delegation proactively issued statements in defence of peaceful protests, transparent elections and freedom of press, calling for dialogue with civil society. The EUMS and the EU's political support to democratic freedoms and movements signalled to the authorities that support from European governments would decrease in the case of any violent suppression of the protests. It is likely that this played a role in the calculations of the ruling elites and thereby contributed to the restraint in violence in reaction to public demonstrations. The commitment from the EU to increase funding to Armenia in 2019 is a recognition of the potential for democratic reform in the coming years. At the same time, it should also be noted that during the period covered the EU has also been slow in reacting to democratic regressions in the country, which in some cases undermined the effectiveness of the EU's assistance. However, in general the EU and certain EUMS have consistently shown their willingness to politically and financially support democratic reforms in Armenia when the political winds were favourable.

Relevance and impact of European democracy support

In general, EU support to democracy was very relevant in the types of support and actors it supported, but at times failed to address the underlying obstacles to democratic consolidation.

The primary target of European democracy support has been legal and judicial development, in particular to support reforms and the harmonisation of national legislation with international and European standards, as well as capacity building of institutions and staff. While justice support is very relevant, the impact of such assistance on the transparent and democratic functioning of the justice sector is debatable, as it occurs in a context of a partisan judicial system where independence cannot be guaranteed. That being said, support did enhance the capacity of key actors and supported certain necessary legislative reforms.

A secondary target of European assistance was support to human rights. Some civil society organisations were assisted in raising awareness and stimulating discussion about human rights, while others monitored the implementation of international human rights conventions such as those on women's rights. The work on women's rights is particularly relevant given the insufficient progress in gender equality in the country. While the impact on people's awareness of human rights is difficult to measure, the Human Rights Defender Office and other human rights organisations did strengthen their capacity to defend and support human rights defenders, and monitor human rights implementation.

European support to civil society formed the third largest sector of democracy support, and arguably the most impactful one. Despite the suppression of protests and media freedoms, Armenian civil society actors continued to demand democratic reforms, thanks in great measure to the support received from the EU and EUMS. Support to civil society was extremely relevant in building the necessary capacity and vibrancy of a variety of civil society organisations, who ultimately played a primary role in the Velvet Revolution. European support enabled civil society organisations to react quickly and organise effectively whenever a window of opportunity for democratic change opened - such as the one leading up to the Velvet Revolution.

Given the history of voter intimidation and ballot box stuffing by the authorities, European support to the organisation, conduct and monitoring of elections has made a relevant and important contribution to the quality of elections. The provision of electronic voter authentication devices and trainings for technical staff through EU technical assistance contributed to the technical capacity for organising elections. Local election observers were also supported, most notably for the snap parliamentary elections following the Velvet Revolution in 2018. While the improvement in the technical capacity for organising the elections was an important step towards transparent and credible elections, it did not address the abuse of administrative resources. Like with support to

judicial development and local authorities, the lack of political will and the influence of the ruling party have been an important stumbling block to effective support to state institutions.

A relatively small amount of support focused on Armenia's media landscape. With TV broadcasting largely in favour of the government and Russian disinformation rife across the country, independent and online media are seen as a crucial area of cooperation. While EU support has not been able to address the bias of TV broadcasting, European donors have provided financial support and capacity building on digital skills and techniques to fight disinformation to some independent and online news channels. These independent media were an important news source for citizens regarding protests, dissent and the events of the Velvet Revolution. While European donors have contributed to some extent to the diversification of the media landscape in Armenia, the amount of support to media did not match the great needs for quality independent information sources.

Support to Armenia's directly elected local authorities was relevant for strengthening democracy at the local level, but its effectiveness in enhancing participation and accountability is limited due to the budgetary dependence on the regional administration (and effectively the ruling party). This not only limited the credibility and independent functioning of local authorities, but also hampered inclusiveness.

A major impediment for democratic progress in Armenia is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While the EU supports the mediation in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group, the EU and EUMS have provided only limited financial assistance to the peacebuilding and rapprochement activities conducted by Armenian civil society, despite the value of the people-to-people contact they foster.

