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RECONFIGURING EU DEMOCRACY
SUPPORT. TOWARDS A SUSTAINED
DEMOS IN THE EU'S EASTERN
NEIGHBOURHOOD

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Trends, patterns and coordination in the EU, Member States' and international institutions' assistance to the eastern neighbourhood countries

Maryna Rabinovych, Kyiv School of Economics
Stiven Kimmel, Kyiv School of Economics

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Executive Summary

As the third deliverable of Work Package 3, the main objective of which is to collect and analyse data on democracy funding by the European Union (EU), EU member states and other international donors, this policy paper offers policy recommendations based on the analysis of patterns and trends of democracy funding in the EU's six EN countries, as provided by the EU and its member states between 2005 and 2022. When relevant, it also draws parallels with the patterns and trends, characteristic for the assistance, provided by the United States (USA) (as the largest bilateral donor in the region) and international organisation, selected based on their engagement in the democratisation efforts in the region, including, amongst others, the International Development Association, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund and the International Labour Organisation. The paper is based on descriptive statistics, derived from the dataset of democracy assistance to the EU's EN countries, developed by REDEMOS.¹ The dataset was developed based on the data on financial flows provided under the framework of Official Development Assistance (ODA), reported by the European Commission to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) between 2005 and 2022, and includes 1474 entries. Thereby 222 relate to projects, funded by the European Commission, 646 by member states, 416 to the USA and 155 to international organisations.

The analysis presents six recommendations. **First**, based on the REDEMOS' experience of working with the dataset, it highlights the need to introduce unified standards as to the scope of data on EU and member states' democracy assistance projects, reported through the OECD library, as well as their classification. This is necessary, since existing differences in the way projects are described may influence their classification and, more broadly, even whether they at all are classified as democracy assistance.

Second, the analysis underscores the importance of the alignment of funding priorities and coordination on the substance of democracy projects between the EU, its member states and other actors, active in the EN region. Alongside the notable increase in overall democracy assistance for the region, this recommendation makes sense amidst the multiplicity of in democracy models, promoted by donors in the region, and difference in the degree to which they engage with related concepts, such as good governance, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality.

Third, the analysis points to the need for the EU and member states to stronger engage and support the electoral model of democracy in EN partner countries. Though free and fair elections lie at the heart of democracy and notwithstanding the rise of the external interference challenge, support to the electoral model of democracy received the smallest amount of support compared to all other models.

Fourth, this paper stresses the role of continuity of donor engagement with certain topics to ensure its effectiveness. The dataset reveals multiple instances of relatively small projects (below USD 1 million) implemented by donors in certain thematic areas (e.g. civil society support, women's rights) within one of the EN countries. However, many of these initiatives were not followed up, limiting their long-term impact.

Fifth, the paper draws attention to the positive case of EU and member states' multi-stakeholder support to Ukraine's decentralisation reform and local empowerment as a potential model for long-term support of priority reforms in partner countries in the EN region and beyond. It is shown that the focus on a priority thematic area within a multi-stakeholder format allows for effective coordination between donors based on their specialisation and networks in a given partner country.

¹ Freyburg, Tina, Dobrescu, Madalina, and Anastasiia Vlasenko. 2024. 'Conceptual framework EU democracy funding. Unpacking EU democracy assistance. What model of democracy does EU funding suit?'. *REDEMOS Working Paper D 3.1*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://redemos.eu/resources/publications/working-papers>.

Finally, it is emphasized that long-termism and continuity should not be treated as imperatives, allowing for a fair balance between stability and adaptability in response to changes within partner countries and a turbulent geopolitical environment. Portfolio assessment is recommended as a tool to investigate the interplay in the impact various EU and member states' initiatives have within dynamically evolving domestic and geopolitical policy contexts.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CRS	Creditor Reporting System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EN	Eastern Neighbourhood
EU	European Union
EUACI	European Union Anti-Corruption Initiative
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UK	United Kingdom
U-LEAD	Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy

Introduction

The amounts allocated by bilateral donors and international organisations to official development assistance (ODA) for the EU's eastern neighbourhood (EN) countries (namely, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) demonstrate a steady growth over the past five years.² Large volumes of assistance, as well as the multiplicity of donors, and the diversity of their interests and programmes make it challenging to effectively govern development cooperation and diminish the possible impact of assistance.³

This challenge of governing development cooperation is of importance for the EU, since development cooperation lies at the heart of EU external action, and the EU and its member states collectively represent the world's largest donor of ODA.⁴ As of 2023, their collective ODA reached EUR 95.9 billion or roughly 42 percent of global ODA.⁵ The EU and member states are expected to coordinate their efforts in the development realm since development policy is a shared competence of the EU (TFEU, Art. 208-211).⁶ They also face the challenge of aligning their priorities with and engaging in coordination with other bilateral donors (e.g. the USA, Canada) and multilateral aid-providing agencies (e.g. UN Development Programme (UNDP), international development banks). Notably, keeping track of development assistance and assessing its impact is particularly challenging to exercise in areas where key concepts are “essentially contested”, as the case with democracy and its promotion is.⁷ Engaging in consistent action in this realm thus requires a nuanced and shared understanding of the scope of various democracy models and the relationship between democracy and closely related concepts, such as the rule of law, human rights and gender equality. In case of the EN countries, exercising democracy promotion is additionally aggravated by Russia's systemic efforts to destabilise the region and resulting complex conflict dynamics.⁸

This policy paper thus offers policy recommendations based on the analysis of patterns and trends of democracy funding in the EU's six EN countries, as provided by the EU and its member states between 2005 and 2022. When relevant, it also draws parallels with the patterns and trends, characteristic for the assistance, provided by the United States (USA) (as the largest bilateral donor in the region) and selected international organisations. The respective international organisations were selected on the basis of their engagement in democratisation work in EN countries and include, *inter alia*, the International Development Association, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund and the International Labour Organisation.

² OECD. 2024. 'Slight increase in official development assistance in 2023.' January 22. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://focus2030.org/Slight-increase-in-Official-Development-Assistance-in-2023>.

³ Ashoff, Guido. 2004. 'Donor coordination: a basic requirement for more efficient and more effective development cooperation.' German Institute of Development Policy Briefing Paper No 7/2004. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/199594/1/die-bp-2004-07.pdf>.

⁴ European Parliament. 2024. 'A general survey of development policy.' April. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/163/a-general-survey-of-development-policy>.

⁵ Council of the EU. 2024. 'Official development assistance: the EU and its member states remain the biggest global provider.' June 24. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/24/official-development-assistance-the-eu-and-its-member-states-remain-the-biggest-global-provider/#:~:text=In%20its%20report%2C%20the%20Council,EUR%2071.6%20billion%20in%202021>.

⁶ European Union. 2024. 'Consolidated text: Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union'. Document 02016E/TXT-20240901. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02016E%2FTXT-20240901>.

