



\* TOGETHER TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY \*

# WHAT THE EU SHOULD DO FOR DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IN AFRICA

Ten Proposals for a New Strategic Initiative in Times of Polarisation

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The EU lacks sound strategic and coherent approaches to support and protect democracy in sub-Saharan Africa



The EU's overall cooperation with African partners needs to become more political



The study recommends concrete actions for a reform of the EU's democracy support in sub-Saharan Africa





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Ten Proposals for a New Strategic Initiative  
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In Kooperation mit:

d.i.e

Deutsches Institut für  
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development  
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# Contents

	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	2
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	4
<b>2</b>	<b>REASONS FOR EU SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA</b>	6
	2.1 Demand-driven Motivations: Societal Demands for Democracy in Africa and Regional Democracy Norms .....	6
	2.2 Instrumental Motivations: Peace and Sustainable Development Through Democracy Support .....	7
	2.3 Geostrategic Motivations: Seeking Partners that Share the Same Values For International Cooperation .....	9
<b>3</b>	<b>EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IN AFRICA</b>	11
	3.1 The Substance of EU Democracy Support .....	11
	3.2 Strategic Approach and Instruments: How Does the EU Support Democracy? .....	17
	3.3 What Do We Know About the Effectiveness of EU Democracy Support? .....	21
	3.4 Case Study Tanzania: EU Democracy Support in Situations of »Shrinking Space« for Democratic Freedoms .....	21
	3.5 Conclusions: Critical Assessment of EU Democracy Support .....	24
<b>4</b>	<b>WHAT NEXT? TEN PROPOSALS FOR EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT TO AFRICA IN TIMES OF POLARISATION</b>	25
	References .....	31
	List of Abbreviations .....	34
	List of Figures .....	35
	List of Tables .....	35
	List of Boxes .....	35

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Future cooperation with African societies will have important implications for the European Union (EU)'s political and economic position in the world. We argue that setting democracy as a core principle of the EU's foreign relations can contribute to sustainable development in Africa and beyond. Furthermore, it is in the EU's own economic, security and political interests, as we will outline in this paper.

Democracy and its support have become an increasingly prominent objective in the engagement of the EU institutions and certain member states with African countries since the early 1990s. While the von der Leyen Commission emphasises the need to strengthen democracy within the EU and external relations, democracy does not take a prominent place on the reform agenda for repositioning Europe in the world and in Africa. This mismatch in ambition and strategic action is partly driven by the fact that the democracy agenda has recently come under pressure. A broad range of political and economic dynamics within as well as outside Europe challenge democracy and its supporters: these include the rise of non-democratic countries such as China, challenges to democracy within the EU, and global autocratisation trends, which include African countries. While posing new challenges the EU needs to react to, these trends also reinforce the importance of continued support and the protection of democracy abroad.

Against this background, the objective of this paper is to make proposals for reforming the EU's democracy support in sub-Saharan Africa. The paper starts by identifying and reflecting on three reasons for the EU to continue and even strengthen its support for democracy in sub-Saharan Africa: strong regional democracy norms and broad societal demands for democracy in Africa; the influence democracy has on sustainable development and peace; and, seeking like-minded partners for international cooperation within the context of global competition over regime types.

An analysis of how the EU's support for democracy and human rights in sub-Saharan Africa has developed over the last decades in terms of its understanding of democracy

support as well as its substance are at the core of this paper. This discussion builds on an in-depth analysis of the EU's policy documents, as well as empirical data on EU democracy aid. In addition, the paper reviews existing academic literature on democracy support to summarise what we know about the EU's concept of democracy, the effectiveness of EU democracy aid and other instruments. In general, there is a lack of a strategic approach to support and protect democracy that does justice to global geostrategic shifts and to current global and regional megatrends. This implies that the EU's overall cooperation with African partners would need to become more political. Socio-economic development challenges are often still perceived as a problem of limited financial and administrative capacities rather than a result of a lack of political will, political incentives or problematic domestic politics and power structures.

Since 2002, the EU has been laying more emphasis on democracy support in its relations with African countries. However, in light of the changed context, the EU now needs to adjust its strategic approach and instruments in Africa fundamentally towards democracy support. Although the EU has developed an approach that supports political reforms through democracy aid, dialogue and positive incentives, support for intermediary institutions like the media, political parties or trade unions and support for the separation of powers (for instance, by supporting parliaments or the independence of the judiciary) has played a limited role in EU democracy support. The context conditions of EU democracy support in Africa have become more challenging and require further action by the EU. Many electoral autocracies and dominant party regimes are under pressure and have responded by restricting political space. The EU has not yet found adequate answers to address these types of problems. Moreover, the economic success of China and the resultant new geopolitical competition make the international context for EU democracy support much more difficult.

This Discussion Paper concludes with proposals on how EU democracy support could be further reformed and adapted in response to changing context conditions:

**Proposal 1:** Bring democracy support and protection to the core of EU external action and implement this strategic priority in EU foreign relations with Africa (and worldwide).

**Proposal 2:** Develop a new narrative and more strategic approach to democracy support in a geopolitical context where democracy is increasingly being undermined from within in (former) democratic countries and challenged from the outside by powerful authoritarian regimes.

**Proposal 3:** Address the impacts of demographic change, urbanisation, digitalisation and climate change on political regimes through EU democracy support.

**Proposal 4:** Invest more in intermediary organisations (media, parties, CSOs, trade unions, business councils) and in the democratic accountability of sectoral policies.

**Proposal 5:** Intensify support for civic education and launch new initiatives to strengthen transnational relations between African and European societies.

**Proposal 6:** Engage more strategically in contexts where authoritarian regimes suddenly open up or where electoral autocracies gradually close political spaces.

**Proposal 7:** Continue and deepen cooperation with African regional organisations and put more emphasis on joint learning and practices for defending democracy.

**Proposal 8:** Create a different institutional set-up that allows the EU to engage more strategically in democratic reforms.

**Proposal 9:** Increase the capacities of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) to work on democracy support.

**Proposal 10:** Develop a joint European approach towards democracy support that is sustained by all European countries.

## 1

# INTRODUCTION

Renewing and deepening the relationships between the European Union (EU) and the African continent is part of the von der Leyen Commission's priorities (European Commission, 2020). By prioritising Africa-EU relations, the Commission acknowledges the geostrategic and developmental relevance of the African continent in world politics. Future cooperation with African societies will have important implications for the EU's political and economic position in the world. So far, the debate around a new Comprehensive Strategy with Africa is focusing on the economic and social transformation of the continent (European Commission & European External Action Service, 2020). Political factors such as democracy and human rights have taken a backseat in the debates. However, making transparent what values the EU stands for and that democracy plays an important role in its foreign and development policies is part and parcel of positioning the EU in the world and in relation to Africa. We are assuming that democracy – as a core principle of the EU's foreign relations – can contribute to sustainable development in Africa and beyond and that is in the EU's own economic, security and political interests. This sounds counterintuitive in a world where democratic order is in crisis, but we will explain why.

A shift in the EU's agenda in support of democracy is currently taking place. Democracy and its support have become an increasingly prominent objective in the engagement of the EU institutions and some member states with African countries since the early 1990s. Since that time, the EU has developed a comprehensive and diverse policy framework to support democracy abroad. The most recent Council Conclusions on Democracy (Council of the European Union, October 2019) reconfirm the EU's interests in supporting democracy abroad. The new EU Commission makes »a new push for European democracy« one of six priorities for its five-year mandate (European Commission, 2020). But while the von der Leyen Commission emphasises the need to strengthen democracy within the EU and in its external relations, democracy does not take a prominent place on the reform agenda for repositioning Europe in the world and as regards Africa.

This mismatch in ambition and strategic action is partly driven by the fact that the democracy agenda has come under pressure. A broad range of political and economic

dynamics within as well as outside Europe challenge democracy and its supporters. While posing new challenges the EU needs to react to, these trends also reinforce the importance of supporting democracy abroad.

First, there are two trends that create pressure:

- Democracy is becoming part of geopolitical world politics again (Carothers, 2020). Non-democratic countries such as China, the Arab states and Russia have been increasing their economic cooperation with African governments over the last decade (Coulibaly, 2020). This trend is now accompanied by an open competition between alternative political models. Protecting democracy, gaining peoples' and political elites' support and demonstrating the comparative advantages of the EU's political model is therefore of geopolitical interest for the EU.
- Challenges to democracy within Europe have affected decision-making processes in the EU, the willingness of member states to finance external support for democracy and, most importantly, the legitimacy and credibility of EU democracy support abroad. Both trends – global competition and internal struggles for democracy within the EU – make it increasingly difficult for European and other external actors to cooperate with African governments on political reforms for inclusive and democratic governance.

Still, there are other trends that show why democratic institutions may be critical to move towards a sustainable future:

- Societal dissatisfaction with development outcomes in Africa (and Europe) has political implications. Increasing social protests in Africa, Europe and other parts of the world reflect growing social and political inequalities. These protests and inequalities often start with economic and social grievances but soon turn into open criticism against political institutions and actors (Weipert-Fenner & Wolff, 2019). Supporting inclusive, democratic institutions in Africa (and Europe) is thus crucial to curb social and political inequalities and achieve development goals such as peace or health care.

- Global and regional megatrends in Africa and Europe will further reinforce these grievances and cause gradual and disruptive changes with fundamental implications for how people live together and how to organise political order. In particular, climate change, digitalisation, urbanisation and demographic change influence political decision-making and societal participation. Democracy support in Africa is an important strategy to steer these megatrends in a »common good«-oriented way.

the presentation of first results of this paper during a workshop with EU policymakers and researchers on 9 January 2020.

Having said that, democratisation remains problematic, in practice and in theory:

- Despite a strong citizen support for democracy on the African continent, as measured by the Afrobarometer, the picture of democratisation has remained mixed since 1990. Whereas some African countries have become more democratic, in others autocratisation and shrinking space for public debate has prevailed or even deepened (V-Dem, 2020). This makes it more difficult for the EU to support domestic actors that are striving for democratic reforms and necessitates a flexible approach, which draws on a variety of instruments to support and protect democracy.

This paper proposes reforms for EU democracy support in Africa<sup>1</sup> in times of fundamental global change. It seeks to inform the positioning of the EU in the world and debates about the »Comprehensive Strategy with Africa«. It is organised in three parts. The first part reflects on reasons for the EU to continue and even strengthen its support for democracy in sub-Saharan Africa. The second part analyses how the EU's support for democracy and human rights in sub-Saharan Africa has developed over the last decade in terms of its understanding of democracy support as well as its substance (What does the EU support?). It assesses the EU's approaches and instruments and summarises the main findings in the academic literature on the effectiveness of EU support (How does the EU support democracy and with what effect?). A short case study of Tanzania illustrates what, how and with what effect the EU supports democracy in a specific context. The third and last part concludes with ten proposals on how EU democracy support could be further reformed and adapted in light of the changed context conditions.

The empirical analysis builds on EU official documents,<sup>2</sup> data on EU democracy aid as well as academic literature on the forms and effects on EU democracy support. In addition, it draws on semi-structured interviews with EU policymakers and civil society organisations (CSOs) conducted in Brussels in September 2019. It also considers comments on

<sup>1</sup> We use the geographic definition of the World Bank due to data availability. We, thus, use the terms »Africa« and »sub-Saharan Africa« interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Relevant EU communications, the EU's annual human rights reports, policy and programming documents related to the EU's financing instruments, the EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights.

## 2

## REASONS FOR EU SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

At a time when democracy is coming increasingly under pressure worldwide, it is important to reflect on *why* the EU should engage in supporting democracy in Africa. There are three main sets of reasons for the EU to promote democracy in Africa: First, there are demand-driven and norm-based reasons that resonate with codified regional African norms and strong demands for democracy by citizens on that continent. Second, there are instrumental motives for supporting democracy and human rights as an indirect means to foster other development goals. Support for democratic reforms is not only a question of the EU's values and of whether the EU is a normative power; it can contribute to sustainable development in Africa and beyond and is in the EU's own economic, security and political interests. Third, global illiberal dynamics provide reasons why it is in Africa's and Europe's geostrategic interests to support democracy in Africa.

### 2.1 DEMAND-DRIVEN MOTIVATIONS: SOCIETAL DEMANDS FOR DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY NORMS

Shared values facilitate inter- and transnational cooperation and are entry points for democracy support and protection. Two such general entry points exist: First, at a government-to-government level, where African leaders have agreed on a set of Pan-African democratic norms for African states and societies. Second, at a societal level, where Africans are raising their voices to demand that democracy be supported and protected. In the following, we provide evidence as to where Africa stands with regard to continental democracy norms and societal demands for democracy.

#### PAN-AFRICAN LEVEL: STRONG REGIONAL DEMOCRACY NORMS

There are strong Pan-African norms of democracy. They are often linked to functional expectations such as democracy as a precondition for peace and development. Some African regional organisations strongly commit to these norms. Although there is still a gap in implementing such norms comprehensively, the African Union (AU) and African regional organisations have developed a routine in protecting de-

mocracies during unconstitutional changes of government on the continent (Leininger, 2015; Wiebusch, Aniekwe, Oette, & Vandeginste, 2019). The AU has introduced democratic norms as guiding principles for state organisation and for the mandate of the AU in its Charter (AU, 2000) and the African Democracy Charter. In 2007, the Charter set a universal framework for protecting and pro-actively promoting democracy on the African continent; it was ratified in 2012 (Glen, 2012). At the regional level, normative commitments to democratic standards vary. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – the African first mover in setting regional democratic norms – spearheads democratic norm-building. While the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has taken up some of the democratic norms, in particular women's rights, other regional organisations in Central, North and East Africa fall behind when it comes to supporting democratic norm-building and promotion on the continent.

Even though not all African regional organisations are equally committed to democratic norms, international regional democracy regimes are a legal and normative starting point for democracy support and protection in Africa (AU [African Union], 2019).

#### SOCIETAL LEVEL: HIGH DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY

The majority of African citizens support democracy. The most recent survey data of Afrobarometer indicates a continuous preference for democracy (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). For instance, when asked for their regime preference, more than two-thirds of Africans (68 per cent) prefer democracy over other forms of political regimes and (72 per cent) reject autocracy and one-man-rule (78 per cent). In general, where political regimes are free enough to allow open surveys, people want democracy. Given the global rise of authoritarianism, it is important to note that 53 per cent of the respondents think that it is more important to have an accountable than an efficient government – an increase of 8 per cent since 2011.

At the same time, most Africans perceive that their political elites are failing to deliver and govern democratically. This perception matches the development of political regimes



on the continent. By now, the global downwards trend of democratisation is not stopping in Africa. While some countries continue to remain democratic, others have become less liberal, politically polarised or remain autocratic. Figure 1 shows that only one-third of the African population lives in liberal and electoral democracies. While the latter often face problems in the full provision of civic and liberal rights such as the right to associate or religious freedom, they do have frequent free and fair elections. However, the majority of Africans still live in electoral autocracies, that is, countries with mostly free and fair elections but severe problems with regard to civic and political rights such as media freedom and freedom of speech.