Conclusions

The main contributions of the EU and EUMS to democratic reform in Armenia resulted from the requirements for democratic reforms that were part of the EU-Armenia Association Agreement, the visa facilitation dialogue, the CEPA and the EaP. The required legal reforms were supported by programmes which involved all different stakeholders. This helped to raise awareness among Armenian political and civil society actors that democratic principles and human rights as inextricable elements of the EU agenda, despite the lack of political will in the ruling party to adopt the reforms. Moreover, the consistent engagement of the EU and EUMS also had a deterring effect on the ruling party's autocratic inclinations and thereby contributed to preventing a further erosion of democratic space.

The case of Armenian civil society support highlights the strategic importance of supporting civil society, in particular in countries where a hybrid regime has a tight grip on political contestation. While support to public institutions has had a positive impact on the technical capacity of these institutions, the transformational impact thereof has been limited due to obstacles such as a lack of

political will and the dependence of institutions on certain political elites. In contrast, civil society support has been impactful with far lower associated costs.

Armenia's recent history thus provides a powerful argument for the concerted political engagement for reform in combination with support to pro-democracy actors in a context of a hybrid regime or authoritarian regime.

Annex 2: Honduras 182

History & state of democracy in Honduras

Honduras has been able to escape the social unrest typical of the Central American region, thanks to a complex mix of political and social peculiarities, in a delicate balance with its economic and geopolitical importance for the interests of the United States in the region. However, the country has been marred by high levels of poverty and faced natural disasters that have devastated a large portion of the country and the economy.

The presidential elections of 2005 were controversially won by the candidate of the Liberal Party, Manuel Zelaya, whose government followed a ‘Socialism of the 21st Century’ approach - this distanced him from the Honduran political, economic and social elites and led to increased polarisation. In 2009, he promoted the implementation of a popular consultation to call for a National Constituent Assembly, which would favour his future re-election. While the judicial branch and the political opposition were against it, the armed forces, who supported Zelaya, were not. However, on 28 June 2009, members of the Armed Forces captured Zelaya and ousted him from power and the country. In the afternoon of that same day, the National Congress, which was controlled by members of his own party, completed the coup d’état by naming the Head of the National Congress Roberto Micheletti, as the new President of Honduras. Micheletti stayed in power from June 2009 until January 2010, when elections resulted in the new government under President Porfirio Lobo.

With an exceptional and comfortable majority in the National Congress, President Lobo decided to establish a government of national unity, in order to facilitate national reconciliation. Facing protests throughout the entire country by the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP), which called for the return of former president Zelaya, Lobo signed the Cartagena Convention allowing Zelaya to return to the country. This situation favoured the creation of new political parties, among them ‘Libertad y Refundación’ or simply ‘Libre’, consisting of Zelaya’s liberal followers and members of the FNRP. It also facilitated the readmission of Honduras in the Organisation of American States (OAS).

The election of 2013 was won by the President of the National Congress Juan Orlando Hernández from the National Party of Honduras. Facing economic woes, security issues and the fight against organised crime, Hernández requested the National Congress to approve the extradition of Honduran citizens to foreign countries. This revealed the extent to which narcotics-related activities had penetrated Honduran politics and the economy, compromising national and regional security. The high degree of public corruption slowly turned into widespread concern in the country. The following elections in 2017 were won again by Hernández but the result was highly disputed by a great number

¹⁸² Cálix Martínez, M. A. 2019. European democracy support in Honduras: a case study reviewing European democracy support. Available [here](#).

of voters. Ultimately, the international community recognised the electoral results, but also made a point of demanding deep political reforms.

European engagement with Honduras

Honduras has had a long tradition of international cooperation with Europe, dating back to the 1980s. In 2006, Honduras was the second biggest recipient of EU aid in Latin America, due to the high level of poverty and the EU's interest in consolidating stability and democracy in the country. EU cooperation with Honduras is guided by the Framework Agreement signed in 1999 between the European Union and the Central American States, which defines the procedures for aid in relation to programmes, projects and technical and financial cooperation. The priorities of the political dialogue and the main challenges of the EU-Honduran relations were highlighted in the new Political and Co-operation Agreement signed in December 2003, which came into force in 2014 after years of bilateral and multilateral negotiations with Central American countries.