⁷ Hidalgo, Oliver. 2008. 'Conceptual History and Politics. Is the Concept of Democracy Essentially Contested?' Contributions to the History of Concepts 4(2): 176-201; Wetzel, Anne. 2015. 'The Substance of EU Democracy Promotion: Introduction and Conceptual Framework.' In *The Substance of EU Democracy Promotion. Concepts and Cases*, edited by Anne Wetzel and Jan Orbie. 1-23. Springer.

⁸ Delcour, Laura. 2018. 'Dealing with the elephant in the room: the EU, its 'Eastern neighbourhood' and Russia.' Contemporary Politics 24(1): 14-29; Siddi, Marco. 2022. 'The partnership that failed: EU-Russia relations and the war in Ukraine.' Journal of European Integration 44(6): 893-898.

The analysis is based on the mapping of the substance of democracy, as offered by Freyburg et al⁹ and distinguishing between six models of democracy assistance, namely electoral, liberal, participatory, egalitarian, peacebuilding and feminist. It also takes account of assistance for good governance, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality as concepts, closely related to democracy and that often come as part of democracy assistance projects.¹⁰

The paper employs descriptive statistics, derived from the dataset of democracy assistance to the EU's EN countries, developed by REDEMOS.¹¹ The dataset was developed based on the data on financial flows provided under the framework of Official Development Assistance (ODA), reported by the European Commission to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) between 2005 and 2022.

The dataset includes 1474 entries, whereby 222 relate to projects, funded by the European Commission, 646 by member states, 416 to the USA and 155 to international organisations. Remaining entries concern projects, funded by the UK following Brexit, as well as those funded by third states (e.g. Israel, Australia), and are not considered in the analysis. The USA is included in the analysis as the largest bilateral donor in the region. The total sum of aid, encompassed by the analysis, constitutes USD 503,3 million, whereby USD 184.25 million were provided by EU institutions, USD 146.62 million by EU member states, USD 139.07 million by the USA, USD 26.33 million by international organisations, and USD 7.03 by non-EU countries (see Figure 1).

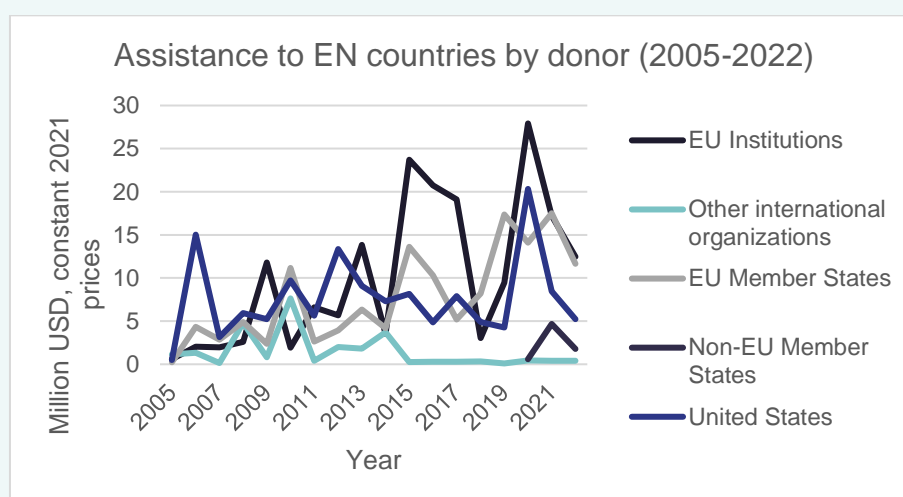


Figure 1: Assistance to EN countries by donor (2005-2022)

The classification of projects under the dataset is based on the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) purpose codes. To address the substance of democracy assistance, Freyburg et al operationalise it according

⁹ Freyburg, Tina, Dobrescu, Madalina, and Anastasiia Vlasenko. 2024. 'Conceptual framework EU democracy funding. Unpacking EU democracy assistance. What model of democracy does EU funding suit?'. *REDEMOS Working Paper D 3.1*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://redemos.eu/resources/publications/working-papers>.

¹⁰ Democracy *stricto sensu* signifies projects related to elections, democratic participation and civil society, legislatures and political parties; good governance includes support for the operation of state executive institutions and anticorruption; human rights refer to the rights of individuals and (vulnerable) groups; the rule of law programmes are mostly concerned with legal and judicial development, often meaning support to reforms of judiciary or law enforcement agencies and, finally, gender equality relates to the protection of women's rights and ensuring females' political participation.

¹¹ Vlasenko, Anastasiia, and Tina Freyburg. 2024. 'International and EU funding in the eastern neighbourhood (2005-2022). REDEMOS Dataset 3.2.' Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://zenodo.org/records/13123531>.

to the aforementioned six distinct models of democracy, thus “aggregating the highly disaggregated ODA purpose codes according to indicators each model exclusively captures.”¹²

Based on REDEMOS’ experience of working with the dataset, the paper **points to the need to introduce unified standards as to the scope of data on EU and member states’ democracy assistance projects, reported through the OECD library, as well as their classification.** Despite the proliferation of democracy assistance to EN countries, the dataset reflects the lack of consistency in the formulation of project titles and descriptions, with some descriptions offering a considerable degree of detail and others remaining limited to a vague statement of purpose (e.g. “democratic participation and civil society”). Differences in the way projects are described may influence their classification and, more broadly, even whether they at all are classified as democracy assistance. Moreover, the analysis of the scope, i.e. of trends and patterns of democracy assistance, is additionally challenged by the lack of indications as to the timing of respective projects. This makes it difficult to account for multi-annual projects in research on EU democracy funding.

Second, the analysis **underscores the importance of the alignment of funding priorities and coordination on the substance of democracy projects between the EU, its member states and other actors, active in the EN region.** Alongside the notable increase in overall democracy assistance for the region, this recommendation can be substantiated by the diversity in democracy models, promoted by donors in the region, and difference in the degree to which they engage with related concepts, such as good governance, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality, as well as evidence from secondary sources.

Third, the analysis points to the need for the **EU and member states to stronger engage and support the electoral model of democracy in EN partner countries.** Though free and fair elections lie at the heart of democracy, support to the electoral model of democracy received the smallest amount of support compared to all other models. Given the wide-spread challenge of Russia’s interference in elections in the region,¹³ **the EU and member states should explore opportunities for the European Commission and EU member states to ensure continuity in democracy assistance, when this is deemed to contribute to the increased effectiveness and impact of interventions.**

Fourth, this paper **stresses the role of continuity of donor engagement with certain topics to ensure its effectiveness.** The dataset reveals multiple instances of relatively small projects (below USD 1 million) implemented by donors in certain thematic areas (e.g. civil society support, women’s rights) within one of the EN countries. However, many of these initiatives were not followed up, limiting their long-term impact.

Fifth, the paper draws attention to the positive case of EU and member states’ **multi-stakeholder support to Ukraine’s decentralisation reform and local empowerment as a potential model for long-term support of priority reforms in partner countries in the EN region and beyond.** The analysis shows that the focus on a priority thematic area within a multi-stakeholder format allows for effective coordination between donors based on their specialisation and networks in a given partner country.