These strong demands for democracy have important implications for EU policies towards Africa. Development co-operation is most effective if it supports endogenously driven developments – in Africa as well as in other world regions. In order to spend its funds effectively, it is important that democracy aid contributes to ongoing political, economic and social reform processes instead of imposing ideas and blueprints from the outside. Given the strong demand for democracy in African societies together with a

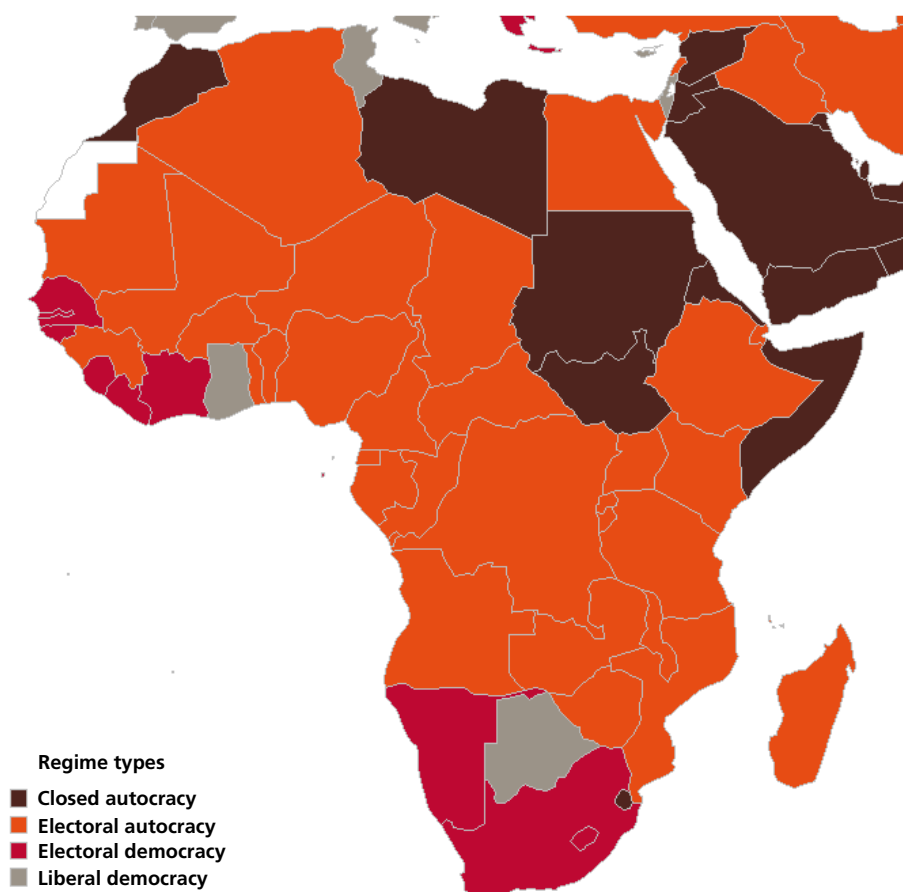
limited supply of supply, it is thus in the EU's normative and functional interests to acknowledge and foster democratisation in Africa.

In addition, support for democracy is most effective where the regime has already reached a minimum level of democracy. In these cases, democracy support can make a difference, ally with democrats, and foster the democratisation of institutions. Given the high number of countries and populations that are at a turning point to either more autocracy or more democracy (for instance, Ethiopia, Benin, Mozambique, Sudan or Tanzania), it is in the EU's interest to invest in more democratisation – and to do so now.

## 2.2 INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATIONS: PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

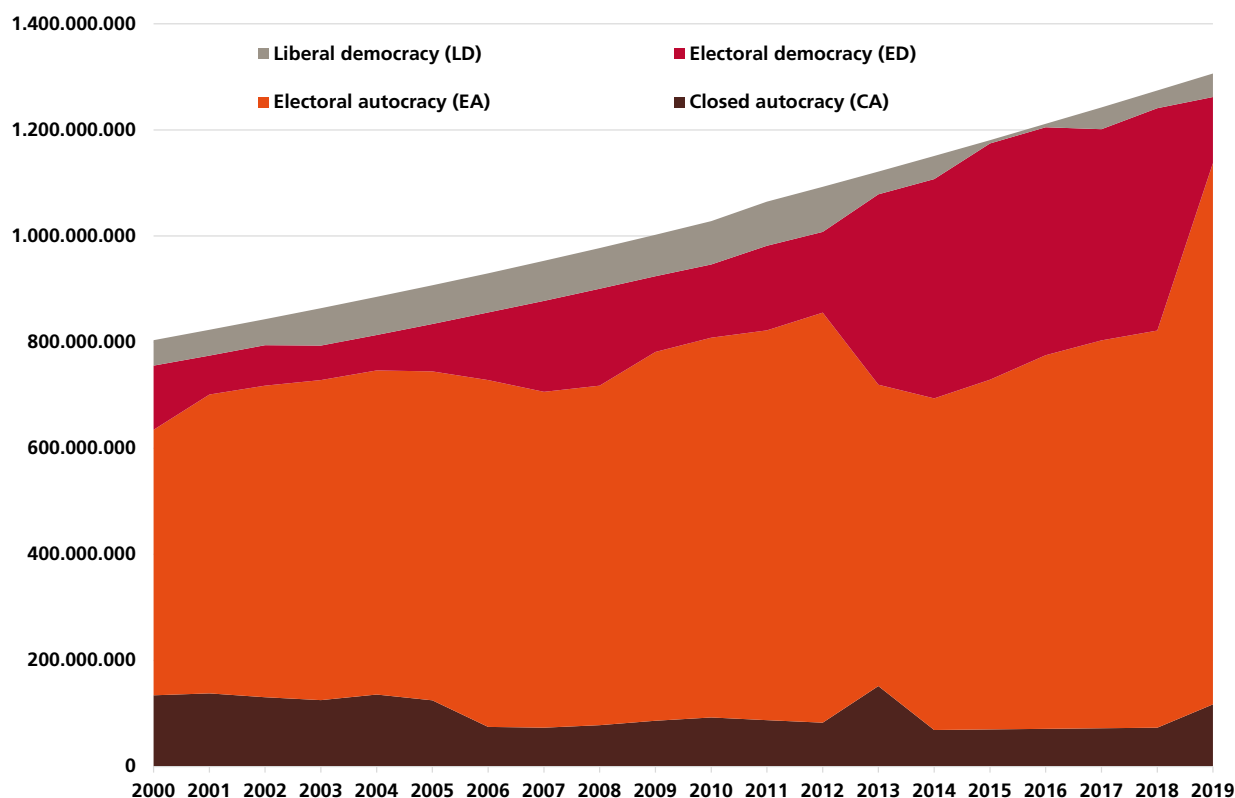
There is a joint interest of the EU and African societies – not necessarily of all political and economic elites – to foster a structural transformation to sustainable development as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Figure 1a  
Regime types in Africa (2018), population weighted



Source: World Bank data.

Figure 1b  
Regime types in Africa (2018), population weighted (continuation)



Source: Authors, based on V-Dem data of 2019

Democracy can be an instrumental or functional means to achieve other development goals such as inclusive and sustainable economic development and peace.

Before discussing research on democracy's socio-economic performance and instrumental value, there is a need for two disclaimers. First, previous research on the relationship between democracy and sustainable development or peace and stability has not sufficiently taken into account the impact of megatrends such as urbanisation, demographic change, digitalisation and climate change. These trends will fundamentally affect African societies in the years to come and we know little on how democracies (and autocracies) will be able to deal with these challenges.

Second, studies on the performance of political regimes vary as regards their specific questions, empirical scale, concepts and methodology. They thus yield mixed results although we can claim in general that if autocracy were an economic and social success story, many African societies would be well-off. However, as a nuanced and detailed picture would go beyond the scope of this study, we will restrict our efforts to providing a first glance of the most important research findings.

**Economic growth:** Democratic regimes are associated with higher economic growth in the long run. It has been strongly debated whether a causal relationship links regime type and economic development and, if so, whether

democracies have an advantage or disadvantage. The successful economic performance of China has fuelled perceptions that autocratic regimes might actually be better in fostering economic growth. However, other studies concur that, in the long term, democracies are more conducive to economic growth (Acemoglu, Naidu, Restrepo, & Robinson, 2019; Kaufmann & Kraay, 2002; Masaki & Van de Walle, 2014). Kaufmann and Kraay (2002) show that good governance contributes to higher per capita incomes. Several recent cross-country studies that have focused specifically on the African continent demonstrate that democracy is positively associated with economic growth (Doces, 2019; Masaki & van de Walle, 2014). Although growth is an important precondition for achieving development goals such as the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), it does not automatically lead to a better provision of services or less poverty: for distributing income that has been generated by economic growth, the political regime of a country is critical.

**Public goods:** Strong evidence exists that democracies provide more public goods compared to authoritarian regimes, independent of the level of economic development (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003; Deacon, 2009; Doces, 2019; Lake & Baum, 2001). A recent cross-country analysis of sub-Saharan Africa indicates that democratic governments are more likely to use expenditure for the public instead of private good and, as a consequence, provide better services such as education (Doces,

2019). Other studies show that infant mortality rates and the risk of famines (even during periods of economic crisis) are lower in democratic regimes (Burchi, 2011; McGuire, 2013). Over time, population health highly correlates with electoral democracy. Where electoral quality has reached a certain level, health performance improves (Wang, Mechkova & Andersson, 2019). Moreover, environmental and climate policies can be more successful in democratic regimes. For instance, more studies find evidence that democracies perform better in countering the loss of biodiversity than autocracies (Rydén et al., 2019).

**Peace and stability:** Empirical evidence and theoretical arguments indicate that democracies are more stable and less likely to experience violent conflict (Bartusevicius & Skaaning, 2018; Hegre, 2014; Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, & Gleditsch, 2001; Russett & Oneal, 2001). In contrast to autocracies, democracies provide transparent and open mechanisms to compete for, allocate but also withdraw political power peacefully. Moreover, democratic institutions are more inclusive and can reduce grievances caused by exclusion, marginalisation or repression. Studies show furthermore that higher levels of democratic governance reduce the risk of conflict (Hegre & Nygård, 2015; Walter, 2015). While periods of regime change exhibit a higher risk of instability (Cederman, Hug, & Krebs, 2010; Hegre et al., 2001), external support for democracy can reduce this risk significantly (Savun & Tirone, 2011). Even in fragile contexts, democracy support can strengthen peace (Fiedler, Grävingholt, Leininger, & Mross, 2019; Mross, 2019a, b). Previous research had argued for »sequencing« external support: donors should first promote stability and only in the medium-term support democratisation. More recent research, however, has made the case for supporting democratisation alongside stability in post-conflict societies (Fiedler, Grävingholt, Leininger, & Mross, 2019; Mross, 2019c; Carothers, 2007; Cheeseman, 2015; Mross, 2019a). Therefore, the EU should provide democracy support – especially in democratising contexts – also with a view of fostering peace and improving the provision of public goods.

## 2.3 GEOSTRATEGIC MOTIVATIONS: SEEKING PARTNERS THAT SHARE THE SAME VALUES FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Support for democracy in Africa is of geopolitical relevance. Increasing and closer economic cooperation with Africa by a multitude of international actors has created the perception of an increasing geopolitical competition on the continent (Coulibaly, 2020). Stronger engagement on the continent by non-democratic powers such as China, Russia or the Arab states has not only increased economic competition over African resources but has also fostered competition over models of political regimes. Some of these actors – in particular China, Russia and the Arab states – contest democracy as an effective political model. In recent years, various developments have contributed to questioning the performance of democracy, for instance,

### Box 1

#### Diverging motivations for a functional approach in the EU and Africa

The EU and African regional organisations have similar functional motivations in supporting democracy. For both, positive correlations between poverty reduction and democracy are an important factor. For both, support for democracy hinges on the assumption that democracies provide better services and better public goods to their citizens. The AU, ECOWAS and SADC link democracy to development goals. In its preamble and various articles, the AU states that it is its explicit goal to make Africa more democratic; here, democracy is clearly labelled as a precondition of stability, peace and economic prosperity. Decisions taken by the African Peace and Security Council (PSC) follow the same pattern and often justify interventions or peace missions through this line of argument.

However, the EU's and African regional organisations' functional motivation for fostering democracy also vary: While the AU has a clear positive commitment to developing the continent and its societies as such, the EU has been emphasising the need to reduce the negative externalities of conflict or poverty that are likely to affect the EU. In particular, the migration flow from Africa to Europe since 2015 has fuelled this narrative. This so-called »migration narrative« has not been well received by African political leaders and might hamper EU efforts to support democracy on the continent.

the economic crisis within the EU (and the United States); and the economic success of China and other authoritarian regimes such as Rwanda or Vietnam. In addition, large-scale initiatives to foster Chinese culture and values or to counter democratic practices are influencing the attitudes and value orientations of African populations and elites. Consequently, external actors' competition in Africa is no longer purely economic: it is also becoming more and more political.

At the same time, a global downwards trend in democratisation is accompanying this global trend in international de-legitimisation of democratic norms and practices. Since the majority of Africans still live in electoral autocracies (see Figure 1), the question of whether democracy or autocracy are perceived as better suited to fostering socio-economic development on the continent likewise have obvious implications for democracy on a global scale.

Given the current global and regional competition as well as regime dynamics, retaining democracy high on the EU foreign and development agenda in Africa should be of major geostrategic interest to the EU (see also Godfrey & Youngs, 2019). In this sense, EU support for democracy in Africa can become an important policy to counter the global rise of illiberal regimes. Firstly, gaining support by African citizens for democratic values is important for the future international cooperation of the EU. In particular, those who are young today will lead their countries tomorrow. Gaining their support for democratic values will facilitate cooperation in the future. In this sense, therefore, support for and protection of democracy constitute an investment in future cooperation in various different policy fields.

Secondly, if Africans were to favour autocracy over democracy in the future, the global liberal order would be likely to deteriorate further. Hence, democracy support is a contribution towards protecting a rules-based global order.



## 3

## EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IN AFRICA

This section focuses on the analysis of EU democracy support in Africa. It addresses the substance of the EU's democracy support («What is supported?»), strategies and instruments («How does the EU support democracy?») and gives insights into the effectiveness of EU democracy support («Does it work?»). An exemplary empirical case study illustrates EU democracy support. The section concludes with a critical assessment of EU democracy support in Africa.