The current technical and financial cooperation projects are based on the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2014-2020, which was developed on the basis of an evaluation of cooperation between the EU and Honduras from 2002 to 2009. Its main topics are food security, employment and the rule of law. The MIP states that 'serious sector analysis is key to success, and there is a particular need for real policies and clear demands'; in addition, it refers to the fact 'that a cross cutting approach to human rights will be incorporated into all sectors, with an appropriate emphasis on economic, social, cultural, and gender equality rights, as well as the reduction of risks resulting from natural disasters or the environment'.¹⁸³

Complementarity and consistency of European engagement

Stemming from a need to properly distribute the incoming aid to tackle the devastation caused by natural disasters, a group of cooperating partners came together to form the G16 group. The G16 has been useful, not only for general coordination of the donors present in the country, but also for coordination among European donors. This despite the fact that EU and EUMS' influence had decreased following the withdrawal and return of cooperation resources as a result of the 2009 coup d'état, which directly affected the continuity of its work.

European influence to promote dialogue with the government and other stakeholders has fluctuated over time and is strongly linked to the lead diplomatic or cooperation representatives. In terms of European democracy support, both the EU and EUMS have always placed a strong emphasis on the need to consult and coordinate with civil society, even at times when it has been complicated by the high levels of polarisation in the country. In dialogues that involve state institutions and civil servants,

¹⁸³ European Commission, Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020, p.3. Available [here](#).

efforts have been made to include intra and inter-sectoral civil society representatives. This was, however, complicated at times by the lack of interest and willingness to participate by civil society and government stakeholders.

In general terms, European support for democracy in Honduras is seen as consistent throughout time in the promotion of democratic values, showing an adequate and very sensitive understanding of the political and democratic situation of Honduras. It is important to point out that its continuity has nevertheless suffered due to issues regarding the reduction of cooperation funds caused by the withdrawal of donor countries from Honduras, and the reduction of the amounts earmarked for these efforts due to donors' national crises. It should also be noted, that the 2009 coup led to the temporal suspension of funding to the Honduran government, while funding for civil society was maintained. Another issue facing consistency, has to do with the variety of the programming periods of European cooperating partners which affects continuity and the adjustment to any national political changes, especially a change of administration. For example, Germany has two-year cycles, Spain adopts five years periods, while the EU has seven-year programmes.

Relevance and impact of European democracy support

European cooperation in Honduras has been perceived as balanced and credible, in part due to the absence of a clear conflict of interest or visible political calculations. Another source of credibility is the support provided to areas in which there have been possibilities to achieve some significant impact, like the security and justice sectors and support to the rule of law. This was achieved through joint efforts between the Honduran government and external donors by successfully reducing crime rates and strengthening security and justice institutions by administrative modernisation, cleaning up the police force and strengthening the skills and capabilities of judiciary operators. It is not without its criticism though, as many have questioned the absence of the necessary conditions for the continuity of cooperation in the justice sector. Many also claim the amounts of financial aid provided are insufficient to create a long lasting impact.

The implementation of the MIP (2014-2020) has generated improvements, by strengthening the national system of human rights protection (ProDerechos), increasing transparency, supporting anti-corruption efforts through the OAS-MACCIH (Organisation of American States - Mission to support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras), and providing support to civil society, the media and the political parties (EuroACT). It has also provided technical assistance to the National Registry of Persons for the implementation of election observation missions.

Other positive improvements to human rights included the creation of a Human Rights Secretariat, as well as the invitation of the Honduran government to open an office of the UN High Commissioner for Human rights. A Ministry of Human Rights has also been created which later formulated a national public policy and a National Plan on Human Rights which is still under implementation.

The support provided by the EU stood out for its focus on civil society, the strengthening of participation and the inclusion of citizens by promoting political dialogue as a peaceful mechanism for the solution to problems and pushing for the inclusion of underrepresented groups. These efforts were visible during the 2017 elections, which saw a bigger inclusion of women, indigenous people and LGBTBI members in electoral lists.

The Clean Politics Act in 2016, which was approved by the National Congress thanks to the technical assistance of the OAS, and supported partially with EU funds, has also motivated the public to demand further transparency and accountability of political party representatives and candidates.