Sixth, it is emphasised that **long-termism and continuity should not be taken as an imperative.** This means the EU should be able to find a fair balance between continuity and reacting to change within partner countries and a turbulent geopolitical environment. In this light, the effectiveness and impact of democracy assistance projects need to be assessed both individually and against a broader picture of development projects in the region, implemented by the EU, its member states and other donors. This points directly to

¹² Freyburg, Tina, Dobrescu, Madalina, and Anastasiia Vlasenko. 2024. ‘Conceptual framework EU democracy funding. Unpacking EU democracy assistance. What model of democracy does EU funding suit?’. *REDEMOS Working Paper D 3.1*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://redemos.eu/resources/publications/working-papers>. Page 11.

¹³ Orenstein, Maya. 2024. ‘Russia’s Information War in Moldova.’ *Policy Commons*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/16987675/russias-information-war-in-moldova/17876180>; Chkhaidze, Nicholas. 2024. ‘Russia emerges as the real winner of Georgia’s disputed election.’ *Atlantic Council*. November 12. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russia-emerges-as-the-real-winner-of-georgias-disputed-election>.

the importance of conducting **portfolio assessments of EU and member states’ democracy promotion action in the EN region and thus on the importance** to zoom in on the substance of projects being financed, their interplay with each other and with projects by other donors, as well as the relevance of the EU portfolio amidst changes within the partner countries and broader geopolitical dynamics.

The remainder of the paper is structured around these six recommendations. It introduces each recommendation and supports it with insights from the analysis of data, included in the REDEMOS dataset of EU democracy funding.¹⁴ Annex 1 includes the table, explaining the six democracy models.

Recommendation 1

- **To introduce unified standards as to the scope of data on the EU and member states’ democracy assistance projects, reported through the OECD library, as well as their classification.**

The proliferation of democracy assistance projects funded by the EU, its member states, and other bilateral and multilateral donors in EN countries highlights the need for practitioners and researchers to quickly and effectively navigate the landscape of these initiatives. Access to clear and comprehensive data on democracy funding is not only crucial for optimising the design and implementation of these projects but also for ensuring transparency and accountability to EU citizens who ultimately fund these efforts through their tax contributions. Nevertheless, the experience of utilising the REDEMOS dataset reveals several limitations as regards the way the data on EU and member states’ projects is currently reported to the OECD. Addressing these shortcomings will contribute to the data’s usability for multiple purposes, such as conducting reviews and assessments of EU democracy assistance projects, developing suggestions for new projects and ensuring the transparency of aid data.

The first such shortcoming relates to the **lack of a unified standard for project titles and descriptions, submitted to the OECD Library**. This can be noticed among EU projects but, even to a larger extent, across the EU and member states’ projects. As illustrated by several selected projects in Table 1, many EU projects, presented in the dataset have a clear title and project description, offering an insight into the measures, funded under the project. In turn, clear titles and descriptions contribute to accurate operationalisation of data on democracy funding:

Table 1: Selected EU projects with clear titles and project descriptions

Year	Recipient	Title	Description	Amount of funding	Model of democracy	Related concepts
2014	Ukraine	Ukraine - EU Speedometer: Constitutional and Judicial Reforms	Contribute to increasing public support for movement towards European integration in Ukraine through independent evaluation of the government’s activity in the areas of constitutional and judicial reforms within the framework of the EU-	USD 136.99	Liberal	rule of law

¹⁴ Vlasenko, Anastasiia, and Tina Freyburg. 2024. ‘International and EU funding in the eastern neighbourhood (2005-2022). REDEMOS Dataset 3.2.’ Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://zenodo.org/records/13123531>.

			Ukraine Association Agenda.			
2020	Moldova	Reform of the initial and continuous training of the police system in the Republic of Moldova	The Twinning Project comes into support of the Budget Support Programme with the General Police Inspectorate of the Republic of Moldova (2015/038-144). The project will mainly focus on the Joint Law Enforcement Training Center.	USD 1.3 million	Liberal	rule of law
2020	Belarus	Creation of Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovations Promotion and Support in Glubokoye District, Vitsebsk Region, Belarus	Overall objective is the facilitation of Glubokoye district socio-economic development via creation of hard and soft infrastructure for improvement of business environment, supporting human capital development, promotion of innovative SMEs.	USD 158.228	participatory	

As Table 2 shows, in some cases, however, neither project titles, nor available descriptions provide an accurate insight into the project's substance and make it difficult to establish whether respective projects at all can be considered (to be part of) democracy assistance. In some cases, descriptions include references to specific programmes and actions, which may be challenging to find online, especially in case of older projects:

Table 2: Selected EU projects with unclear titles / descriptions

Year	Recipient	Title	Description	Amount of funding	Model of democracy	Related concepts
2005	Ukraine	Social welfare services (Ukraine)	<i>Absent</i>	USD 139.800	Egalitarian	
2007	Belarus	Democratisation and human rights in Belarus	Democratisation and human rights in Belarus' <i>(the nature and substance of support is unclear)</i>	USD 52.824	Liberal	human rights
2013	Armenia	Support to democratic governance in Armenia	Support to democratic governance in Armenia <i>(the nature and substance of support is unclear)</i>	USD 101.418	participatory	
2017	Belarus	EIDHR 2012 Annual Action Programme -	EIDHR 2012 Annual Action Programme - Without Country Based Support	USD 36.042	participatory	

		Without Country Based Support Schemes and Targeted Projects	Schemes and Targeted Projects <i>(the nature and substance of support is unclear)</i>			
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Notably, though enabling one to make sense of projects they refer to, EU project descriptions in the dataset are formulated in different ways, as they are “copy-pasted” from different parts of original project descriptions, often outside the context (e.g. “Children with disabilities who are currently out of education enjoy their human rights for inclusive education, as specified in Article 24 of the UNCRPD” vs “To support the capacity of the Ombudsman Institution and its regional centres to ensure the implementation of its mandate related to the National Preventive Mechanism, Rights of Child, Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Human Rights of Older People and Right to Access to Information”).

The establishment of unified EU-level standards on information to be included in project descriptions for the purpose of reporting ODA to the OECD Library would have largely contributed to addressing these inconsistencies. Such rules would have also served as a first step to unifying the reporting practices of the EU and member states, as those responsible also tend to formulate information for reporting very differently. For instance, over twenty Dutch democracy support projects in Ukraine, funded between 2010 and 2022, refer to project priorities (e.g. human rights, democratic partnership and civil society) but fail to provide any descriptions. A similar situation exists with respect to the majority of Swedish projects in Ukraine (2005-2022) and to some in Moldova and Belarus (whereby project descriptions would just mention “project funding” or “project-type intervention”). Similar issues are identified in the descriptions of democracy assistance from the United Kingdom and Poland, while projects by other member states (e.g. Finland, Czechia, Luxembourg, Romania, Estonia) offer consistent but easy-to-understand descriptions of the measures in question.