### 3.1 THE SUBSTANCE OF EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

What is the substance of democracy support by the EU? What is the EU's understanding of democracy that should be supported abroad? Which type of democracy does the EU support through its democracy aid? In order to answer these questions, we analyse key EU policy documents that provide insights into the EU's general understanding of democracy support, we assess the operational level and the allocation of EU democracy aid funds, and we take into consideration relevant academic literature. In sum, this provides insights into how consistently the EU applies its concept of democracy in EU support at a country level. However, based on previous studies and our own field research, we are aware that the various different stages of democracy support (from concept to implementation) are not always consistent. For instance, even if general EU policy documents highlight the importance of accountability, EU delegations do not necessarily apply this as a policy priority on the ground.

#### EU POLICY DOCUMENTS

Support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law have been guiding objectives in the EU's external relations since the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992.<sup>3</sup> Overall, understandings of democracy have not changed substantially since 2000 (for an overview see Annex 1). The EU has aimed at maintaining a rather broad understanding of democracy in order to avoid a blueprint. A crucial element of

the EU's definition is a rights-based understanding of democracy where the rule of law is a core element of EU democracy support. A change from a more institutional understanding with a strong focus on political institutions and the rule of law to a strengthening of state-society relations as well as participation and representation as main principles of democracy can be observed after 2005. At the same time, the concept of «good governance» has become less relevant in most documents since the mid-2000s.

While human rights and the rule of law have been relevant for all definitions of democracy in EU documents from 2009 to 2019, the EU does not provide consistent guidance on how these concepts relate to each other. In particular, the EU understands that human rights and democracy are inextricably linked. The EU Strategic Framework and Action Plans on Human Rights (2012) and the Strategic Framework for Democracy and Human Rights (2015–2019) lay a stronger emphasis on human rights than on democracy, which is – explicitly or implicitly – seen rather as a means to guarantee the protection and promotion of human rights.

Although democracy – according to all EU documents – is a value in itself, the scope of this value varies. While it was conceived as a «universal value» in the Council Conclusions of 2009, the Global Strategy calls it an «intrinsic value» of the EU while the Council Conclusions on Democracy of 2019 see the value of democracy as a global and universal public good. Apart from describing democracy as being an important value in itself, the documents also reveal an instrumental perspective on democracy as a means to achieve specific policy goals, in particular sustainable development and peace (Cotonou Agreement, 2000; European Commission, 2017; Global Strategy, 2016).

#### OPERATIONAL LEVEL: ALLOCATION OF FUNDING IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

A closer look at the EU's democracy aid disbursements in sub-Saharan Africa since the early 2000s shows that the substance of EU support has also changed slightly over time. Over the last decade, support to improve public financial management (including domestic revenue mobili-

<sup>3</sup> Earlier academic assessments of the EU's notion of democracy yield similar results as outlined in this section (compare Börzel & Risse, 2009; Wetzel & Orbie, 2011).

sation) has gained more weight, as has support for decentralisation. Support for government capacities (which includes support for public sector policy and administration management) was reduced slightly after 2008 in both absolute and relative terms. Overall, support geared towards government effectiveness (decentralisation, financial management, government capacities) and democratic qualities (focusing on pluralism, such as elections, legislatures, media, civil society and human rights) are roughly equally distributed, with the former category dominating slightly. The balance depends on support for legal and judicial development, which can serve to strengthen checks and balances on the executive by promoting an independent judiciary, but can also foster government capacities, for instance by providing support for the infrastructure of courts.

Support for elections is an important aspect in the EU's democracy support, but it has declined in relative and absolute volumes (see Figures 2 and 3 and Box 2). Clearly, the EU's democracy support goes beyond elections. The EU has also placed emphasis on civil society organisations over the last decade, and to a lesser extent on human rights. The EU engages with parliaments, the media and political parties, but only to a limited extent, as can be seen from Figure 3. Moreover, EU support in that area focuses on capacity-building for individual democratic institutions (for instance, human rights commissions or an ombudsman) rather than on the systemic political and institutional context in which these organisations operate (for instance, relations between the executive and legislative or intermediary institutions such as political parties). It puts little emphasis on horizontal accountability and the separation of powers (Wetzel & Orbie, 2011).

Limited support for parliaments can partly be explained by the EU's cooperation structures: when negotiating and programming its development aid funds, the EU mainly engages with governments. Since 2014, the European Parliament (EP) has developed a more comprehensive approach to democracy support and to cooperating with other parliaments. Given the EP's small budget to work on inter-parliamentary exchanges, the focus is on a very limited number of parliaments, mostly in the neighbourhood. In Africa, the EP maintains regular exchange with the Pan-African Parliament along with some parliaments in countries where the EP has participated in EOMs, complementing assistance provided through the EIDHR.

For some time, the EU has been reluctant to engage with political parties as the EU is supposed to be non-partisan, and support for political parties is politically sensitive (even if provided to all and not just one or two parties). Some EU member states, however, are very active in this field. The German political foundations, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) maintain close cooperation with both ruling and opposition parties. As dominant party systems in sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly coming under pressure and party support from China and other sources becomes more relevant, the EU has recently start-

#### Box 2

##### **EU election observation mission: research evidence and recent trends**

One important aspect in EU democracy support is election observation. The EU had conducted 163 election observation missions (EOM) by 2019, most of them in Africa. Existing research largely finds that election observation efforts have a positive effect on democratic governance in that they can improve the quality of the elections observed as well as of future elections (Donno, 2013; Kelley, 2012). Hyde and Marinov (2014) find that election monitoring increases the likelihood of protests and argue that it can improve democratic quality in the longer term by disclosing information about fraud, which can help to mobilise protests against such behaviour. However, research also indicates that the presence of election observers increases the chances of election boycotts (Beaulieu & Hyde, 2009) and one recent study finds that international condemnation of elections increases the risk of post-electoral violence (von Borzyskowski, 2019). Thus, while election monitoring is an important and valuable instrument, it needs to be embedded in other efforts to improve the quality of democratic institutions and procedures.

As elections have become more institutionalised and the democratic quality of the election process has generally improved over time, the EU has recently started to adjust its approach to election observation (Interviews, September 2019). A report by the European Court of Auditors in 2017 criticised that EOMs ended with the presentation of the final report and recommendations of the EOM to the national government and relevant institutions, rather than adopting a long-term approach. To address this criticism, the EU has started to conduct follow-up missions where the EU analyses whether progress has been made towards the implementation of the recommendations from the EOM. In addition, given the growing role of social media, EOMs now make more efforts to likewise take into consideration online debates and campaigns. EOMs are also more strongly complemented by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) assistance for elections while findings from the EOM are more systematically taken into consideration within political dialogue with the partner governments (Interviews, September 2019).

ed to enhance its engagement with political parties. However, this is still in its beginnings and not yet reflected in the allocation of funds.

The EU engages with African governments on the legal and institutional framework guaranteeing the freedom of information and public speech. Press and media laws, for instance, are discussed during political dialogue meetings. Yet, the EU provides very limited direct financial support for the media. On the other hand, the EU has put a strong focus on human rights. Within the EU's policies, support for human rights has received special attention. The Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights, for example, gives prominence to human rights and entails only a few objectives targeted specifically at supporting democracy. The EIDHR has many more measures aimed at supporting human rights rather than democratic institutions. Support for human rights is facilitated by the strong international frame-

Figure 2  
Sub-components of EU democracy support over time to sub-Saharan Africa

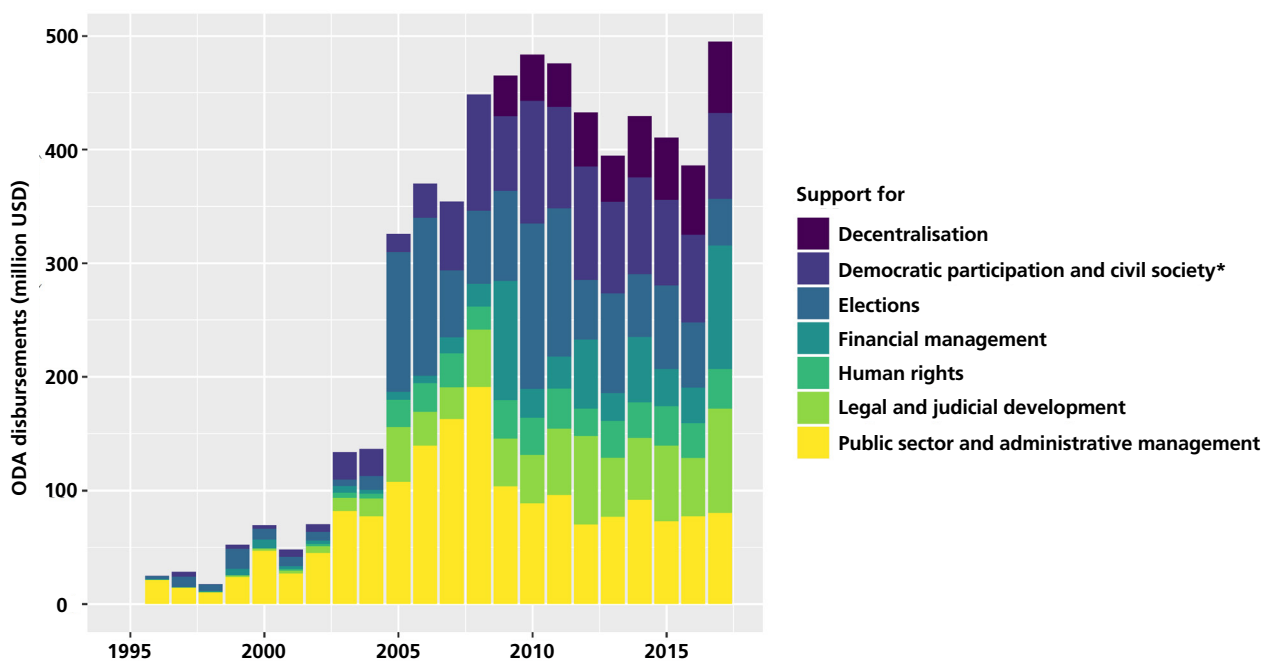
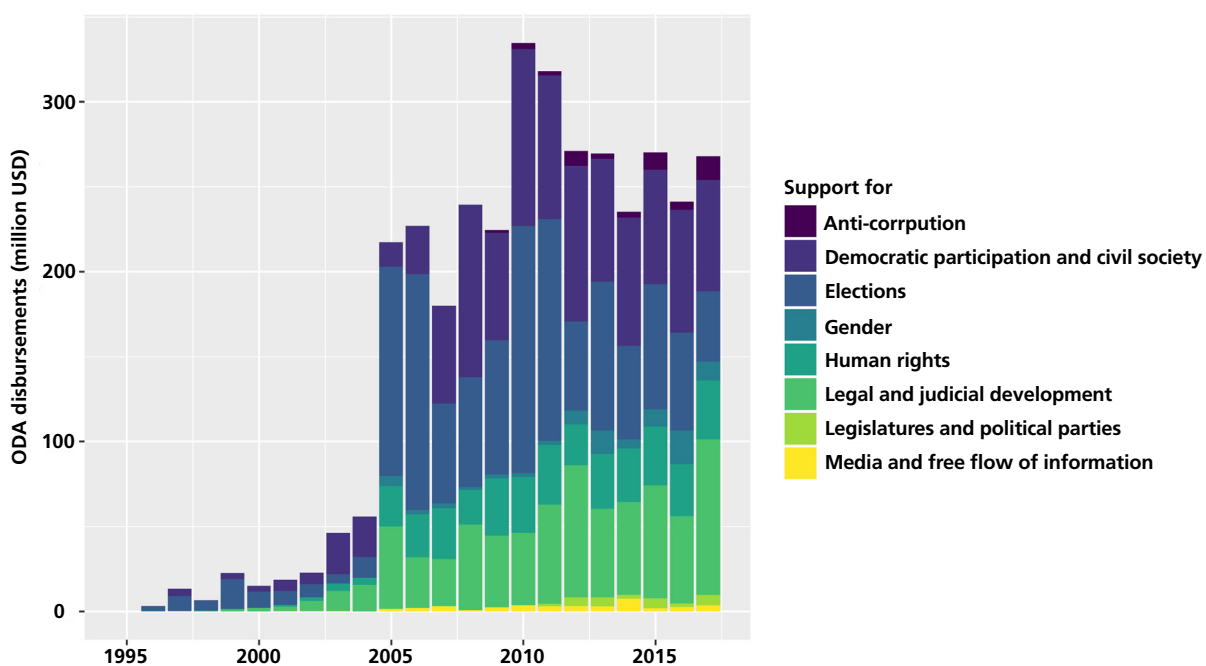


Figure 3  
Zooming in: selected subcomponents of EU democracy support to sub-Saharan Africa



work to which the EU can refer. Due to the (quasi) universal acceptance of human rights, EU engagement in this area is less controversial (also with EU member states) than EU measures to support principles of democracy, even though international human rights frameworks have been considerably contested by China and others in the past few years.

Finally, the EU also puts emphasis on supporting civil society organisations and engages with civil society organisations to implement general development aid programmes. Particularly in contexts where state structures are weak or non-existent, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) take over basic functions in terms of service provision. Moreover, the EU engages with civil society organisations to strengthen their role in decision-making processes. Donor support for civil society (not just by the EU) has greatly increased since 2000. In contexts with weak state structures, high levels of corruption or a lack of political will by the government to implement reforms, civil society actors are seen as an alternative way through which to channel aid or to influence reforms (despite recent critical debates on the role of donor aid to civil society).

Data on EU democracy aid presented here give an overview of the EU's support to democracy and human rights between the mid-1990s and 2017. These figures do not depict two trends that challenge support and protection of democracy: First, security and stability remain important is-

ues in the EU's foreign policy agenda. The securitisation of aid tends to prioritise stability over democratisation when it comes to foreign policy priorities of the EU (Brown & Grävingholt, 2016). There is a consensus that security has overruled democracy as a key concept of EU foreign policy during the last decades. Although it is not likely that security will become less important, there are signs that democracy might be taken serious as an overarching goal of the EU's foreign policies (Council of the European Union, 2019). Second, as increasing funding of public financial management suggests, resource mobilisation has become a priority in the EU's Africa policies. Similar to the German and US-American approach, the EU has been emphasising private investments. Although private investments are an important precondition for funding sustainable development, the EU has not linked it to its support to democratic development.