Conclusion

Honduras is to this day still experiencing the negative outcomes of the 2009 coup d'état. The impact is present in the weakened rule of law and the fragility of government institutions, which suffer from high levels of insecurity due to organised crime. This directly affects the efficiency of aid and its sustainability, but also the credibility of cooperation efforts, a challenge that international donors need to face by providing greater support to all democracy sectors.

European cooperation boasts from a positive reputation as a result of a strong value-based moral presence and public positions at critical times. As of now, Honduras is facing growing movements of protests as a result of the accusations of corruption, and an increase in organised crime which has generated an environment of uncertainty that demands continuity for the work of the EU in the country. This positive reputation can be attributed to the successful promotion of modernisation of the National Registry of Persons, the support for strengthening the rule of law, highlighting the work of the Honduras Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and lastly, to the national and regional support provided by European governments to increase communication among political stakeholders and civil society.

Annex 3: Tunisia ¹⁸⁴

As the only sustained and peaceful democratic transition out of the 2011 wave of protests across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), many have looked at Tunisia as an example for democratic revolutions in a largely authoritarian region. Disillusionment is spreading among Tunisians, however, who have seen little progress in their socio-economic well-being and the ability of the state to deliver on its promises. In the meanwhile, EU engagement in its neighbourhood - and particularly in Tunisia - is preoccupied primarily with migration and stability, rather than political development. Tunisia is an important case for many reasons but particularly because it is a post-revolutionary country in the European neighbourhood and a state where other European interests such as migration and security figure prominently.

The Tunisian context

In January 2011, Tunisians rose up against the authoritarian regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali with demands for fundamental freedoms, human dignity, social justice and democracy. After decades of political repression, the peaceful revolution saw Tunisians demanding democratic governance and an inclusive socio-economic system. While the transition to a new political constellation was largely peaceful, it has not been easy.

Out of fear for the perils of a power vacuum, all organisations and political parties grouped together around the general Tunisian trade union (UGTT), which convened a political dialogue and process of consensus-seeking in 2012. At this time, instability and insecurity took over the country, with the rise of extremist groups and politically-motivated crime. However, civil society groupings were able to mitigate this deep political crisis and bring all stakeholders together for a new social compromise.

As one of the cornerstones of Tunisia's transition, a new constitution was put in place, in line with international human rights obligations and democratic standards. The new constitution included the creation of new independent state bodies, such as an institution for good governance and the fight against corruption, an independent electoral commission and a national human rights institute. Despite the ambitious commitments, many transitional reforms are yet to be implemented. Members of Parliament have, for instance, not yet been able to agree on the appointment of judges to the Supreme and Constitutional Court.

Democratic elections for the National Assembly were conducted in 2014 and ever since, Tunisia has been ruled by a fluctuating coalition of Islamist and secular parties. A problem of 'political nomadism' nevertheless prevails, meaning parliamentarians within and outside of the coalition regularly cross

¹⁸⁴ Abdeljaoued, I. European democracy support in Tunisia: a case study reviewing European democracy support. Forthcoming.

the floor to other parties when they benefit from doing so. This has greatly eroded trust in political parties and the party system more generally.

As Tunisians have seen unemployment, purchasing power, inflation and corruption stagnate or grow worse, disillusionment in the democratic system and the political class is widespread. This is particularly worrying in the regions of Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid - where the 2011 revolution started - which suffer from regional underdevelopment and are increasingly vulnerable to jihadist groups' recruitment. Over 8000 Tunisians have left the country to join the fight for the Islamic State, which poses an additional security threat.

Today, Tunisian democracy is at a crossroads. On the one hand, the country has put in place democratic institutions, a new modern constitution, transparent elections and a pro-active civil society. On the other hand, democracy has not delivered the inclusive socio-economic reforms and well-being Tunisians had expected. As a result, 7 out of 10 Tunisians are dissatisfied with democratic processes, and 6 out of 10 Tunisians consider Tunisia to be either a democracy with major problems, or not a democracy at all. At the same time, democracy indexes show significant openings in the democratic space following 2011, with deteriorations in civil liberties and political rights in 2017-2018.

European engagement

In the face of the previously mentioned challenges, European democracy support has failed to adequately address the issues where intervention would have been beneficial.