Unified standards on project reporting would have also contributed to addressing another shortcoming of the current reporting system, namely the difficulty of determining whether funding is intended for a single year or to support a multi-annual program. In other words, the current reporting format makes it challenging to trace the continuity of EU and member state actions unless one focuses on small-scale projects or conducts additional checks based on project numbers. While some EU and member state projects explicitly reference project phases (e.g., the EU’s Anti-Corruption Initiative in Ukraine, EUACI – Phase II), others do not, even when substantial funding is involved.

This issue can be illustrated by, for example, EU funding for the peacebuilding model in Georgia. Despite three significant allocations—USD 12.83 million in 2012, USD 22.23 million in 2015, and USD 22.55 million in 2020—for civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution activities (e.g., the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, EUMM), the dataset provides no clear breakdown of how these funds were distributed over the years. Uncertainty regarding project timelines and fund distribution is also evident in larger member state allocations. This point can be illustrated by the 2021 German initiative “Strengthening of resources for a sustainable development of hosting communities in Eastern Ukraine”, valued at USD 4.87 billion. Like incomplete or unclear project descriptions, the challenge of determining the timing of allocations without additional research reduces the transparency of democracy data and, consequently, the accountability of aid-providing organisations.

Finally, it is important that the **unified standards offer guidance as to project classification, checks across comparable projects and that the EU and member states agree on purpose codes for joint actions.** As already mentioned, the ‘essentially contested’ nature of the democracy concept and the tight interplay between democracy models creates the challenge of operationalising and classifying democracy assistance. Though this challenge cannot be fully resolved, and one project may to different degrees contribute to several democracy models, the EU and member states should still improve the consistency of reporting in several ways.

- First, they can develop **joint guidance for project classification and include examples for officials as to how to deal with contested cases and decide on correct purpose codes** (e.g. when the project contributes to both democratic participation and the protection of socio-economic rights).
- Second, reporting can be improved by **closer checks on comparable projects to address gaps in the dataset**. For example, while EUMM Georgia funding is classified as democracy assistance, similar allocations for EUBAM and EUAM in Ukraine are not. This discrepancy elevates Georgia as a top recipient of EU democracy aid (see Figure 2 below), while excluding relevant data for Ukraine, thus undermining the transparency and accuracy of reported allocations.

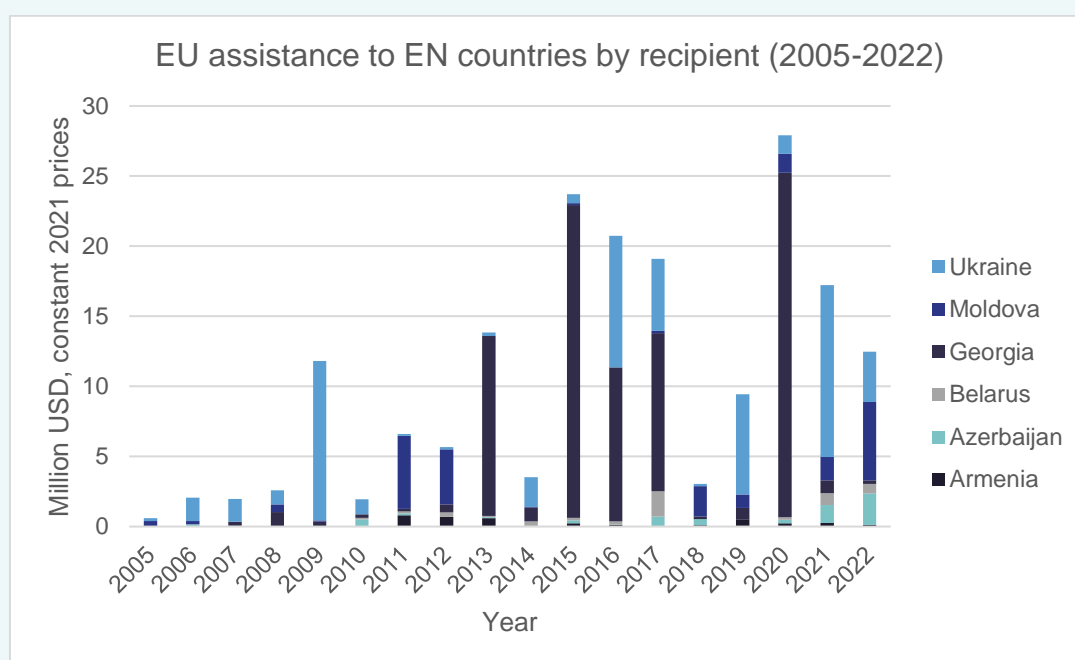


Figure 2: Assistance to EN countries from EU institutions by recipient (2005-2022)

- Fourth, the reporting could have been improved **through the coordinated reporting for joint actions by the EU, its member states and other involved actors**. For instance, while the dataset does not include EU allocations to the EUBAM, some member states (e.g. Finland) and international organisations (e.g. the International Organisation for Migration) reported their contributions to EUBAM as democracy assistance. As a potential further step, it could have been beneficial to report joint (multi-stakeholder) multi-annual actions in a manner that would enable a dataset user to trace the design of the action and contributions by different stakeholders without additional research.

In combination, detailed unified reporting standards and coordinated reporting on joint actions are needed to address existing gaps in reporting EU democracy promotion projects and increase its accuracy and transparency. Such standards would also contribute to the accountability of aid-providing agencies since more accurate data will contribute to the better quality of projects' evaluation and research on EU democracy funding.

Recommendation 2

- **To put an emphasis on the alignment of funding priorities and coordination on the substance of democracy projects between the EU, its member states and other actors, active in the EN region.**

Donor entities' "alignment" on aid objectives and "harmonisation" (coordination, simplification of procedures and sharing information to avoid duplication) are central to key international roadmaps for aid

provision, namely the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the review of literature on EU aid coordination points to the insufficiency of alignment and coordination with other donors, and the challenge of aid fragmentation in various contexts, ranging from the Western Balkans to Africa.¹⁶ Though donor coordination encounters context-specific challenges (e.g., divergent priorities among donors or rent-seeking practices by local elites), the absence of positive examples of EU coordination with member states or third actors underscores the significance of this issue for the EU.

While accounts of EU alignment and coordination with other actors in its assistance to EN countries are highly limited,¹⁷ the proliferation of assistance projects to these countries contributes to the topicality of this issue. This statement can be illustrated by the overall rise in the funding for democracy in the region over the period from 2005 until 2022 (see Figure 1 above). While in 2005 and 2006, cumulative EU assistance for democracy to EN countries constituted USD 594 903 and USD 2.05 million, respectively, it reached the peak of USD 23.7 million in 2015 and accounted for USD 12.46 million in 2022. A similar trend regards the assistance from member states (USD 231 199 in 2005 vs the high point of USD 22.184 million in 2021 and USD 13.4 million in 2022) and the USA as the biggest bilateral donor to the region (USD 494 582 in 2005 vs the high point of USD 20.32 million in 2020 and USD 5.2 million in 2022). Such a rise in funds, utilised for democracy promotion represents an opportunity to both fund more projects and launch ambitious initiatives, yet also results in a challenge for donors to agree on priority action for support and to avoid the duplication of efforts.