## HOW DOES THE EU TAKE SPECIFIC COUNTRY CONDITIONS INTO ACCOUNT?

Taking a closer look at which countries receive EU democracy support, regime type is not a clear predictor of the largest recipients of such EU support. Between 2014 and 2017, the five largest recipients of EU democracy support have included an autocracy (Somalia); electoral autocracies (Tanzania and Uganda); and electoral democracies (Nigeria and Benin) (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Ten largest recipients of EU democracy support in sub-Saharan Africa

2014–2017			2007–2013		
Recipient	ODA commitments	ODA disbursements	Recipient	ODA commitments	ODA disbursements
<b>Somalia</b>	86.3	20.34	<b>Nigeria</b>	47.68	30.65
<b>Tanzania</b>	65.42	21.07	<b>Democratic Republic of the Congo</b>	33.47	29.48
<b>Uganda</b>	35.37	12.59	<b>Mali</b>	27.44	22.75
<b>Nigeria</b>	29.21	27.22	<b>South Sudan (since 2011)</b>	27.18	13.14
<b>Benin</b>	24.2	16.93	<b>Benin</b>	23.48	15.59
<b>Ghana</b>	22.3	20.57	<b>Guinea</b>	18.17	8.85
<b>Zambia</b>	18.5	9.24	<b>Niger</b>	17.31	10.8
<b>Malawi</b>	17.5	15.41	<b>Ivory Coast</b>	16.47	22.8
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	16.33	6.12	<b>Malawi</b>	15.53	12.36
<b>Democratic Republic of the Congo</b>	16.01	29.15	<b>South Africa</b>	15.25	20.1
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	14.12	9.98	<b>Ghana</b>	14.61	13.36

liberal democracy
  electoral democracy
  electoral autocracy
  autocracy

Notes: Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments and disbursements are reported in million USD (here yearly averages).

Colours indicate regime type (during the majority of years observed; if the same number of year, most recent year).

Source: Authors based on OECD/DAC & V-Dem data



More generally, since 2014, the largest share of democracy aid in sub-Saharan Africa has been provided to regimes classified as »electoral autocracies«, followed by a large share provided to electoral democracies. Only a relatively small share was disbursed to autocracies (Angola, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan, Swaziland) or liberal democracies (Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mauritius) in the time period 2014–2017 (see Figure 4). This is mostly due to the larger number of electoral autocracies and democracies. On average, the amount each country receives does not vary much depending on the regime type.

However, taking a closer look at the substance of democracy support (see Figure 5), it becomes clear that the *kind* and *composition* of EU democracy support differs between different African regime contexts. Most strikingly, liberal democracies have received significant support for decentralisation in recent years, while this kind of support was almost absent in other regime types. In autocracies (both full and electoral), the majority of support is divided between that for the public sector and financial management reform, legal and judicial development, and civil society.

Taking a more fine-grained look at those subcomponents of democracy support geared towards democratic quality gives some further insights. Figure 6 shows the distribution as averages of recipients belonging to the different regime categories. While, there is only negligible support for legislatures and political parties in both types of autocracies,

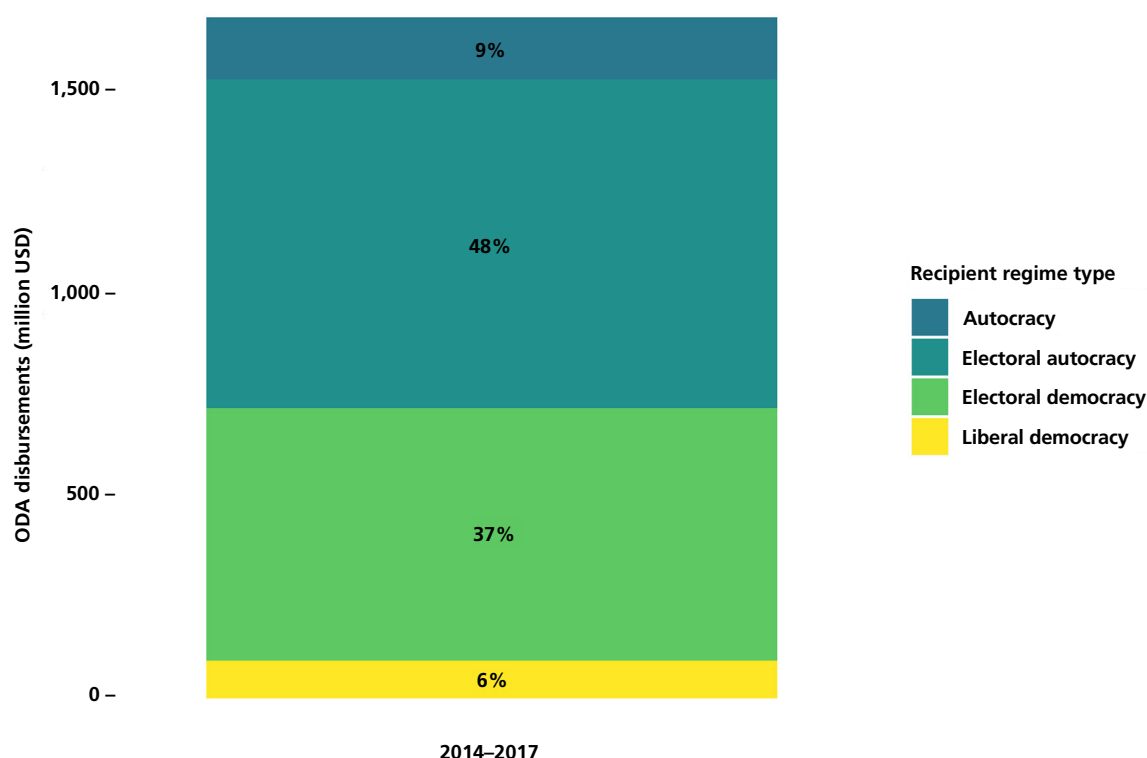
support for media and the free flow of information is the largest in autocracies, with very little of such support in electoral democracies and none in liberal democracies, on average. Support for anti-corruption is interestingly barely provided in more autocratic regimes, with liberal democracies receiving the largest share on average. Of course, with all of these types of support, the distribution depends not only on strategic decision-making on the part of the EU but also in which areas the partner governments allow external support to be provided.

In electoral democracies, it is notable that support for the judiciary is relatively strong and that it has increased in recent years. Support for improving government capacities follows the opposite trend: relatively high amounts are also disbursed for this goal, yet much lower than ten years earlier. In general, in electoral autocracies or electoral democracies, the EU provides more support geared towards democratic quality than the effectiveness of government institutions.

Since support for democracy constitutes only about 10 per cent of overall ODA, it is also worthwhile taking the broader context of development aid by the EU into account. The following graph shows clearly that in absolute terms<sup>4</sup> elec-

<sup>4</sup> In relative terms, closed autocracies have received most general ODA in recent years, liberal democracies by far the least.

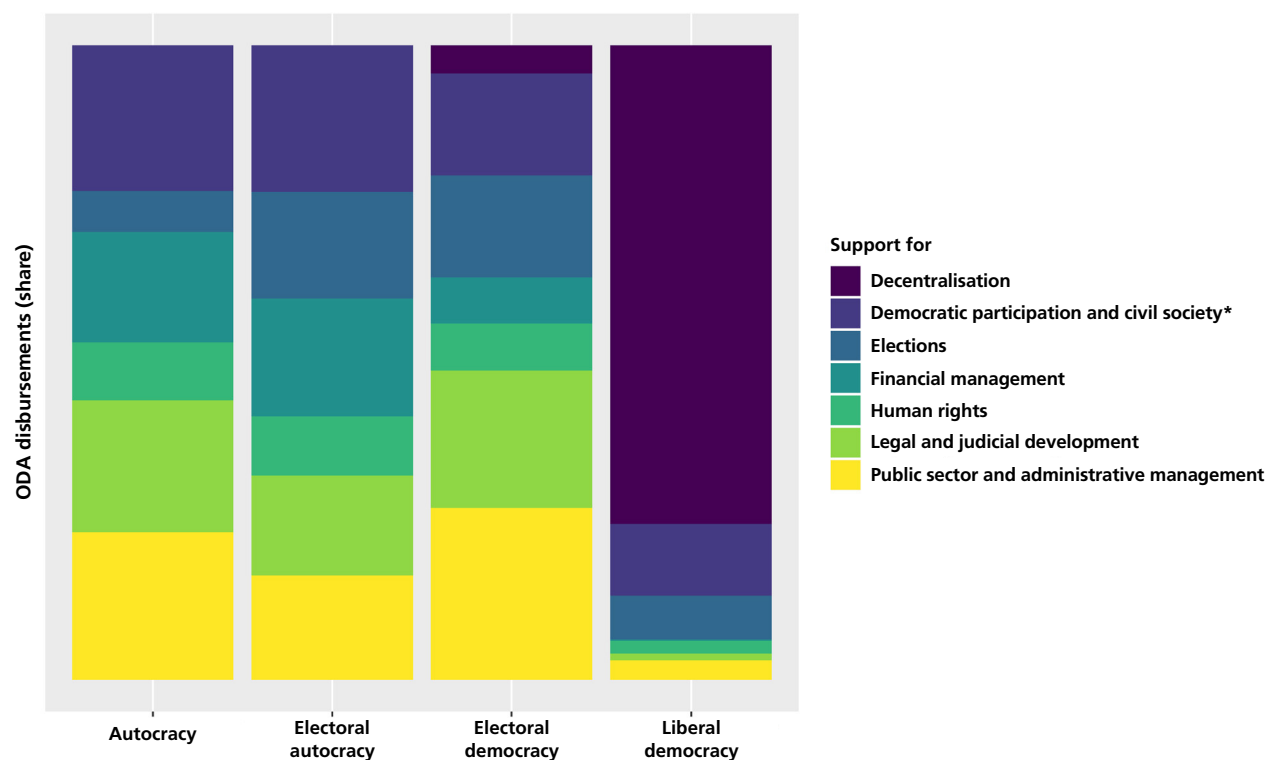
Figure 4  
Democracy support by the EU according to recipient regime type



Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC & V-Dem data on sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 5

## Share of different types of support according to regime type

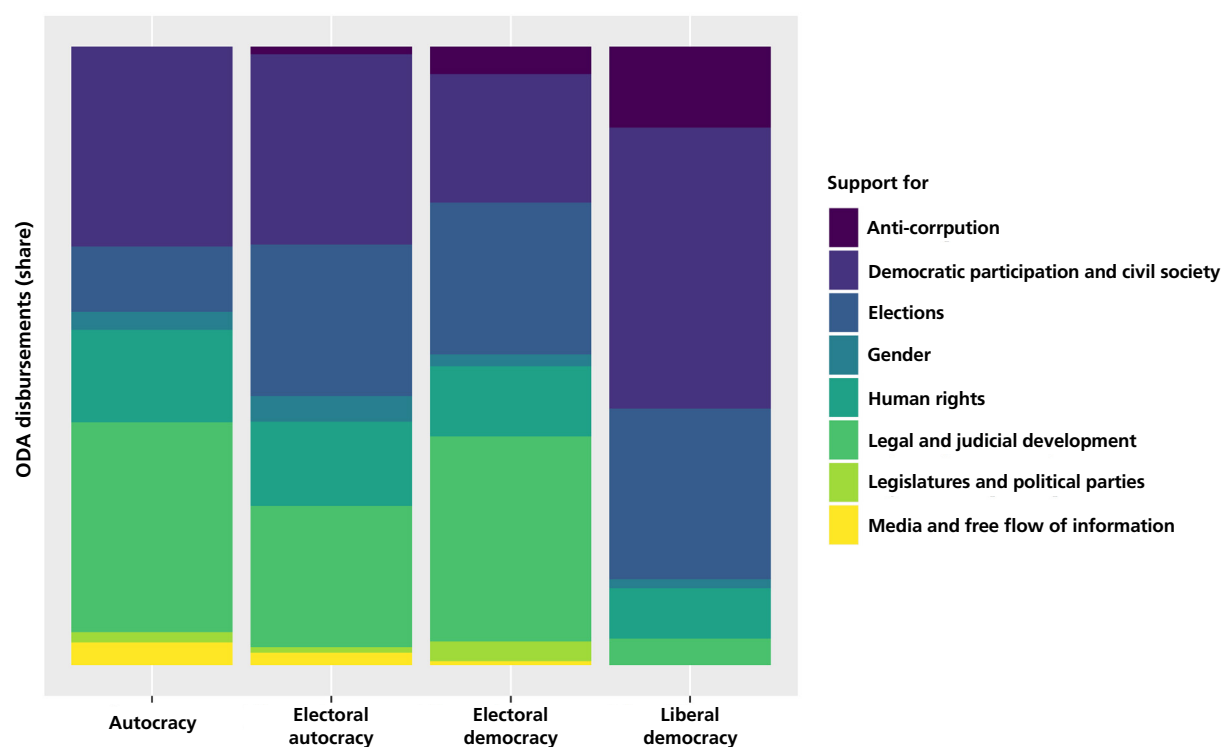


Note: \* Includes support for parliaments and political parties, media, gender and anti-corruption.

Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC & V-Dem data: democracy support by the EU to sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 6

## Share of different sub-types of support according to regime type



Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC & V-Dem data: democracy support by the EU to sub-Saharan Africa

toral autocracies receive the largest amount of general ODA although it is known that aid is more effective in political regimes with moderate to high good governance levels (Figure 7). Development aid often contributes to strengthening the regime in place, including autocratic regimes. To avoid strengthening authoritarian regimes through development aid, it is crucial that aid to these types of regimes contains a strong component of democracy aid. If democracy support is a core principle of the EU's international cooperation activities, the EU needs to reconsider aligning its overall ODA with this goal and ensure that it strengthens efforts to foster democratisation.

### 3.2 STRATEGIC APPROACH AND INSTRUMENTS: HOW DOES THE EU SUPPORT DEMOCRACY?

Since the early 2000s, the EU has mostly relied on a positive approach that seeks to promote democracy, human rights, and good governance through political dialogue, democracy aid, and positive conditionality rather than sanctions and punitive measures.