The EU is the largest donor to Tunisia, with financial support steadily increasing in the last decade. In fact, support under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) nearly doubled from 2015 to 2017. Out of this increasing budget, the funding dedicated to democracy is rather marginal. The largest chunk of funding is dedicated to economic growth and reforms (38%), followed by regional development (20%), governance and rule of law support (14%) and civil society and human rights support (4%) for 2017-2020. The sum of EU democracy support does not exceed 9% of total ODA to Tunisia, out of which only 12.3% is directly channelled at civil society. The EU thereby focuses on support to the judiciary, security and migration management, rather than media development, human rights, civil society, gender equality or the building of a democratic culture. The funding does not adequately reflect the challenges in these sectors of democracy support. At the same time, it is in line with the economic and security problems Tunisia grapples with.

From 2014 onwards, financial support to Tunisia increased steadily each year. The support put the focus on economic growth, border management, security issues and regional development. In 2014-2015, 15% of EU development cooperation funds to Tunisia were dedicated to democracy support, mostly for the judicial system, media, equality and civil society support. Through the more-for-more

mechanism, funding increased further those years as an incentive to continue democratic reforms. Direct civil society support also increased in this time.

EUMS have provided far more support to democracy in Tunisia, even if these amounts are still rather marginal as a share of total ODA in most cases. The most generous donors to Tunisia are France, Italy and Germany, however, only a very small share of their ODA is dedicated to democracy support: 6% of French total ODA, 2% of German total ODA and 1% of Italian total ODA. Instead, these major donors have focused on regional development, employment, water governance, agriculture and energy. As the country's most strategic partners, this does not provide financial incentives for the government to implement democratic reforms. In contrast, some of the smaller European donors provide a far more important share of their ODA to civil society and democracy support. For instance, Sweden dedicates as much as 70% of its ODA to democracy support. Overall, three sectors stand out as major recipients of European funding: security, gender equality and the judiciary.

Complementarity and consistency of European engagement

The research found that throughout the last decade, there was a disappointing lack of coordination of democracy support between European donors in Tunisia. The only forms of cooperation centred around specific sectors, like gender equality and decentralisation, but this was limited to occasional joint working groups which received little follow-up. Some stand-alone efforts were made by the EU delegation, but these also lacked follow-up. More generally, there does not seem to be a common understanding of the obstacles to democratic progress, nor a shared vision, shared priorities or coordination mechanisms. This has led to a number of project overlaps and replications.

The degree to which the EU and EUMS coordinate with local stakeholders, civil society, media and political parties was also found wanting. Civil society is not systematically involved in consultations on programmes and policy. Only some NGOs from the capital are invited to focal groups, which has unfortunately fed a dynamic of competition among CSOs.

The EU's support to democracy in Tunisia has been subject to the political winds in Europe, which steered cooperation towards migration management and security rather than sustainable change, with the exception of a brief period of ambition following the 2011 revolution.

The Jasmin Revolution surprised the EU, in particular with the vibrancy and courage of civil society. The events called for an EU response, which came with the updated European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011. As one of the principles of the document, conditionality was installed with a more-for-more mechanism for countries engaging in democratic processes. The 2011 ENP revision played with talk of *deep democracy* and explicitly set democratic reforms as one of its objectives. The amounts of funding did not, however, match the ambitious language even if there were some increases (as noted above).

This new policy was also a 180-degree shift from what came before. No conditionality was applied to the Ben Ali regime, as Europe preferred the autocratic stability over a democratic partnership at its borders. The EU even provided ample budget support to the Ben Ali regime, representing half of total EU ODA to Tunisia for 1996-2008. This reflected the EU's preoccupation with economic development and security at the time. This has greatly discredited the EU as a value-driven global actor in the eyes of Tunisian citizens.

However, the EU's rhetorical ambition on democracy regarding the neighbourhood was short-lived, as the 2015 revision of the ENP shifted the focus firmly back to economic development, security, migration and mobility as areas of support. The EU Global Strategy of 2016 then further cemented the EU's focus on stability and migration, with language on resilience, at the detriment of democracy support, which loses its priority status. This is mirrored in the national support framework for Tunisia, where only support to good governance and the rule of law remain among the priorities of financing. Democracy does remain a political priority issue.