In the same vein, **the importance of the alignment of priorities and coordination regarding the substance of democracy assistance in the EN countries is substantiated by changing trends as to recipients of assistance and the diversity of democracy models, supported by donors in the region.** Figure 3 below demonstrates that cumulative democracy assistance, provided to EN countries between 2005 and 2022, to different degrees incorporated all democracy models, and different models were more topical at different timepoints.

¹⁵ OECD. 2005. 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness'. Accessed January 28, 2025. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2005/03/paris-declaration-on-aid-effectiveness_g1g12949/9789264098084-en.pdf; OECD. 2008. 'Accra Agenda for Action.' https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2008/09/accra-agenda-for-action_g1g1294b/9789264098107-en.pdf.

¹⁶ Delputte, Sarah, and Orbie, Jan. 2020. 'Paradigm Shift or Reinventing the Wheel? Towards a Research Agenda on Change and Continuity in EU Development Policy.' *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 16(2): 234-256; Bartlett, William. 2021. 'International Assistance, Donor Interests, and State Capture in the Western Balkans.' *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29(2): 184-200; Leiderer, Stefan. 2015. 'Donor Coordination for Effective Government Policies?'. *Journal of International Development*, 27(8): 1422-1445.

¹⁷ Wolczuk, Katarzyna. 2009. 'Implementation without Coordination: The Impact of EU Conditionality on Ukraine under the European Neighbourhood Policy'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(2): 187-211; Rabinovych, Maryna, and Andrea Gawrich. 2023. 'The Conflict in Eastern Ukraine and International Support for the Decentralization Reform (2014–2022): Theory-Guided Observations.' *East European Politics and Societies* 37(3): 1036–1058.

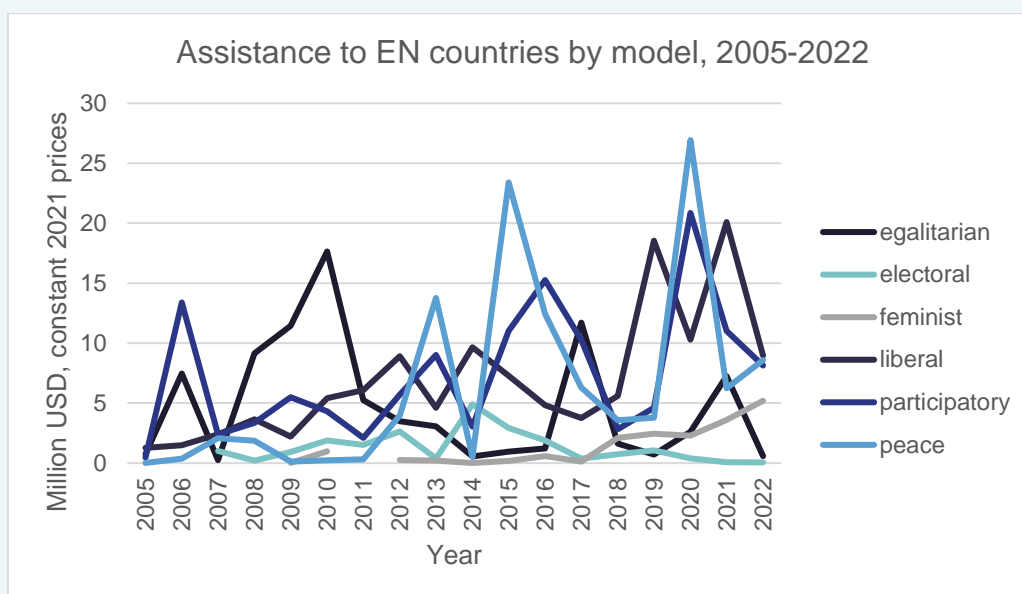


Figure 3: Assistance to EN countries by model (2005-2022)

Although the analysis of assistance by model demonstrates common patterns and trends (e.g. prominence of the liberal model versus less support for the feminist and electoral models in the EU and member states’ assistance), Table 3 highlights a considerable diversity in donors’ preferences and funding across various models and key foci of their action:

Table 3: Funding for democracy by donors and models

Donors & Preferred models (from most to least popular), assistance in USD and % of total assistance, key project focus)				
	EU (total: USD 184.25 million).	Member states (total: USD 146.62 million)	USA (total: USD 139.07 million)	International organisations (total: USD 26.33 million)
1st	Peacebuilding (USD 83.68 million / 45.4 %) Assistance to civilian peacebuilding, conflict resolution and security sector reforms (e.g. EUMM Georgia)	Liberal (USD 48.5 million / 34.6%) Considerable focus on human rights, alongside legal and judicial development, mostly in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus	Participatory (USD 68 million / 48.9 %) Decentralisation and subnational governance in Ukraine Subnational governance in Azerbaijan	Egalitarian (USD 16.01 million / 61.2 %) Social services in Moldova and Azerbaijan
2nd	Liberal (USD 36.699 million / 19.9 %) Anti-corruption, law enforcement, and judicial system (legal and judicial development), mostly in Ukraine	Participatory (USD 37.9 million / 27%) Strong support to decentralisation and subnational governance in Ukraine	Liberal (USD 33.6 million / 24.1 %) Legal and judicial development and human rights across all ENI countries	Liberal (USD 5.15 million / 19.6%) Big project on legal and judicial development in Azerbaijan
3rd	Egalitarian (USD 31.84 million / 17.2 %)	Egalitarian (USD 26.47 million / 18%)	Electoral (USD 15.47 million / 11.1 %)	Participatory (USD 2.8 million / 10.6%)

	Support for social services and employment creation across all EN countries	Focus on the government's capacity to deliver social services in Moldova	Support to legislatures and political parties in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Belarus (before 2020 elections)	Significant share – decentralisation in Azerbaijan
4 th	Participatory (USD 24.4 million / 13.2 %) Decentralisation in Ukraine, civil society support in Belarus	Peacebuilding (USD 15.8 million / 11.2 %) Focus on EUMM Georgia	Egalitarian (USD 11.362 million / 8.1%) Biggest projects focused on social services in Georgia and support to vulnerable groups in Moldova)	Peacebuilding (USD 1.3 million / 4.9%) Civilian peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Moldova and Georgia
5 th	Feminist (USD 3.85 million / slightly over 2%) Ending violence against women and girls in Azerbaijan and Armenia	Feminist (USD 11.089 million / 7.5%) Gender equality and women's rights related projects across all EN countries	Peacebuilding (USD 9.7 million / 6.9%) Civilian peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Ukraine	Feminist (USD 627 769 / 2.38%) 19 small projects on gender equality and women's rights across EN countries
6 th	Electoral (USD 3.73 million / slightly over 2%) Elections-related projects in Ukraine and Moldova	Electoral (USD 1.37 million / less than 1%) Elections-related projects in Ukraine and Moldova	Feminist (USD 917.89 / less than 1%) Small projects on gender equality in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in 2020 and 2022	Electoral (USD 416 208 / 1.6 %) Four elections-related projects in Moldova and Georgia

As is the case with respect to the variegated democracy models, also the analysis of assistance for democracy and related concepts (rule of law, human rights, good governance and gender equality) demonstrates the prominence of different priorities at different time points (see Figure 4).