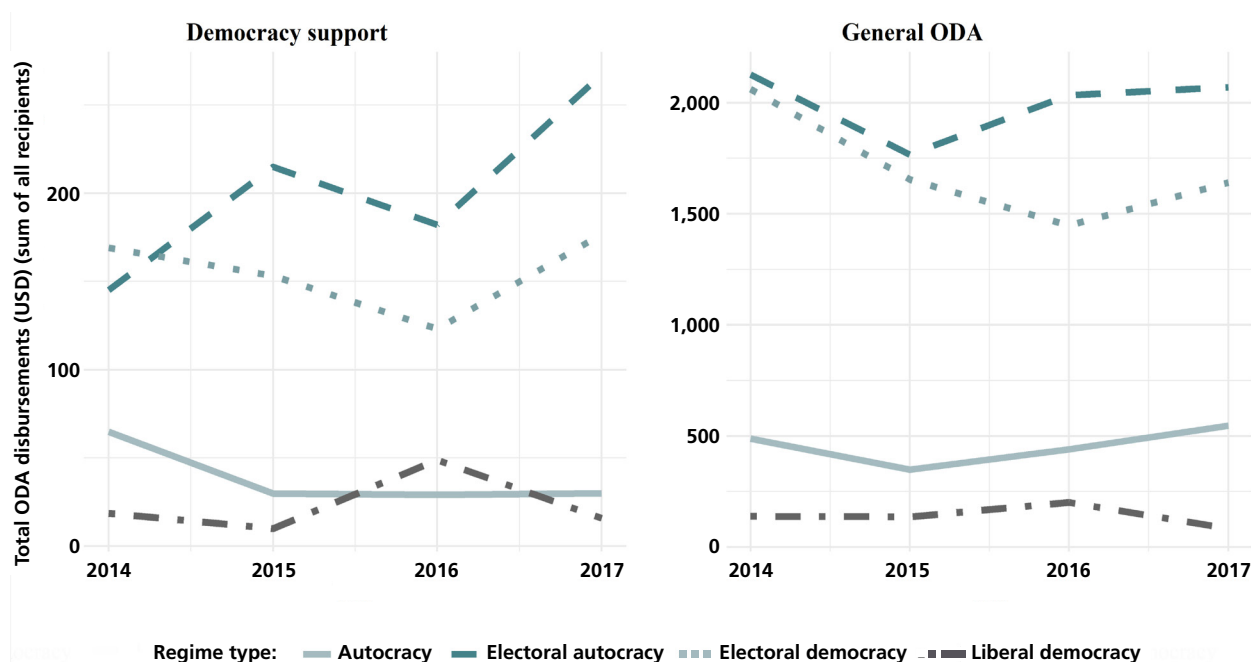
Although support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law are overarching objectives in EU foreign policy as defined in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 21), the key objective of development policy is poverty reduction and, in the long term, poverty eradication (Article 208). Since the early 2000s, the EU has addressed this tension by developing specific aid instruments that are geared towards support-

ing democratic reforms (for example, EIDHR) while at the same time maintaining a relatively technocratic and apolitical approach to providing development assistance through the European Development Fund (EDF) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). Socio-economic development challenges are often still perceived as problems stemming from limited financial and administrative capacities rather than ones also caused by a lack of political will or political incentives, or by domestic politics and power structures.

### DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IN EU-AFRICA RELATIONS

The EU has been strengthening its political dialogue with African countries since the mid-2000s. The political dialogue of the EU and EU member states is conducted under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement (Cotonou Agreement, 2000). Since the mid-2000s, the EU has made efforts to regularly conduct dialogues with almost all sub-Saharan African countries. Both the 2009 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support and the creation of the External Action Service have allowed political dialogue to be strengthened. It is not only conducted in situations of political conflict and crisis but feature as a regular item in the EU's bilateral relations with most African countries. Even if the impact of the dialogues is difficult to measure and is perceived by some governments purely as a matter of duty, such dialogues provide an opportunity to address human rights violations and breaches of democratic principles.

Figure 7  
Official development assistance by the EU according to regime type



Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC & V-Dem data: ODA disbursements by the EU to sub-Saharan Africa.

Since the mid-2000s, the EU has also invested considerably in strengthening its democracy aid instruments in Africa. In the last decade, the EU has spent roughly 10 per cent of its total ODA provided to sub-Saharan African partners on democracy support, namely around USD 400 million annually (see Figure 8). The volume of democracy support has slightly increased over time, but not as much as general EU aid to Africa. Only exceeded by the World Bank (IDA), the EU is the largest provider of democracy support in sub-Saharan Africa, compared both to European and non-European donors (see Table 2).

The EU provides democracy support through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human rights (EIDHR), the European Development Fund (EDF) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). With the next multiannual financial framework (MFF), the European Commission has proposed to combine the EU's external funding instruments into one single instrument: the Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The idea is to increase coherence between the various different external funding instruments by taking a more holistic approach. Although the NDICI promises more policy coherence, the detailed structure, budget lines and implementation of instruments will tell whether it leads to substantive differences in the EU's operations.

With the EIDHR, the EU can support actors in difficult contexts without the formal consent of the African govern-

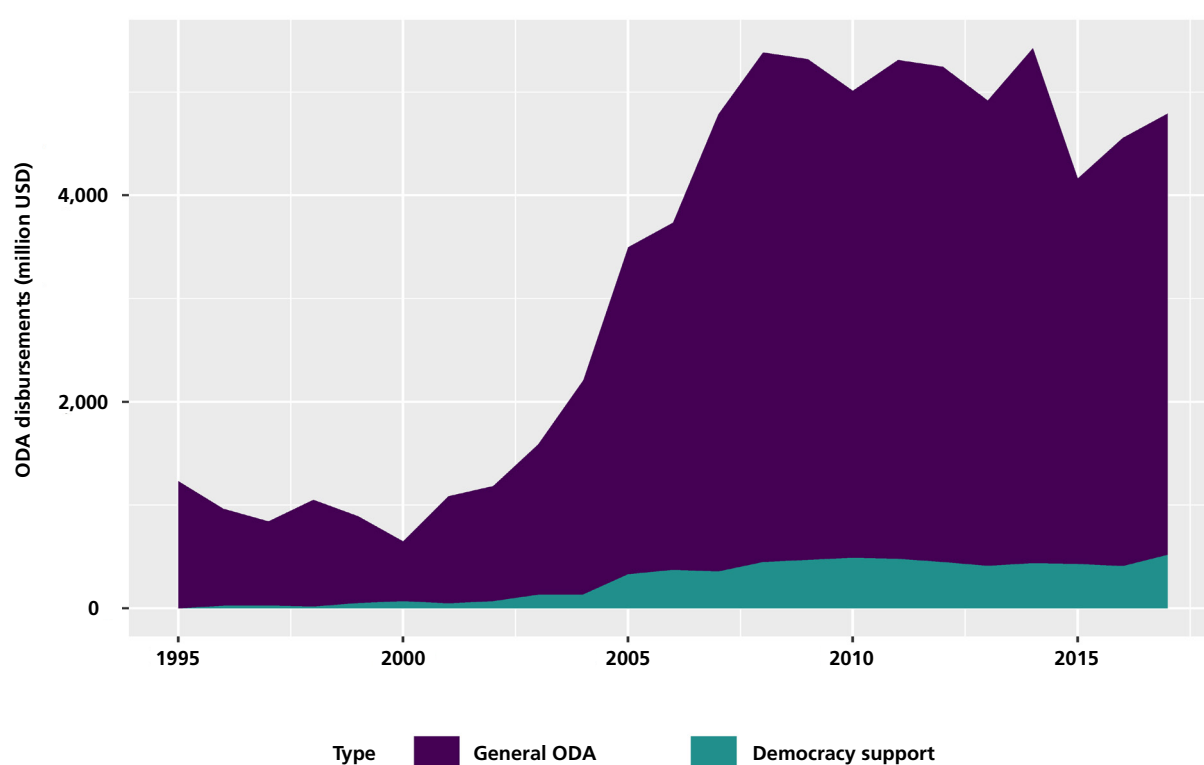
ment. With the EDF and the DCI (including through thematic programmes), the EU can support capacity-building or formal democratic institutions in cooperation with African governments. As a response to the Arab Spring, the EU developed a new instrument – the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) – for its neighbourhood. The EED aims to react faster and to provide support to civil society actors and political activists without government consent (Leininger & Richter, 2012). Yet, due to its geographic scope, the EED is not used for supporting democratic reforms in sub-Saharan Africa.

The EIDHR has five main objectives: i) It seeks to support human rights defenders in situations where they are most at risk<sup>5</sup>; ii) it aims at promoting the EU's human rights priorities; iii) it provides support to democracy; iv) it supports election observation; and v) it supports international and regional human rights mechanisms and instruments (European Commission, 2014). The multiannual planning for the period 2018 to 2020 shows that the EU lays a strong focus on human rights rather than on democratic institutions and processes (see Table 3).

Next to democracy aid and political dialogue, the EU also uses positive conditionality. The Governance Incentive

<sup>5</sup> The EIDHR has developed mechanisms to respond very quickly with small amounts of money while details about who is supported are not public.

Figure 8  
EU democracy support and total ODA to sub-Saharan Africa (1995–2017)



Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC data



Table 2  
**EU democracy aid figures (2014–2017)**

Donor	ODA commitments	ODA disbursements
International Development Association (IDA)	1,176.41	941.19
EU institutions	548.58	449.99
United States	352.58	290.98
Germany	287.49	245.67
Sweden	198.04	224.2
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	155.74	151.54
Norway	143.72	120.29
United Kingdom	133.53	346.8
African Development Fund (AfDB)	123.26	88.14
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	106.25	106.25
Denmark	101.51	88.39
Zimbabwe	14.12	9.98

Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC data

Table 3  
**EIDHR multiannual planning (2018–2020)**

EU Emergency Fund for Human Rights Defenders at Risk and EU Human Rights Defenders Protection Mechanism	EUR 19,789,474
EIDHR Human Rights Crises Facility	EUR 11,052,632
<b>Global calls TOTAL (2018–2020)</b>	EUR 64,500,000
Human rights defenders (focus on »identity-based« discrimination – LGBTI)	EUR 10 million
Business and human rights	EUR 5 million
Shrinking civic, democratic and civil society space	EUR 10 million
Death penalty	EUR 7 million
Torture and ill treatment	EUR 8 million
Rights of children in most difficult situations	EUR 10 million
Civic activism: leveraging new technologies	EUR 5 million
Democratic accountability: role of media and civil society	EUR 5 million
Ad hoc action – emerging issues	EUR 4.5 million
The 7 <sup>th</sup> World Congress against the death penalty	EUR 1,500,000
<b>Support to local civil society action through Country-Based Support Scheme</b> (of which EUR 83 million (31 per cent) are provided to sub-Saharan Africa)	EUR 270,788,000
A global programme to improve indigenous peoples' participation to UN human rights system, access to justice and development	EUR 3,000,000
Support for UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	EUR 13,500,000
International Criminal Court	EUR 3 million
Regional human rights instruments and mechanisms	EUR 3 million
Global campus on human rights	EUR 11,812,500
Capacity development of national human rights institutions	EUR 3,947,368
Supporting human rights dialogues and their follow-up (e.g. support for CSO meetings linked to EU human rights dialogues)	EUR 1,000,000
EIDHR support measure	EUR 2,500,000

Source: Authors, based on European Commission (2018a)

Tranche of the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF, for example, aimed to provide material incentives for reforms in African countries (Molenaers & Nijs, 2009). Yet, its implementation proved difficult. Funds have been disbursed as a reward for the *drafting* of governance action plans instead of the actual implementation of these reforms. Moreover, political considerations have affected its implementation as some EU member states insisted that countries where they have a special interest benefit from the initiative – irrespective of the level of ambition of the governance action plans. In the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF, a »performance-based mechanism« was foreseen but did not come into action.

Aid modalities such as budget support also allow the EU and member states to incentivise political reforms. Minimum standards in terms of respect for human rights, transparency, and accountability in decision-making processes are a precondition for the provision of budget support that is still widely used in EU development cooperation. When these principles are breached, withholding budget support has been used to exert pressure on African governments (Molenaers, Gagliano, Smets, & Dellepiane, 2015).

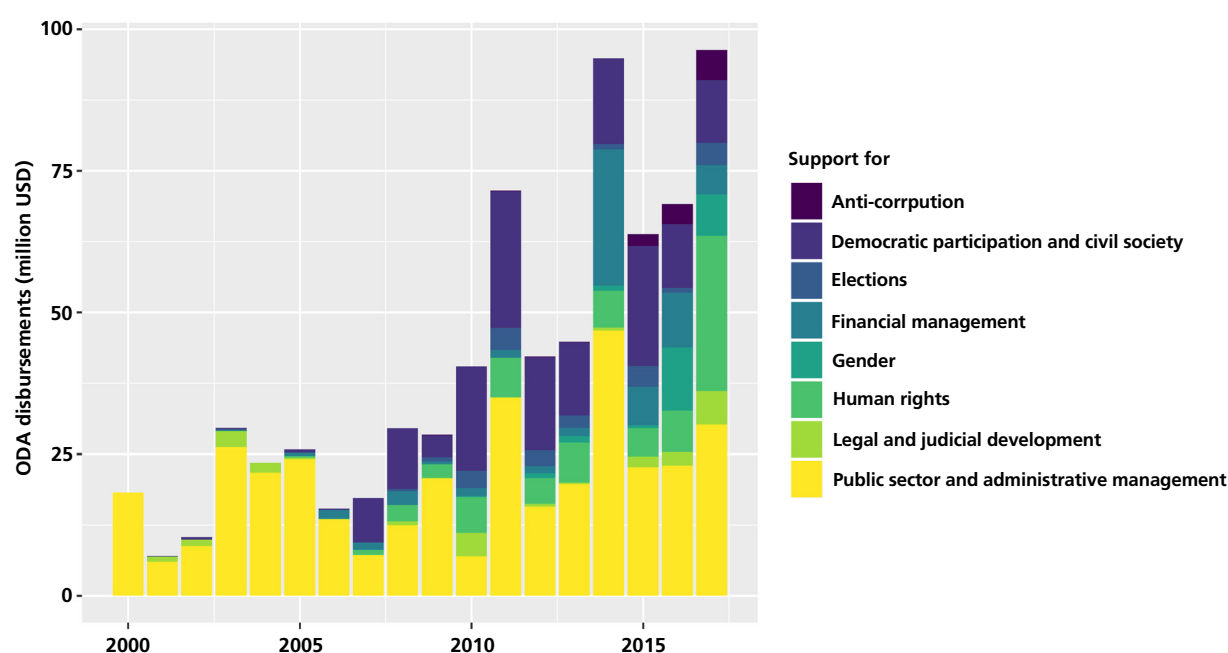
The EU has continued to use negative conditionality, such as sanctions, to respond to serious violations of human rights or coup d'états. It has used sanctions more frequently in relation to African countries than any other region. Yet, the EU has become more reluctant to apply sanctions in the 2000s than in the 1990s (Portela, 2010; Zimelis, 2011). The type of sanctions used has also changed. In line with changing global norms, the EU has been more hesi-

tant to use general economic sanctions (such as the suspension of aid or trade preferences under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement). Instead, it increasingly uses targeted sanctions towards individuals within the context of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFPS) (for instance, asset freezing and travel bans for high-level officials involved in gross human rights violations).

Since 2010, the EU has made efforts to develop a stronger analytical basis for its democracy and human rights support. As a follow-up to the 2009 Council Conclusions on democracy support and as part of the EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights, the EU delegation prepares (confidential) Human Rights Country Strategy Papers that develop an assessment of the human rights situation and provide a basis for political dialogue or for allocating democracy aid. While these strategy papers were initially limited to an analysis of the human rights situation, they have been broadened over time to include a more general analysis of the political situation. As these documents are confidential, no cross-country comparative analysis about their substance and their application can be conducted.