Overall, internal EU politics and a lack of ambition in foreign policy have dictated EU and EUMS' engagement with Tunisia. While some support for democracy remained over time, democracy had to give way for stability, both prior the 2011 revolution and afterwards, once the 2015 migration surge caused a domestic fallout in Europe. Cooperation with undemocratic governments became the *modus operandi* again soon after the burst of ambition of the 2011 revolutions.

Impact and contribution

Some of the EU and EUMS' support to the democratic transition in Tunisia has been highly relevant and adequate, in that they have tackled the challenges of democratisation. Through the *more-for-more* principle, funding has also been linked to public administration reform, judiciary development, independent media and a civic culture. Within democracy support, judicial development has been the primary sector of support of the EU. Areas absent in Tunisia are support to a political culture, citizenship, democratic participatory processes, the political party system and local governance. The lack of support on these key pillars of democracy stands in sharp contrast with the prioritisation of short-term interests of security and stability by most EUMS and the EU.

When assessing the overall impact of European democracy support in Tunisia, a mixed picture emerges. On the one hand, Tunisia has benefited from hundreds of multi-sectoral, multi-actor programmes, primarily to economic development and governance. On the other hand, the mediocre results in the field of democracy and human rights point at an inefficient usage of funding that missed its focus with a relatively small budget. Even the justice sector, which benefited from a large majority of democracy support funding, still suffers from the same weaknesses as before and has had no spillover effect on the quality of democratic processes. Gender equality - the second priority of

democracy support to Tunisia - similarly did not reap any substantial results, even if it probably too early to draw definitive conclusions. The same assessment can be made for media development support, despite great efforts by the EU and EUMS. In the meantime, security sector support has arguably made an impact in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of the security sector in controlling terrorist risks and lowering crime rates.

Enhancing the impact on democracy in Tunisia would require shifting the focus from economic development and security cooperation, to democracy support. Lowering democracy on the agenda comes with a lot of risks, especially in view of the growing disillusionment with democracy among Tunisians. The limited internalisation of democratic values creates a long-term risk for political processes, including the disengagement of civil society, dwindling citizen participation and negative perceptions of democratic processes.

Conclusion

In sum, some progress has been made in Tunisia's democratic processes, including through the development of a progressive constitution, the conduct of elections, the creation of new independent institutions and enhanced pluralism. The EU and EUMS have supported Tunisia in these reforms, in particularly through judiciary development. However, the progress has stagnated and a number of critical cornerstones necessary for democracy - such as an independent judiciary and media, and the consolidation of the rule of law - are yet to develop. Many Tunisians are disenchanted with the lack of progress, and as a result many are already turning their back on elections, political parties and the state more generally. Compromise can still be found among different Tunisian political voices.

The current and past EU strategy for engaging with Tunisia, particularly through the ENP, is inadequate for supporting the durable and stable progress Tunisians want. Democracy has made way for a focus on stability, embellished through the language of resilience. At the same time, Tunisians are becoming increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with both the EU and democracy itself, creating new security and stability threats.

Annex 4: Zimbabwe ¹⁸⁵

History & state of democracy in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has, since its independence in 1980, been led by the same political party: the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) led by President Robert Mugabe up until 2017. The formation of the opposition party, known as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), by a range of civil society groups around the turn of the century led to a new era of opposition and competition in the country.

The outcomes of successive elections, parliamentary and presidential, during the period from 2000 to 2008, were highly contested and marked by gross human rights violations and election irregularities. The elections of 2008 took place during the height of Zimbabwe's economic crisis, which meant that the political landscape was tense. The Movement for Democratic Change - Tsvangirai (MDC-T), a splinter group of the former MDC, had won but not with a clear majority, which was not enough to secure an outright first round victory. The resulting run-off was marred by violence against opposition leaders and supporters which led Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC-T leader, to withdraw.

As Tsvangirai withdrew, Mugabe retained power in the face of widespread international condemnation. As a result, a Global Political Agreement (GPA) was negotiated under the mediation of South Africa, which led to the formation of a coalition government. The resulting Government of National Unity (GNU) was an important shift in Zimbabwe's history, as it forced political parties to engage and jointly govern the country. During these years, the GNU managed to ensure political and economic stability, and the formulation of a new constitution approved in a referendum in 2013. However, through its prolonged control over the security and military sectors, ZANU-PF constrained the opening up of key democratic spaces. The 2013 elections were won by ZANU-PF again, though electoral observers agreed that it did not meet international standards on free and fair elections because of the presence of forms of subtle intimidation and violence like the politicisation of food aid. The 2013 elections marked the end of the coalition government and were followed by a political landscape that was mostly dominated by intense factionalism within ZANU-PF, which culminated in a military intervention in November 2017 causing massive protests that ultimately led Mugabe to resign.