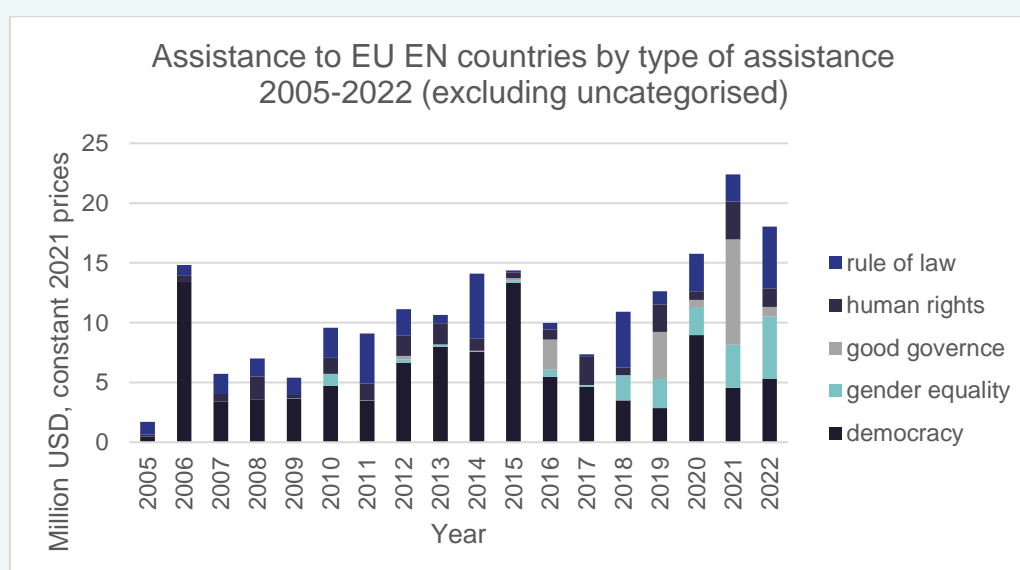


Figure 4: Assistance to EN countries by type of assistance 2005-2022 (excluding uncategorised)

Clearly dominated by democracy *strictu sensu*, i.e. projects, focusing on elections, democratic participation and civil society, as well as legislatures and political parties (30 % of categorised funding), EU funding was characterised by similar amounts, allocated to projects on good governance (23%, mostly anticorruption), human rights (20.3%) and the rule of law (19.6%). With 7% of categorised assistance, **gender equality** received the least amount of funding, with relatively small-scale projects funded in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In contrast, directly following **democracy *strictu sensu*** (nearly 50% of categorised funding), **gender equality** was the second-most important priority for member states' action (roughly 20 %), mostly due to Sweden's ambitious projects aimed at countering violence against women in Georgia and Belarus in 2020. **Rule of law** initiatives received 15.3 % of funding, allocated by Germany, Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom to legal and judicial development projects across all the EN countries, except Moldova. With 10% of overall funding, **human rights** projects were rather small, never exceeding USD 1 million and spread across all EN countries. Finally, member states' funding for **good governance** in the EU's EN region constituted USD 4.33 million or roughly 6.7% of categorised funding, mostly related to UK., Czech and Finnish anticorruption projects in Ukraine.

In the case of the USA., we see an even clearer orientation on **democracy *strictu sensu*** (74 %), allocated across a broad spectrum of projects focusing on the capacity of legislatures, political parties and civil society participation in all EN countries, except Moldova. Almost 20% of categorised funds were used to fund **rule of law** projects across the whole region, while **human rights, good governance and gender equality** priorities collectively accounted for the remaining 6% of categorised assistance.

In contrast to the EU, EU member states and the USA., the **rule of law** was the key priority for categorised assistance by international organisations (over 50%, with the largest project dealing with legal and judicial development in Azerbaijan). Funding for **democracy *strictu sensu*** and **human rights** occupied the second and third positions, respectively, both composed of multiple small-scale projects across the EU's EN region (roughly 20% and 14%, respectively). International organisations' cumulative categorised funding for **gender equality and good governance** projects did not exceed USD 1 million.

With this, the analysis of the substance of democracy funding in EN countries demonstrates a considerable variation across donors, particularly when it comes to preferred models of assistance and support to the rule of law, good governance, human rights and gender equality as concepts related to democracy. **Amidst the overall rise in the volume of assistance, the revealed variation and multi-facetedness of external support to democracy in the EN region determines the need for the EU to align the priorities of its assistance and coordinate not only with member states but other important donors, such as the USA, and relevant international organisations.** Improvement of reporting on EU and member states' democracy assistance projects, as suggested by Recommendation 1, represents an important step towards a better overview of past projects and, subsequently, the evidence-based alignment of priorities for future projects.

Recommendation 3

- **Whenever possible under political circumstances, to strengthen the EU and member states' engagement with the electoral model in partner countries, especially when it comes to building partner countries' resilience to digital threats to elections.**

Free and fair elections lie at the heart of democracy.¹⁸ While elections can exist outside democracy (i.e. when misused by undemocratic or hybrid regimes),¹⁹ **it is not possible to run a democratic state without elected officials, chosen through free and fair elections.** Dahl²⁰ refers to *elected officials* and *free and fair elections* as key political institutions of modern representative democratic government. In a representative democracy, "control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in officials elected by citizens."²¹ For the principle of representativeness to function, such officials should be chosen "in frequent and fair elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon."²² Merkel²³ also points to the centrality of the electoral regime in his understanding of contemporary embedded democracy, "as it is the most obvious expression of the sovereignty of the people, the participation of citizens and the equal weight allotted to their individual preferences."

Notably, the contemporary understanding of the electoral democracy model goes far beyond the mere fact of holding elections at the national and subnational levels and the absence of fraud and violence on election day. As illustrated by the V-DEM index codebook²⁴, it encompasses, *inter alia*, suffrage and potential obstacles to exercising it, party system and transparency of funding for political parties, the peculiarities of campaigning and the use of media, formation and capacity of election bodies and the quality of national and international monitoring.²⁵

Notwithstanding **the importance of the electoral model and the multiplicity of potential avenues for supporting it, the electoral model received surprisingly little attention in EU and member states' support for democracy in EN countries between 2005 and 2022.** As Table 3 above indicates, projects focused on the electoral model accounted for slightly over 2% of EU funding, and less than 1% of funding provided by EU member states (which is quite different from the U.S.A. that allocated 11.1 % of its funding for the electoral model, with a considerable focus on supporting legislatures and political parties).