In 2012, the European Commission launched an initiative to mainstream support for human rights throughout its development aid instruments, the so-called »rights-based approach«. This initiative was taken up in the programming of the multiannual financial framework in 2014; it was then reiterated in the EU Action Plan on Democracy and Human Rights and in 2017 in the European Consensus on Development. However, it was geared only towards promoting hu-

Figure 9  
EU democracy support to African regional organisations



Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC data

man rights, not democratic reforms more generally, and had limited structural impact on how the EU implements its development aid funds.

Democracy support is not limited to bilateral cooperation with African countries but also forms part of regional co-operation (see Figure 9). Overall, development assistance provided to the regional level in Africa has increased since 2000. It is interesting to note that the patterns of support vary between bilateral and regional cooperation. While bilateral cooperation focuses more on core elements of democracy, regional cooperation addressed public administrations and financial governance. The large amount provided for human rights in 2017 can be ascribed to funds allocated in the context of migration management. Support for media and the free flow of information is not included in the graph since no noteworthy amounts have been spent in this area. Transnational media networks might provide a relevant avenue in view of increasing repression of journalists and critical media.

### 3.3 WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT?

An increasing body of research has investigated the effect of democracy aid on democratic quality in recipient countries. Although many of these studies do not analyse the EU's democracy aid to Africa specifically as they include all donors or all recipient countries in the analysis, this research *does* provide valuable insights for EU democracy support in Africa. Generally, most cross-country analyses concur that democracy aid does have a positive effect on the level of democracy (Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, & Seligson, 2007; Kalyvitis & Vlachaki, 2010; Scott & Steele, 2011). However, there is still little evidence on the contribution made by promoters of democracy to preventing autocratic backlashes.

More specifically, cross-country research and case studies on African countries demonstrate that democracy support can positively contribute to transitions to democracy (Resnick & van de Walle, 2013), stabilise multiparty regimes (Dietrich & Wright, 2015) and help to counter democratic reversals (Manning & Malbrough, 2013; Resnick, 2013). Moreover, democracy aid is associated with more electoral accountability (Heinrich & Loftis, 2019; Tripp, 2013) and has a positive effect on political institutions (Jones & Tarp, 2016). However, democracy aid does little to alter the balance between opposition and ruling party (Dietrich & Wright, 2015).

Aid dependency matters for the impact of democracy support, as several studies show. This is particularly relevant in light of the high aid dependency of many African countries, even though the increasing engagement of new donors such as Russia and China reduces dependency on Western aid. Kalyvitis and Vlachaki (2010) find that democracy aid has a positive effect in aid-dependent countries that are already relatively democratic.

Democratic sanctions are a matter of last resort that external actors can use to respond to a coup d'état or serious human rights violations. Research has found the EU's use of aid sanctions in Africa to be more effective than elsewhere (Portela, 2010). This is partly attributed to Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, which provides predictability and clarity by defining clear and mutually agreed procedures for cases where essential elements are breached (democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law). Moreover, the relatively high aid dependency of African countries compared to countries in other regions is identified as a factor that has made sanctions more successful (Portela, 2010). However, the EU rarely imposes sanctions in the presence of strategic interests or high developmental performance (Del Biondo, 2015).

While general development aid is not intended to influence the level of democracy directly, it does have an impact. Some argue that it strengthens the recipient regime, making democratic regimes more democratic and autocratic regimes more autocratic (Dutta, Leeson, & Williamson, 2013). Others find that the type of authoritarian regime matters – it seems that development aid and democracy aid are more likely to support democratisation in party-based regimes than in other types of authoritarian regimes (Cornell, 2012; Wright, 2009).

At the same time, particularly high aid dependency can create a »responsibility trap«, in which donors are reluctant to suspend aid in view of the expected humanitarian consequences for the population (Mross, 2015, p. 59). Generally, the weak enforcement of conditionalities is perceived as one of the main reasons why they do not succeed (Boyce, 2002, 2003; Crawford, 1997; Emmanuel, 2010; Frerks & Klem, 2006; Goodhand & Sedra, 2007). A similar argument also holds for democracy aid. Based on a case study on Ghana, Crawford (2007, p. 169) argues that the EU's and EU member states' democracy aid is »high on rhetoric but remains low on delivery.«

### 3.4 CASE STUDY TANZANIA: EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IN SITUATIONS OF »SHRINKING SPACE« FOR DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS

How can – and should – the EU respond to shrinking spaces for democratic freedoms? This question has proved particularly difficult for EU democracy support in recent years. One case in point that allows one to discuss some of the difficulties that EU democracy support is facing in dominant party regimes that close political spaces is Tanzania.

Since John Pombe Magufuli unexpectedly won the highly competitive elections in 2015, he has been criticised for authoritarian tendencies. The opposition, civil society and the media have faced serious repression since 2015. Public and private opposition gatherings have been prohibited and members of the opposition parties have been arrested. Repressive media laws and a statistic law have reduced press

freedom and the freedom of academia.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, democratic procedures are frequently circumvented through a rule based on decrees, ultimatums and sackings of officials. Freedom House (Freedom House, 2019) classifies Tanzania as partly free and points to a sharp decline in civil liberties and political rights since 2015. Despite having entered his presidential term as an outsider to the core party apparatus, Magufuli has quickly cemented his position of power within the ruling party CCM (*Chama Cha Mapinduzi*, in English »Party of the Revolution«).

The EU has been one of the major donors to Tanzania, providing USD 1.5 billion between 2009 and 2017. The planning for the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF had been concluded in 2014, a few months before the election of President Magufuli. The EU agreed with the Tanzanian government to cooperate on good governance and energy as well as sustainable agriculture as priority sectors. In Tanzania, »good governance« as a focal sector under the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF was understood as providing direct budget support accompanied by supporting measures such as public financial management, domestic revenue mobilisation, and support for the fight against corruption. This is reflected in the democracy aid data as provided by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (see Figure 10). Between 2014 and 2017, most of EU democracy aid (72 per cent) was allocated to supporting public financial management reforms, while fighting corruption was not a priority.

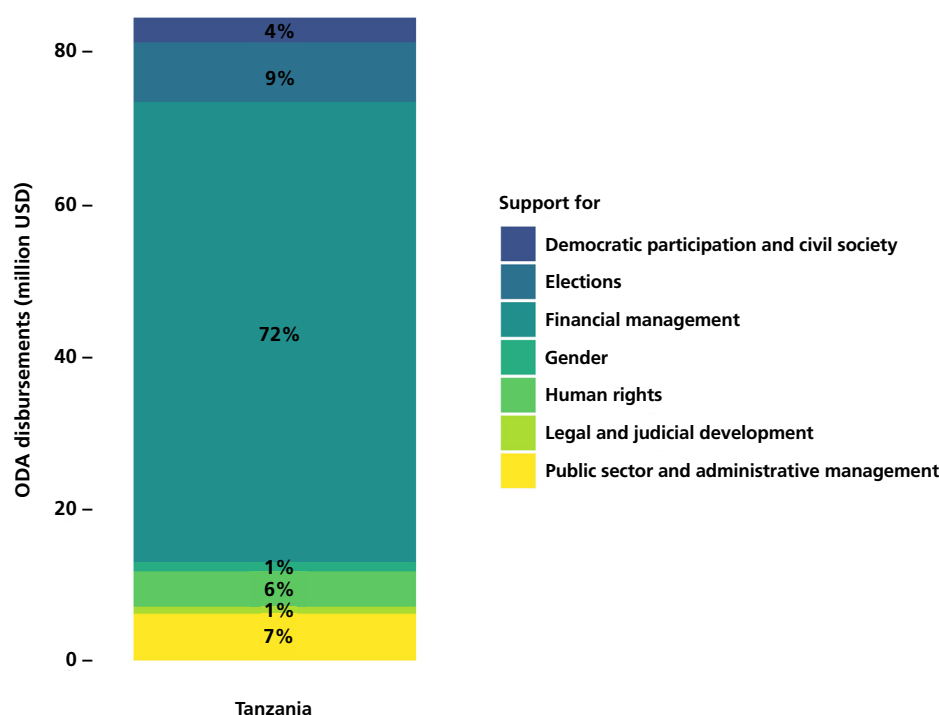
The EU's financial support for democracy in Tanzania was limited. Between 2014 and 2017, only 4 per cent of democracy aid were provided to democratic participation and civil society. According to official OECD/DAC statistics, the EU reported no aid for media, legislatures and political parties in that period. A small share of democracy aid was provided for human rights (6 per cent) and elections (9 per cent). In its aid programme, the EU has therefore clearly focused on strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of state institutions rather than on democratic accountability or the separation of powers.

The EU supports civil society actors through country calls for proposals through the EIDHR, sometimes co-funded through the EDF or thematic budget lines from the DCI. In 2016, shortly after the elections, the EU's country calls for proposals emphasised the fight against corruption. In the most recent call, however, the EU has put more emphasis on countering the shrinking of political spaces and on supporting civil liberties and political rights (see Table 4; European Commission, 2018c).

The rapid decline in political spaces since President Magufuli took power came as a surprise to many donor officials in-

<sup>6</sup> Tanzania consequently dropped from rank 75 in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index to rank 118 (out of 180 countries) in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index. Several people have been arrested under the new Cybercrimes Act (2015). Furthermore, several journalists have been killed and their offices vandalised.

Figure 10  
EU democracy support to Tanzania (2014–2017)



Source: Authors, based on OECD/DAC data

Table 4  
The most recent EU country call for proposals in Tanzania

Call	Lot	Amount in EUR	EU budget line
<b>2016–2017</b>	Lot 1 – Enhancing CSOs' contribution to accountability and fight against corruption	1,200,000	DCI local actors
	Lot 2 – Enhancing local actors' contribution to accountability and the fight against corruption	600,000	DCI local actors
	Lot 3 – Inclusive participation in the political system	1,700,000	10 <sup>th</sup> EDF
	Lot 4 – Countering harmful practices and discrimination	1,700,000	EIDHR
<b>2018–2019</b>	LoT 1 – CSOs <b>only</b> : »promoting freedom of expression, access to information, press freedom and reinforcing media capacities, with special focus on women and youth« and »increase[ing] CSOs' contribution toward a culture of peace, conflict prevention and inclusive democracy in the United Republic of Tanzania, and in particular in the archipelago of Zanzibar«	2,700,000	DCI local actors
	LoT 2 – EIDHR <b>only</b> : »To support human rights and human rights defenders in situations where they are most at risk« and »to promote participatory democracy through CSOs' engagement in electoral processes«	1,800,000	EIDHR

Source: Authors

cluding those in the EU.<sup>7</sup> The EU responded with a mix of public criticism, strong public statements, and behind-the-scenes demarches regarding specific cases of human rights violations. Political dialogue according to Article 8 had been conducted irregularly since 2015.<sup>8</sup> From 2017 onwards, the EU sought to use a more joined-up approach to better coordinate the EU delegation and member states' positions on supporting democratic reforms, the fight against corruption, and peace and political stability (including in Zanzibar) (EU [European Union], 2017). In September 2018, the EU mentioned the difficult human rights situation in Tanzania in its statement at the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council. In addition, the EU slightly adjusted the substance of its financial aid for civil society actors. The EU provided some aid through the emergency facility of the EIDHR to particularly vulnerable human rights activists and put more emphasis on supporting political rights and civil liberties (interviews in September 2019; see also Table 4). In addition, the EU used the EIDHR, and to some extent the EDF, to organise local events and capacity-building for civil society and the media to conduct debates on shrinking spaces in Tanzania.

On 5 November 2018, the EU Ambassador to Tanzania, Roeland Van de Geer, was recalled to Brussels in response

to pressures from the Tanzanian authorities – an unprecedented act in EU-Tanzania relations and EU-Africa relations more generally. On behalf of the EU and its member states, the High Representative and Commission Vice President Federica Mogherini criticised the tightening restrictions on the media, civil society and opposition parties in Tanzania. She also expressed the EU's concern over the deteriorating situation for LGBTI persons. In response to the tense relations and the pressure that Tanzanian authorities were exerting on the EU delegation, the EU conducted a comprehensive review of its relations with Tanzania and the political dialogue was put on hold. In December 2018, the European Parliament adopted a critical resolution on the human rights situation in Tanzania.

The situation in Tanzania raises fundamental questions on how to respond to shrinking political spaces in EU partner countries and how to use and combine different EU instruments to support democratisation efforts. Support through the EDF has a strong development orientation. The EU can use the EDF (or the geographic funding under the NDICI) to promote the effectiveness of state institutions. Given the long-term orientation of EDF funding, it is rather difficult to use the instrument to respond to sudden events or gradually shrinking political spaces. The EIDHR can be used to support specific political actors and democratic reforms but, in times of shrinking spaces, civil society organisations can face many difficulties in responding to the country calls for proposals. Thus, both instruments are not very well suited to responding to a changing political context in the very short term. »Public naming and shaming« by the EU

<sup>7</sup> See in this connection the EU human rights annual report: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/compiled\\_country\\_updates\\_annual\\_report\\_on\\_human\\_rights\\_and\\_democracy\\_2017\\_clean\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/compiled_country_updates_annual_report_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2017_clean_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> No dialogue meetings took place in 2015 and 2016; two meetings were conducted in 2017. See information provided in EU annual human rights reports.



may put pressure on the partner government and help local activists and regime critics in some situations while, in other situations, diplomacy behind closed doors might be more successful. In any case, the EU delegation has little chance of being influential and exerting leverage if EU member states do not closely align and cooperate with the EU delegation.

Beyond the question of which instruments to use, shrinking spaces raise new questions of how to »sell« democracy support in relations with the partner government. Arguments for improving human rights and democratic principles might have more chance of being heard if they are linked to arguments about socio-economic progress. For instance, preventing Tanzanian authorities from applying the restrictive teenage-pregnancy law could be framed either as a human rights issue or as a measure that prevents socio-economic development because the girls who have to leave school will have less chance of entering the skilled labour market.

In any case, the example of Tanzania shows that the EU needs to reform its aid and democracy aid instruments and also that it needs to find new ways of using its democracy support instruments more strategically in situations where political spaces begin to close.

### 3.5 CONCLUSIONS: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

Since the mid-2000s, the EU has made democracy support a stronger aspect in its relations with African countries. The EU has developed a positive approach that supports political reforms through democracy aid, dialogue and positive incentives. Sanctions and negative conditionality are only applied in exceptional cases. The EU is putting strong emphasis on making political institutions more effective. Support for human rights and support for civil society also play a key role. Yet, support for intermediary institutions such as the media, political parties or trade unions and support for the separation of powers (for instance, by supporting parliaments or the independence of the judiciary) has played a limited role in EU democracy support up to now. Instead, the EU has tended to assume that supporting specific actors and individual institutions (for example, a human rights commission or an ombudsman) within a political system contributes to democratic reform. This is critical because supporting one type of actor or institution does not necessarily contribute to the systemic change which is needed for democratisation. For instance, supporting the participation of civil society actors in policymaking can, but does not necessarily, foster democracy. Development NGOs participate in policymaking processes but do not necessarily have democratic goals and, thus, play along with autocratic rules in a respective context.