The run-up to the 2018 elections was characterised by a peaceful environment, as noted by most election observers, who also pointed at the opening of space and the ability of the opposition to campaign freely. Despite this, most international election observers concluded that the elections were not in accordance with international standards as the politics of fear still played a role, and eventually repression was felt again as election protesters were discriminately shot at by the Army

¹⁸⁵ Knoppert, H., *European democracy support in Zimbabwe: a case study reviewing European democracy support*. 2019. Available [here](#).

protesting the results. In the end, ZANU-PF's Emmerson Mnangagwa, was sworn in as President and he soon elected a new Cabinet and appointed a number of army generals to government, which the opposition and civil society saw as an attempt to militarise the state. This fear became a reality when in January 2019, Zimbabwean security forces used disproportionate violence in response to widespread protests linked to the continued economic crisis. The human rights violations were believed to be the worst in a decade and the violent crackdown on both opposition and civil society was also a major setback in European re-engagement efforts.

European engagement with Zimbabwe

Ever since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the EU and its member states have been providing development assistance to Zimbabwe. The adoption of European restrictive measures (a form of sanctions) in 2002, following the expulsion of the head of the EU's electoral monitoring team, saw a reorientation of programmes which mainly focused on social sectors such as education and health, and on civil society support. The most significant shift in Europe's approach and positioning towards Zimbabwe came after the 2013 elections. The outcomes of the elections and the resulting dissolution of the GNU led to a period of reorientation of European policy and support, which many respondents indicated resulted in a key turning point in European relations with Zimbabwe.

The number of donors in Zimbabwe shrank, as did the budgets and portfolio of most remaining European donors. Another important heritage from this period that continues to play an important factor in European policy discussions was the Fast-Track Land-Reform Program which ZANU-PF initiated shortly after the defeat in the constitutional referendum in 2000. A large number of white farmers, including several European farmers, were forced off their land together with their workers. These evictions were often violent and occurred without any form of compensation. The issue of compensation continues to influence engagement between European countries and Zimbabwe.

Mugabe's removal brought Zimbabwe back on the agenda of many international actors, with several high-level delegations from European countries visiting Zimbabwe in the months after Mugabe's departure. There was a clear sense of hope Mnangagwa could change the country's course of history, leading to a clear willingness to assist Zimbabwe in its envisaged transition. This hope was fed by Mnangagwa's public remarks in which he outlined his vision for Zimbabwe, describing his new government as 'the new dispensation', which was 'open for business' and promoting democracy. That the EU was invited to send an EOM for the first time in sixteen years further testified to this change.

Complementarity and consistency of European engagement

EU member states with a presence in Zimbabwe meet every two weeks in a Heads of Mission meeting under the coordination of the EU Delegation in Zimbabwe. EU member states also have thematic coordination groups, for example on human rights, elections and development assistance. After 2013

differences among EU member states, mainly about how to support and engage with the Zimbabwean government started coming to light. Moreover, some EU member states and/or donors were hesitant to coordinate with countries that were in a different stage of engagement affecting the complementarity of support. Coordinating with the UN was also made harder because of alleged conflict of interest, as UN bodies were dependant on funding and the willingness of the government of Zimbabwe to cooperate and be allowed to work, therefore making it harder for them to discuss sensitive topics. Nevertheless, in the post-Mugabe era, the EU managed to have its member states rally around the EU EOM as a guideline for engagement.

Next to assessing the coordination in Zimbabwe, it is also relevant to look at coordination among the EU institutions in Brussels and between EUMS embassies and their respective headquarters in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The political engagement and discussions under the re-engagement agenda (after 2013) did not always seem to correspond with the programmatic support provided. Sometimes, there also seemed to be different opinions between embassies and headquarters, with the latter making decisions that did not necessarily always reflect the thinking within the diplomatic corps. In general, it can be said that there was quite a mixed picture in terms of donor coordination. It is clear though that there was not an all-encompassing structured coordination. It therefore seems there is room for improvement, especially since there are relatively few donors in Zimbabwe compared to other countries.