Moreover, as Figure 5 demonstrates, the EU and member states' cumulative annual assistance for the electoral model seldom exceeded USD 1 million. The 2014 spike in assistance (USD 2.89 million) is thereby attributed to the EU and member states' (Sweden, Luxembourg) support to the conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine following the Euromaidan Revolution. Similarly, the smaller spike in 2019 is associated with EU support for elections in Ukraine. Usually funded by member states, projects in support

¹⁸ Dahl, Robert A. 2005. 'What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?' *Political Science Quarterly* 120(2): 187–197; Merkel, Wolfgang. 2004. "Embedded and Defective Democracies." *Democratization* 11(5): 33–35.

¹⁹ Diamond, Larry. 2002. "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 21–35.

²⁰ Dahl, Robert A. 2005. 'What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?' *Political Science Quarterly* 120(2): 187–197.

²¹ Ibid. Page 188.

²² Ibid. Page 188.

²³ Merkel, Wolfgang. 2004. "Embedded and Defective Democracies." *Democratization* 11(5): 33–35. Page 38.

²⁴ V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) is an international research initiative that provides detailed data on democracy, governance, and political systems worldwide, enabling comparative analysis and historical tracking. For more information, please check <https://www.v-dem.net/>

²⁵ Varieties of Democracy. 2024. 'Codebook. V4'. Accessed January 28, 2025. https://v-dem.net/documents/38/V-Dem_Codebook_v14.pdf.

of legislatures and political parties were small-scale and often tended to focus on topics other than elections (e.g. the 2020 Twinning project for the Parliament of Moldova focused on the EU approximation process).

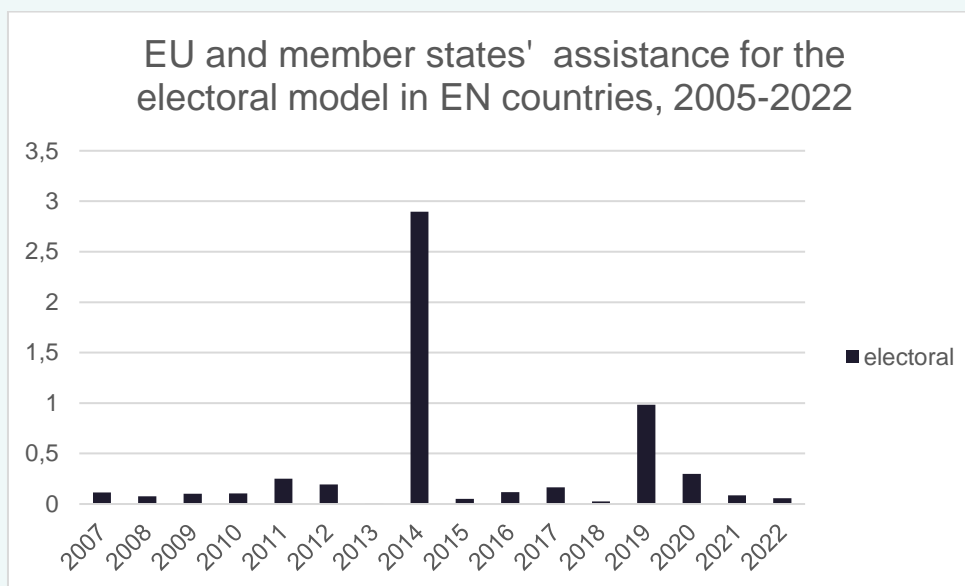


Figure 5: EU and member states' assistance for the electoral model in EN countries, 2005-2022

Strengthening the electoral model in EN countries, where political circumstances allow this, is of particular importance amidst **the rise of Russia's assertiveness and its increased interference in elections**. As exemplified by the 2024 elections in Moldova and Georgia,²⁶ Russia's interference tactics combines voter bribery, disinformation and social media manipulation, as well as the misuse of economic and energy leverage. This requires the EU and its member states to analyse the extent to which their support for the electoral model in EN countries, especially Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, can be strengthened to address such malign practices – both short-term with respect to specific elections and in a longer run.

Given the prominence of digital threats to free and fair elections (e.g. cyber-attacks, disinformation, social media manipulation), **the EU and its member states should strengthen the digital component of their support to the electoral model in EN countries**. Available data reveals that only some projects are aimed at countering digital threats in EN countries. Thereof only two specifically addressed digital threats in the context of elections ("Countering Election-related Cyber Threats and Disinformation Campaigns in Ukraine", funded by the EU in 2019 and 2020, while others were of a more general nature (e.g. "Fight against disinformation in Moldova, funded by Germany in 2021 and "Building resilience against disinformation and fake news in Armenia", funded by Czech Republic in 2022).

Ultimately, the centrality of the electoral model to representative democracy, and particularly the rise of Russia's digital interference in elections in EN countries determine the need for the EU and EU member states to significantly scale up their engagement with the electoral democracy model in partner countries.

²⁶ Spencer, Katherine. 2024. 'Moldovan and Georgian elections highlight Russia's regional ambitions.' *Atlantic Council*. October 24. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/moldovan-and-georgian-elections-highlight-russias-regional-ambitions>.

Recommendation 4

- **To explore opportunities for the European Commission and EU member states' to ensure continuity in democracy assistance, when this is deemed to contribute to the increased effectiveness and impact of interventions.**

Existing scholarship on EU democracy promotion stresses its overall continuity under various, even turbulent circumstances.²⁷ As in the case of the Western Balkans, the continuity in EU support, characterised by a lack of adaptation to the challenges of elites' resistance to reforms, has received substantial critique for promoting "stabilitocracy".²⁸ Nevertheless, an insight into the structure of EU and member states' democracy assistance reveals a different challenge: namely, **the proliferation of comparably small projects on different themes that target different stakeholders and quickly discontinue.**

This finding can be indirectly supported by the fact that, out of over one thousand entries in the dataset of democracy assistance to the EU's EN countries, developed by REDEMOS,²⁹ only 65 relate to projects and initiatives that received funding of USD 1 million or more (57 of them were funded by the EU and member states, such as Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Poland and Denmark). Though the existing reporting design makes it difficult to establish which of the remaining smaller-scale projects (of under USD 1 million) are one-off initiatives or build on earlier engagements (see #Recommendation 1), a closer **look at the projects and their descriptions showcases the presence of multiple small projects that address various democracy challenges short-term, with no traceable continuation.** This phenomenon raises doubts as to the long-term impact of such projects beyond their immediate effectiveness, i.e. the attainment of project objectives. Notably, such doubts go in line with concerns, repeatedly expressed in the relevant scholarly literature on the funding of non-government organisations worldwide and particularly in EN countries that experience both legitimacy and effectiveness challenges due to donors' preferences for project-, rather than programme funding and quickly shifting priorities.³⁰

The proliferation of short-term projects with limited follow-ups is salient in the case of the feminist and electoral models that have been least prominent both in the EU and member states' funding. As Figure 6 demonstrates, EU and member states' cumulative assistance under these models has been quite uneven, with the feminist model even marked by a three-year gap in project funding between 2010 and 2012.