Even though some policymakers and academics are sceptical about whether democracy support instruments work,

evidence from research suggests that EU democracy support can contribute to political reforms in Africa if EU instruments take the local context into account, remain realistic in their goals and are well-coordinated with EU member states (see Section 2 and subsection 3.3.). Yet, the context conditions for EU democracy support in Africa have become more challenging and require further action by the EU. Many electoral autocracies and dominant party regimes are under pressure (including in Tanzania) and respond by reducing political spaces. Moreover, the economic success of China and the new geopolitical competition make the international context for EU democracy support much more difficult. In this context, the EU will need to fundamentally adjust its strategic approach and instruments towards democracy support in Africa.

## 4

# WHAT NEXT? TEN PROPOSALS FOR EU DEMOCRACY SUPPORT TO AFRICA IN TIMES OF POLARISATION

»[I]f the EU gives up supporting democracy, nobody will do it.«  
(Interview, EU official, September 2019)

In this final section, we develop proposals for how the EU could reform its strategic approach to and instruments for democracy support in Africa. In October 2019, the Council adopted Council Conclusions on Democracy which aim to guide the EU's actions in a time when democracy is being challenged worldwide. These Council Conclusions are intended to inform policy processes such as the negotiations on the next multiannual financial framework and the NDI-CI. At the same time, they aim at making democracy support a key parameter of the EU's external action. A strategic opportunity for this purpose is the »Comprehensive Strategy with Africa« and the EU's preparations of the AU-EU summit that is scheduled for the second half of 2020. Our proposals seek to contribute to these debates.

Our proposals address four types of reform needs. First, we propose reforms related to reorganisation within the EU in order to be able to support democracy effectively and reposition itself in the world. Second, reforms must allow

the EU to adapt to and shape global trends. Third, we propose reform elements that address current trends in societies and help to sharpen the substance and instruments of democracy support. Fourth, reforms need to consider the particularities of specific contexts in Africa and strategic partners in Africa. Table 5 illustrates this approach.

**Proposal 1:** *Bring democracy support and protection to the core of EU external action and implement this strategic priority in EU foreign relations with Africa (and worldwide).*

Even though support for democracy has gained importance since the early 2000s, it only constitutes a small aspect of EU aid to Africa and of the overall partnership. In other words, even though support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law are enshrined in the Lisbon treaty, supporting democracy in Africa has not been a strategic goal of the EU up till now. In view of the changed global context, the EU needs to design strategies that make de-

Table 5  
Parameters for reforming EU democracy support

Reforms within EU	Adaptation and shaping global trends	Substance and instruments to support democracy	African context and strategic partners
Make democracy support relevant for external action (Proposal 1)	Develop new narrative and strategy (Proposal 2)	Invest in intermediary organisations (Proposal 4)	Continue strategic partnership with regional organisations (Proposal 7)
Reform institutional set-up of EU democracy support (Proposals 8 and 9)	Address megatrends (Proposal 3)	Streamline sectoral policies for democratisation (Proposal 4)	Engage strategically in authoritarian contexts (Proposal 6)
Develop a »joint« European approach (Proposal 10)	Adapt to international environment (Proposal 3)	Intensify civic education on a large scale (Proposal 5)	Protect democracy in processes of autocratisation (Proposal 6)
		Support transnational networks on a large scale (Proposals 5 and 7)	

Source: Authors

mocracy support a prominent aspect in EU external action. At the same time, the EU needs to adjust its focus. It is no longer enough to *support* democracy – the EU also needs to develop strategies to *protect* democracy in electoral and liberal democracies where democratic institutions and practices come under pressure. This implies not only concrete actions in third countries but also standing up for democratic norms within the EU itself and in global fora such as the United Nations.

The EU is currently revising its Africa policy. Support for private sector engagement and investments have gained prominence in EU-Africa relations in recent years, most visibly with the Alliance for Sustainable Investments and Jobs, and the External Investment Plan. Structural transformation and job creation will be key to support long-term economic development on the continent. Yet, economic growth does not automatically lead to social cohesion and inclusive welfare. The EU should therefore complement its initiatives to foster sustainable investments and jobs with a new flagship initiative for a value-based partnership.

**Proposal 2:** *Develop a new narrative and more strategic approach to democracy support and protection in a changed geopolitical context.*

The international context for supporting democracy and human rights has become more challenging. The number of countries that undermine democracy openly and proactively is increasing. China, Russia and other authoritarian powers are aiming at legitimising the autocratic model internationally and are competing with the EU for political influence in Africa (Hackenesch, 2018). For instance, in light of China's substantial economic growth and success in poverty reduction, China's authoritarianism is increasingly being perceived as an alternative development model. Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China has been advocating its authoritarian political regime more actively, for instance through the international contacts of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s International Department (ID-CCP). Many ruling parties in Africa – particularly the former liberation movements – are close partners of the ID-CCP while explaining the Chinese model has become an important part of party-to-party cooperation (Hackenesch & Bader, in press). Taking these global trends into account is a starting point for a strategic repositioning of EU-Africa relations.

Repositioning the EU in the world requires an open acknowledgement of the EU's values and political standpoint. This should be an element of a new narrative. As a response to the changed geopolitical setting, the EU should not reinforce competition by directly comparing one political model with the other but rather invest in a »business case for democracy« that explains why, how and under what conditions democratic regimes deliver socio-economic and political benefits to their citizens. China's success has led some policymakers and political elites in Europe and Africa to question whether authoritarian regimes could be as successful as democratic regimes in pov-

erty reduction, providing functioning health care and education systems, guaranteeing security, and promoting inclusive economic growth. However, various academic studies show that authoritarian regimes that provide socio-economic benefits beyond a narrow political elite are rare and emerge only in very specific settings. Rwanda is one of these rare exceptions – and is not an example that can be used as a model to replicate elsewhere. The EU should hence invest more resources in discussing the benefits and challenges of democratic systems with African elites and societies.

**Proposal 3:** *Address the impacts of demographic change, urbanisation, digitalisation and climate change on political regimes through EU democracy support.*

Demographic change, digitalisation, urbanisation and climate change have substantial implications for political reforms in African countries in the years to come. These trends could have both positive and negative effects and could either contribute to democratisation or to strengthening authoritarian practices. They could also deepen social and political inequalities if not tackled adequately. At the same time, the way societies are organised influences if and how they are able to shape these trends. For instance, digitalisation is more likely to benefit all people if its regulation is transparent and based on principles of accountability, and if it prevents monopolies and the corresponding concentration of wealth.

Demographic change and youth movements challenge established regimes and have played key roles in ousting authoritarian leaders in countries such as Burkina Faso (2014) or Ethiopia (2017–2018). Digitalisation and social media can open new channels to access information and facilitate democratic participation (Ndavula & Mberia, 2012; van Rensburg, 2012). The strong influence of social media in mobilising protests during the Arab Spring has been widely reported (Breuer, Landman & Farquhar, 2015; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). At the same time, surveillance of social media enables rulers to control opponents and critics. Incumbents use internet shutdowns during critical election periods, as has happened in several West African and Central African countries. Urbanisation can have positive effects on democratisation, as urban elites may be mobilised more easily to demand improved service delivery and accountability from their political leaders. At the same time, urban societies might be easier to control and to co-opt by authoritarian governments (Glaeser & Steinberg, 2016). Extreme weather conditions and natural disasters as a consequences of climate change can put democratic (and autocratic) regimes severely under pressure. Having said that, it is unclear whether democracies or non-democratic regimes are better suited to manage transitions towards carbon-neutral societies.

While the EU and member states have begun to take these trends into account in their cooperation with African countries, they have mostly engaged on these topics from a technical and sectoral perspective. The impact of these

trends on political reforms has received limited attention. Moreover, each of these trends has been addressed in isolation even though youth movements, urbanisation and digitalisation have strong interaction dynamics. In order to help unfold their positive effects, and mitigate their negative potential, the EU would need to explicitly address these trends and their interaction dynamics in its democracy support strategies (see also Hackenesch, 2019).

For EU democracy support instruments as well as the EU's analytical tools this would require several reforms: First, the EU should engage more with African countries to strengthen pro-democratic regulatory environments for social media and the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Second, the EU should engage more in supporting inclusive politics and policies at the level of cities. Third, EU strategy and planning tools such as the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy Papers need to include systematic analysis of how youth movements, urbanisation and digitalisation impact political developments in African cities and countries (and EU responses accordingly). Fourth, in many regards, the megatrends and their effects on political regimes offer opportunities for renewing the EU-Africa partnership and for basing it on a more equal footing through joint learning among the EU and African governments and societies. For instance, the regulation of social media to reduce polarisation and hate speech in general and during election campaigns in particular is weak in many African as well as European countries. Ensuring that the megatrends help to make societies more inclusive instead of increasing polarisation offers ample room for joint learning.

**Proposal 4:** *Invest more in intermediary organisations (media, parties, CSOs, trade unions, business councils) and in the democratic accountability of sectoral policies.*

Since the early 2000s, the EU has spent most of its democracy aid on promoting the effectiveness of political institutions rather than their democratic quality. Recent revisions of strategic priorities (see Conclusions on Democracy, Council of the European Union, 2019) acknowledge that, instead, the EU would need to invest more strongly in the media, civil society, political parties and parliaments. Even though these actors are particularly difficult to engage with, the EU should make more efforts in this regard.

Which intermediary actors can contribute to more democratisation and how these actors can be supported depends on the country context. For instance, in dominant party regimes where the ruling party tends to stabilise non-democratic practises, it is necessary to identify reform factions within the party or support dialogue platforms that bring together civil society, opposition parties, and regime actors. The media can play a crucial role in transmitting democratic messages and forming citizens' democratic attitudes. In a highly repressive regime, one way ahead can be to strengthen regional and transnational networks that promote investigative journalism and build up strong transnational media that can provide free and independent coverage beyond the reach of the regime.

When engaging with political parties or the media, the EU is clearly not »the only show in town«. For most African ruling parties in dominant party regimes, the Chinese Communist Party is the most important cooperation partner (Hackenesch & Bader, in press). China has also invested heavily in strengthening ties with African media. Russia has recently offered support for the online manipulation of election campaigns. This changed context makes the EU's cooperation with political parties and the media even more difficult, but no less relevant.

In addition to engaging with intermediary actors, the EU should invest more in promoting democratic accountability (horizontally between the executive, legislative and judiciary as well as vertically between the state and the people)<sup>9</sup> and in sectoral policies. EU support for sectoral policies already includes technical and financial assistance to render sectoral policies more effective and efficient. This strategy would need to be complemented with a more political approach to supporting sectoral reforms. For instance, the EU could invest more in supporting civil society organisations or the media that uncover corruption in the energy and transport sectors or in large-scale infrastructure investments. Such an implicit support would need to be part of a broader strategy to support democratic reforms in a country and it would need to be guided by a »do-no-harm« approach as activists in authoritarian regimes take a high personal risk when fighting for democracy.

**Proposal 5:** *Intensify support for civic education and launch new initiatives to strengthen transnational relations between African and European societies.*

The EU needs to invest substantially more in civic education. So far, development assistance for education provided by the EU and other EU donors does not include assistance for political education. In light of demographic change, the mobilisation potential of youth, the new role of social media and outside influences from evangelical churches and Muslim communities, the EU and its member states should broaden and intensify their cooperation with African partners on civic education. This could include more cooperation between various African and European actors (including from EU member states) engaged in civic education (that is, political foundations, media, or actors such as the German Federal Agency for Civic Education) and exchange programmes for European and African youth, students, political and business elites.

Europe and Africa have developed close transnational bonds. Ensuring that these bonds remain attractive and productive in the future requires that European and African business professionals, civil society, youth or politicians can easily con-

<sup>9</sup> Any political regime – democratic or autocratic – relies on mechanisms of accountability. Democratic accountability consists of three elements: first, the ruled can demand information from the rulers (information); second, rulers give that information (responsiveness); and, third, if the ruled are not satisfied with the rulers they can sanction them, for instance, through elections or other mechanisms of sanction (sanctions).

nect and base their cooperation on similar values. Given the massive investments of China and Arab states in value-based trainings and education for African children, youth, professionals and political elites, the EU should engage more in strengthening transnational ties. It should invest in a long-term approach which helps to build tolerant and democratic minds through transnational cooperation and relations. This would also need to include a new approach towards cultural policy (Weigel, 2019).

**Proposal 6:** *Engage more strategically in contexts where authoritarian regimes suddenly open up or where electoral autocracies gradually close political spaces.*

In addition to supporting the deepening of young democracies, two specific country situations require a more strategic approach both now and in the years to come. The first country situation refers to authoritarian regimes that suddenly open up. After the Arab Spring, other closed authoritarian regimes such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia or Sudan suddenly opened up political spaces in response to public protest. Similar situations might emerge in the future when certain authoritarian leaders reach the end of their rule (for age or health reasons) and public protest has been mounting (for instance, in Cameroon). For the EU, these situations are particularly challenging because the EU's funding instruments are long-term-oriented and not very flexible. Disbursements of aid tranches that have been planned for some time might fall in a period right before or during a political crisis. On the other hand, the EU has very limited means to mobilise aid funds to respond on an ad hoc basis within days, weeks or months. The EIDHR's human rights defenders line can mobilise short-term assistance within 48 hours. But these funds are very small and can be only used for individual activists and small human rights groups. In short, the EU's financial instruments give little flexibility to respond to situations where authoritarian regimes suddenly open up.

The second country situation where the EU needs to develop a more strategic approach refers to contexts where African democracies or electoral autocracies gradually close political spaces. Tanzania is one particularly prominent example (see section 3.4). The EU has difficulties in responding to shrinking spaces, and in protecting democratic institutions and practices: Which incentives and what type of support and protection can help, when and how? How much pressure should be exerted, when and how? Putting too much pressure might risk that the overall aid relationship or other strategic interests in relation to the country are negatively affected. Applying no pressure or applying it too late could mean that the measure might not have any effect. In these cases, also the long-term orientation of EU aid programming hardly allows for quick reactions. Moreover, if aid disbursements take place right after announcements of new legislation that is critical for the media or CSOs, this can send problematic messages.

What could the EU do differently? A first step might be a comparative learning exercise. Over the past years, the EU

and member states have confronted gradually closing spaces and regimes that have suddenly opened up in different countries. A comparative analysis of what has worked and what has not and in which situations among the EU and member states could be one step forward. For regimes that suddenly open up, this comparative analysis should include the broad-based academic evidence about transition processes. For regimes that gradually close political spaces, this comparative perspective would need to include an analysis of the factors which drive African governments' decisions to close political spaces. These factors often lie within the power structures and power base of the ruling party (particularly in dominant party regimes) or other elite networks (Hackenesch, 2015).