In the first decade of this century, many European donors supported the human rights and democracy agenda in Zimbabwe. The EU and its member states, as well as international foundations and NGOs, had significant budgets for democracy support programmes. There was an emphasis on governance and human rights funding during this period, with shifts in funding mainly happening around elections. Most civil society representatives felt European donors had a clear political agenda of supporting pro-democracy actors. Funding was mostly channelled through civil society, which contributed to a vibrant civil society during this period.

In the past decade, the EU has been consistent on the need for political and economic reforms. As such, it can be said that the reform agenda has been quite a consistent element of European engagement with Zimbabwe, although the approach to achieve these reforms has been subject to significant changes. The most notable shift was the change from a focus on (large scale) support to civil society and multilateral institutions towards an agenda of re-engagement with the Zimbabwean government after the 2013 elections. This change of approach has had a lasting impact on the perception of the EU in Zimbabwe.

Relevance and impact of European democracy support

The restrictive measures in place constrained the nature of European democracy support to

Zimbabwe, as it was not eligible for a number of EU funding instruments. Support focused mostly on civil society organisations, which led to frictions and distrust with the Zimbabwean government, as the European democracy support programmes were never consulted with them. This was also one of the reasons why the government of Zimbabwe refused to have a political dialogue with the EU as agreed in Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement, the partnership agreement that guides relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP). While engaging an authoritarian government is understandable for various humanitarian, social and economic reasons and the EU Delegation in Harare made a concerted effort to ensure that funds were not misused, there is an inherent danger that providing support to an authoritarian government allows it to consolidate power. Lastly, European policy makers sometimes tended to be too focused on the realities of the day, for example when it came to the factionalism within ZANU-PF. In doing so, it appeared they sometimes lost sight of the longer term, as well as some of the continuous issues that remained unchanged.

There are several areas where European support clearly contributed to the promotion of a culture of democracy in Zimbabwe. Regarding elections and the electoral environment, the EU provided technical support to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), which for example contributed to a more robust voters roll and also led to more younger people being given the chance to vote. However, more needs to be done to support the full electoral cycle rather than focusing on the elections themselves. European assistance to Zimbabwean NGOs during the 2000s contributed to a thriving civil society that managed to mobilise support around important issues even if some cases of corruption left a stain on this era of cooperation. Significant support was provided under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) to strengthen Zimbabwe's judiciary and other justice sectors, focusing on institutional reforms and ensuring justice for all. Given the intertwining of the state and the ruling party, there is likely to be a need to work with other parties to ensure a more equitable balance in the political system in the future.

Conclusion

European support has taken place in a fluctuating political context, which made supporting Zimbabwe more challenging. Some of these challenges dealt with the set-up and structure of the funding mechanisms, which is a common challenge in other countries receiving international aid. Other challenges focused more on the complexities of providing democracy support in an authoritarian context, while Zimbabwe raised further country specific issues.

The way the funding mechanisms of the EU and other European donors are structured does not necessarily match the realities of Zimbabwean beneficiaries, who were not always able to sufficiently respond to the rapidly fluctuating context. Despite the support provided by European democracy support donors, and the positive impact of certain interventions, there is general agreement that there is still a lot that needs to be done in terms of improving the democratic culture and processes

in Zimbabwe. Shaping future European democracy support programmes will be a complicated exercise that requires careful analysis and one of the key lessons of the past period seems the necessity to avoid too singular an orientation and approach.

Given the developments in Zimbabwe in January 2019, with the violent crackdown of Zimbabwe's security forces and the massive human rights violations, it seems likely that another period of reorientation of engagement and support lies ahead. It is clear that the authoritarian system of governance that characterised the Mugabe era is still mostly in place, and the increased militarisation of the state apparatus is worrying. This will require a careful balancing act of European actors. Still, Zimbabwe provides a clear-cut example of the problems of poor accountability, limited participation, restrictions on human rights and endemic state capture over the past 20 years. The social and economic situation in the country has deteriorated to a depressing and distressing degree as a result of the authoritarian system that has been constructed by Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

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