A second step would need to involve a reform of the EU's financing instruments. The EIDHR needs to broaden its focus and reach beyond the support of civil society. Support for political equality is relevant to counter increasing social inequalities in all world regions, in particular with regard to women and youth. EIDHR country calls should be tailored according to country contexts, in particular according to the type of political regime (democracy versus autocracy); regime dynamics (opening versus closing); strength of state institutions (fragile versus strong); and the culture of conflict-resolution in a society (peace versus violent conflict). A new funding line could be introduced in the EIDHR that would allow EU delegations to initiate projects to protect and support democracy (without relying on responses for country calls for proposals). From the geographic instruments, parts of the new flexibility cushion that is foreseen in the NDICI proposal could be used for financial incentives in situations where authoritarian political regimes suddenly open up.

A third step would need to involve more strategic approaches in the EU delegation's and member states' response to shrinking spaces and autocratic regimes that suddenly open up. If the EU wants to make relevant contributions during regime transitions or in countering autocratisation trends, it would need to invest more in taking a role as a power broker and in engaging behind-the-scenes. This can only work if member states also align their positions. As the EU is often perceived to be more neutral than individual countries, the EU should play a more significant political role.

**Proposal 7:** *Continue and deepen cooperation with African regional organisations and put more emphasis on joint learning and practices for defending democracy.*

Regional organisations and integration processes provide a solid basis for supporting and protecting democracy on the continent. Democratic norms as set out in the African Charter for Democracy and Human Rights (AU, 2012) and the AU's practices to defend democracy where incumbents aim to extend their executive powers are good starting points for fostering an exchange with political elites. Joint learning opportunities emerge from the AU's and other regional organisation's experience in defending democratic and con-



stitutional principles. The EU can learn from African experiences for defending democracy in Europe and develop joint strategies to do so in Africa (for instance, mediation efforts during the political struggle in the Gambia in 2017). Joint learning should further focus on strategies to curb the gradual processes of autocratisation (for instance, Pan-African fact-finding missions in Senegal 2012). An important question to be addressed here is how to best combine cooperative approaches and conditionalities on aid.

Where political elites are not interested in deepening or defending democracy, the EU can use African regional democracy norms to support democratic forces in their struggle against processes of autocratisation or autocracy. First, the EU can sensitise for these norms and support capacity-building to make these norms better known. Second, the EU can use these norms as a reference point to legitimise its own activities to support democracy in African societies.

Dynamic processes of regional integration, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), can be catalytic for fostering democratic political models and practices. While technical elements such as facilitating free trade and standards for improving value chains are at the core of establishing the AfCFTA, political factors should not be underestimated. Democratic (or for that matter also autocratic) norms and practices tend to »travel« across borders and diffuse regionally where integration processes take place (Pevehouse, 2002; Goldring & Greitens, 2020). Integrating support and protection of democracy in trade-related policies on the AfCFTA should thus be one element of the EU's strategy to support democracy in Africa.

**Proposal 8:** *Create a different institutional set-up that allows the EU to engage more strategically in democratic reforms.*

Three reforms in EU strategies to support and protect democracy are needed: further reform of the EIDHR; and the development of a more political approach to both EU development aid instruments and to EU non-aid policies towards Africa.

First, the EU would need to increase the strategic significance of the EIDHR. The proposal of a regulation for the next multiannual financial framework that would create the NDICI foresees a slight increase for a thematic instrument that would follow the EIDHR. While the outcome of the negotiations on the NDICI is unclear, it would be important to further strengthen the inbuilt flexibility of the EIDHR and maintain the mix of global and country calls. The country-specific allocation could be strengthened to not only allow for country calls for proposals for which civil society organisations can apply, but to have some flexible funds for democracy aid activities that are not possible within the EDF (see also Proposal 6).

Second, the EU's geographic budget lines in the NDICI will need to use a more substantial share to support democrat-

ic institution-building and reform. The current DCI has an input target specifying that 15 per cent of its geographic funding need to be spent on support for democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. This ceiling has helped to increase the share of EU aid directed at supporting political reforms through the DCI (Hackenesch, 2016). In the NDICI proposal, input targets have only been proposed for migration, social inclusion and human development (including gender), and climate change (see European Commission, 2018b, p. 19). A dedicated input target on democracy and human rights could help to keep the issue high on the political agenda. In terms of substance, EU geographic instruments can work on less sensitive areas compared to the EIDHR as the implementation of geographic instruments is contingent on cooperation with the respective African government. Yet, when supporting sectoral policies and in providing capacity-building for democratic institutions, more could be done to leverage support through the geographic components of DCI and EDF (or, in the future, through the geographic funding of the NDICI).

Third, the EU's geographic aid programmes would need to develop a more political approach towards providing development assistance, taking into account more strongly how aid – regardless of how it is provided and to whom – affects domestic politics in a country (see also Godfrey & Youngs, 2019). This would need to include more political economy analysis, more flexibility in terms of instruments, and a more strategic approach to engaging in certain (non-democratic) country contexts (see Proposal 6).

**Proposal 9:** *Increase the capacities of the EEAS (and DEVCO) to work on democracy support.*

Putting more emphasis on supporting democratic reforms requires administrative and human capacities to develop and implement reforms. The European Commission's DG DEVCO (Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development) has capacities for implementing the EIDHR. The implementation of democracy support through geographic instruments is overseen by the geographic experts working on specific country contexts. For both, the EU delegations in African countries have important responsibilities and room for manoeuvre to propose specific measures. At the EEAS, two divisions are responsible for EU democracy and human rights support. Yet, where one division focuses on human rights, the other one is mainly dealing with election observation and has very limited capacities to develop further ideas for a more strategic approach to democracy support.

What would be needed are substantial additional resources at the EEAS and DEVCO to work on democracy support and democracy protection in order to bring together the different elements on how the EU engages in democracy support through the EIDHR as well as the EU's geographic instruments. These additional capacities would also be needed to develop a more political approach towards the EU's development programmes. Moreover, at country level in the EU delegations, additional capacities would be re-

quired if the EIDHR develops a new flexibility fund (beyond the country calls) which allows the EU delegations to initiate own proposals for democracy support projects and if the EU wants to work more strategically on the implications of the megatrends for political transformation.

**Proposal 10:** *Develop a joint European approach towards democracy support.*

The EU has a specific role and responsibility in supporting democracy and human rights. As the quote at the beginning of this section suggests: if the EU is not doing this, no other actor will. Moreover, given its variety of political models and its experiences with regime transitions, Europe has valuable learning to share. As the democratic model is being challenged within Europe itself, not least with the rise of radical right populist governments in some member states, this will open up a starting point for European actors to discuss with African countries more at »eye-level«.

However, in general terms, EU democracy support will not work, if the EU and member states do not work together in this field. The EU institutions cannot put a lot of emphasis on human rights violations in political dialogue and public statements if member states do not back the EU's position. At the same time, individual member states can do very little by themselves if this is not part of a broader European effort. As the United Kingdom has left the EU, one member is missing that had been a strong advocate of human rights and democracy support.

In the EU's relations with Africa, EU member states hold different positions on how important democracy support is compared to other goals. Moreover, some member states where populist radical right parties take prominent roles in government have openly questioned some of the norms that the EU seeks to promote as well as how the EU seeks to support these norms. This contestation within the EU is not going to go away any time soon. It is part of a broader debate where the EU needs to invest more *inside* the EU to strengthen democratic principles in light of illiberal reforms, increasing polarisation and negative influences from outside (for example, from Russia or China). Yet – despite these domestic challenges and divergences – more can be done to bring those EU member states closer together who are in favour of supporting democracy in Africa. While the Nordic states have traditionally championed this agenda, a key success factor will be how Germany and France position themselves and whether more convergence between the German and French positions in this field can be reached.

The EU needs to become more strategic in supporting democratic reforms, using the collective leverage of EU institutions and member states, and combining development aid instruments more strongly with trade, security policy, migration, and other parts of the EU's external relations. If the EU does not develop a joint European approach towards democracy support in Africa, it will have limited weight there in the political competition with China and other powers.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AfCFTA</b>	African Continental Free Trade Area
<b>AfDB</b>	African Development Bank
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CCM</b>	Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Tanzania)
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
<b>DCI</b>	Development Cooperation Instrument
<b>DG DEVCO</b>	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EDF</b>	European Development Fund
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EED</b>	European Endowment for Democracy
<b>EIDHR</b>	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
<b>EOM</b>	Election Observation Mission
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IBRD</b>	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>IDA</b>	International Development Association (World Bank)
<b>ID-CPC</b>	International Department (Chinese Communist Party)
<b>LGBTI</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersexual
<b>MFF</b>	Multiannual Financial Framework
<b>NDICI</b>	Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NIMD</b>	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PSC</b>	African Peace and Security Council
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USD</b>	United States dollar
<b>WFD</b>	Westminster Foundation for Democracy

## LIST OF FIGURES

- 6 Figure 1a**  
Regime types in Africa (2018), population weighted
- 7 Figure 1b**  
Regime types in Africa (2018), population weighted (continuation)
- 12 Figure 2**  
Sub-components of EU democracy support over time to sub-Saharan Africa
- 12 Figure 3**  
Zooming in: selected subcomponents of EU democracy support to sub-Saharan Africa
- 14 Figure 4**  
Democracy support by the EU according to recipient regime type
- 15 Figure 5**  
Share of different types of support according to regime type
- 15 Figure 6**  
Share of different sub-types of support according to regime type
- 16 Figure 7**  
Official development assistance by the EU according to regime type
- 17 Figure 8**  
EU democracy support and total ODA to sub-Saharan Africa (1995–2017)
- 19 Figure 9**  
EU democracy support to African regional organisations
- 21 Figure 10**  
EU democracy support to Tanzania (2014–2017)

## LIST OF TABLES

- 13 Table 1**  
Ten largest recipients of EU democracy support in sub-Saharan Africa
- 18 Table 2**  
EU democracy aid figures (2014–2017)
- 18 Table 3**  
EIDHR multiannual planning (2018–2020)
- 22 Table 4**  
The most recent EU country call for proposals in Tanzania
- 24 Table 5**  
Parameters for reforming EU democracy support

## LIST OF BOXES

- 8 Box 1**  
Diverging motivations for a functional approach in the EU and Africa
- 11 Box 2**  
EU election observation mission: research evidence and recent trends

## ANNEX 1: OVERVIEW OF GENERAL EU POLICY DOCUMENTS

Legal text/ policy document	Year	Democracy (emphasis on)	Good governance	Human rights
Cotonou Agreement	2000	<i>Democracy based on human rights</i> – Strong civil society – Diversity – Freedom	Transparent and accountable governance	– Focus on institutions – Protect and promote human rights
Council Conclusions	2009	<i>Democracy as a universal value</i> → <i>Rights-based</i> – State-society relations, including political parties – Democratic and participatory gover- nance	– Marginal, mentioned only twice – Not further defined but linked to: democracy, as sustainable development and poverty reduction	– Institutions and individuals – Protect and promote human rights – Protect human rights defenders
European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	2014–2017 2018–2020	→ <i>Rights-based</i> – Strong civil society – Participatory – Representative  → <i>Rights-based</i> – Protection of HR	Marginal in document	Focus on institutions and individuals
European Consensus on Development	2017	<i>Democracy as a universal value</i> – State-society relations, including civil society and political parties	Not explicitly defined but no change as compared to 2000	Protect and promote human rights
EU Global Strategy	2018	<i>Democracy as a European value</i>	No mention	Strong focus on protecting and promoting all human rights
Council Conclusions	2019	<i>Democracy as a global and universal public good</i> → <i>Rights-based</i> – Inclusive – Equal  Broadened to: – Media – Horizontal accountability	No mention	Protect and promote all human rights

## Notes:

*EU foreign policies to support democracy:* In 2009, the Council adopted two conclusions under the Czech and Swedish presidencies: »Support to Democratic Governance – Towards an enhanced EU framework« (Council, 2009a) and »Democracy Support in EU External Relations – Towards increased coherence and effectiveness« (Council, 2009b). These conclusions re-emphasised the EU's commitment to provide support for democratic principles. Moreover, since the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2011, this agenda has received more prominence. The Foreign Affairs Council then adopted the first EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights (2012–2014), together with the Strategic Framework for Democracy and Human Rights, which was revised for the period 2015–2019. In 2019, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted new Council Conclusions on »Democracy« that provided guidelines for EU external democracy support and for the revision of the EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights.

*EU development policies:* In 2014, EU development ministers introduced a »rights-based approach« in EU development policy, aimed at »integrat[ing] human rights principles into EU operational activities for development, co-  
vering arrangements both at headquarters and in the field for the synchronisation of human rights and development cooperation activities«. The »New Consensus on Development« of 2017 reinforced democracy, good gover-  
nance and human rights as important principles of EU development policies.

*EU-Africa policies:* The Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, contains the strongest legal provision for EU democracy support abroad. Firstly, it stipulates that democracy, good governance and human rights are »essential and  
fundamental elements« of EU-Africa relations (Cotonou Agreement, Art. 9[1]) and priorities for cooperation. Secondly, it allows the EU to apply sanctions if a state does not comply with democratic principles and no solution is  
found through dialogue. In addition, democracy, good governance and human rights have been confirmed as priorities in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) that was launched in Lisbon in 2007.

Source: Authors

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# WHAT THE EU SHOULD DO FOR DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IN AFRICA

## Ten Proposals for a New Strategic Initiative in Times of Polarisation



**Proposal 1:** Bring democracy support and protection to the core of EU external action and implement this strategic priority in EU foreign relations with Africa (and worldwide).

**Proposal 2:** Develop a new narrative and more strategic approach to democracy support in a geopolitical context where democracy is increasingly being undermined from within in (former) democratic countries and challenged from the outside by powerful authoritarian regimes.

**Proposal 3:** Address the impacts of demographic change, urbanisation, digitalisation and climate change on political regimes through EU democracy support.



**Proposal 4:** Invest more in intermediary organisations (media, parties, CSOs, trade unions, business councils) and in the democratic accountability of sectoral policies.

**Proposal 5:** Intensify support for civic education and launch new initiatives to strengthen transnational relations between African and European societies.

**Proposal 6:** Engage more strategically in contexts where authoritarian regimes suddenly open up or where electoral autocracies gradually close political spaces.

**Proposal 7:** Continue and deepen cooperation with African regional organisations and put more emphasis on joint learning and practices for defending democracy.



**Proposal 8:** Create a different institutional set-up that allows the EU to engage more strategically in democratic reforms.

**Proposal 9:** Increase the capacities of the European External Action Service (EEAS) (and the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO)) to work on democracy support.

**Proposal 10:** Develop a joint European approach towards democracy support that is sustained by all European countries.

Further information on the topic can be found here:  
<https://www.fes.de/en/together-towards-justainability>