²⁷ Mouhib, Leila. 2016. "EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia and Morocco: Between Contextual Changes and Structural Continuity." In *The Struggle for Influence in the Middle East: The Arab Uprisings and Foreign Assistance*, edited by Federica Bicchì, Benoit Challand, and Steven Heydermann. Routledge; Fiedlschuster, Micha. 2018. Globalization, EU Democracy Assistance and the World Social Forum. In *Concepts and Practices of Democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁸ Kmezić, Marko. 2016. "EU Rule of Law Conditionality: Democracy or 'Stabilitocracy' Promotion in the Western Balkans?" In *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: A Failure of EU Conditionality?*, edited by Jelena Džankić, Soeren Keil, and Marko Kmezić, 87-109. Routledge.

²⁹ Vlasenko, Anastasiia, and Tina Freyburg. 2024. 'International and EU funding in the eastern neighbourhood (2005-2022). REDEMOS Dataset 3.2.' Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://zenodo.org/records/13123531>.

³⁰ Parks, Thomas. 2008. 'The Rise and Fall of Donor Funding for Advocacy NGOs: Understanding the Impact.' *Development in Practice* 18(2): 213-227; Bidenko, Yuliya. 2020. 'The finances of the civil society in Ukraine: Key trends, models and obstacles in achieving sustainability.' *The Journal of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Issues of Political Science* 36: 24-36; Aliyev, Huseyn. 2015. 'Assessing the European Union's Assistance to Civil Society in Its Eastern Neighbourhood: Lessons from the South Caucasus.' *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 24(1): 42-60.

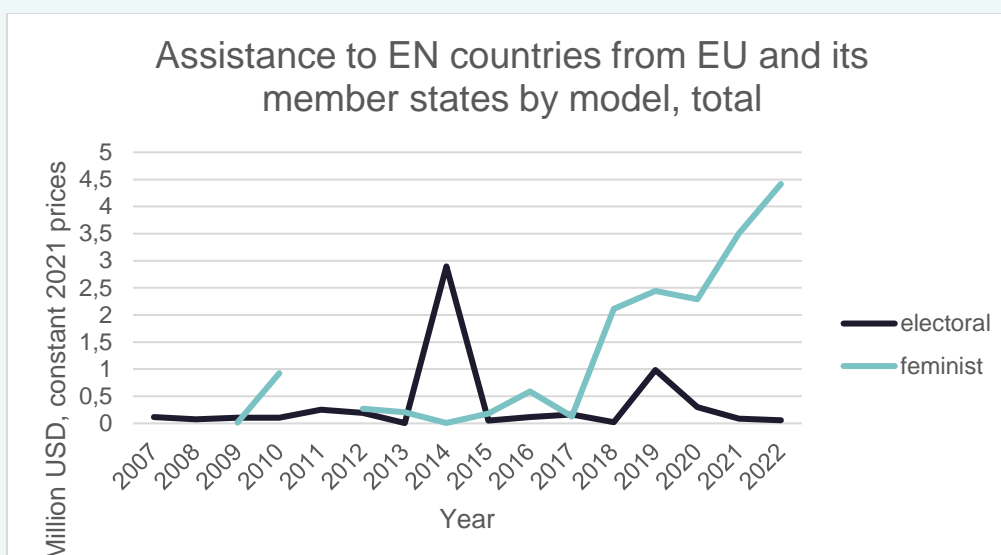


Figure 6: EU and member states’ assistance for the feminist and electoral model in EN countries, 2005-2022

Moreover, an insight into projects, funded under these models, reveals multiple further instances of discontinuity. For example, while Sweden (in 2020) and Finland (in 2021) funded in total four projects focused on women’s rights and ending violence against women and girls in Belarus, no comparable initiatives were realised in 2022, even though this theme remains topical, especially in the aftermath of the 2020 Belarusian protests.³¹ The absence of such initiatives in 2022 can be hardly explained by political circumstances, since the protests and EU reaction to them took place in 2020, and in the subsequent years the EU has continued projects, oriented on supporting Belarusian people.³² Some instances of discontinuity also regard earlier engagement with the topic of women’s rights in Azerbaijan by Finland (2012, USD 74945 & 2013, USD 19756) and Germany (2013, USD 9573), which they did not follow up on. Between 2013 and 2016, there were no projects in Azerbaijan that could be attributed to the feminist model and, after two projects by the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) in 2016 (USD 56 668 and USD 9359, respectively), engagement was again suspended, with the next projects funded only in 2021 (including the EU-funded USD 1.29 million project on ending violence against women and girls).

As expressed earlier (# Recommendation 3) regarding the electoral model, an insight into projects funded under this model reveals a lack of continuous EU and/or member states’ engagement with the ‘electoral core’ in EN countries, particularly during periods between elections in partner countries. For instance, in Ukraine, while cumulative support from the EU and Sweden for the 2014 post-Euromaidan presidential and parliamentary elections exceeded USD 2.8 million, only two small projects were implemented within the electoral model in the years between the 2014 and 2019 elections: one by Luxembourg in 2015 (USD 20,048) and another by the United Kingdom (USD 7,944). Similarly, after the EU funded two projects in connection with the 2019 elections in Ukraine—one in 2019 (USD 983,528) and another in 2020 (USD 241,241)—no follow-up initiatives took place in 2021 and 2022. This highlights the critical need for sustained support for the ‘electoral core’ to ensure the development of strong institutions and the implementation of effective electoral procedures and practices, not just during electoral cycles but also in the interim periods.

The proliferation of relatively small projects, oriented both towards governments and civil society, is also visible within other democracy models, more frequently utilised by the EU and its member states. This finding can be supported by the results of the systematic review of projects, falling within the scope of

³¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2021. ‘Belarus: Women paying heavy price for standing up for human rights - UN expert.’ October, 25. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/10/belarus-women-paying-heavy-price-standing-human-rights-un-expert>.

³² European Commission. 2024. ‘Belarus.’ Accessed January 28, 2025. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/belarus_en.

different models (e.g. “labour rights” and “employment creation” under the egalitarian model; “media and free flow of information” and “radio and television” under the liberal one and “decentralisation and subnational government” under the participatory one). This review reveals the multiplicity of small-scale projects in partner countries with no traceable follow-ups or big gaps between similar projects (e.g. “Active Labour Market in Moldova”, funded by Sweden with USD 574 605 in 2009; “Labour market policy development needs in Moldova”, funded by Austria in 2017 with USD 38 338; “Support to the sustainability of independent media in Belarus”, funded by Germany in 2014 with USD 52 262).

Furthermore, the above finding can also be supported by referencing projects under the participatory and egalitarian models, focused on autonomous regions in partner countries (e.g. Gagauzia in Moldova) and conflict-affected areas (regions of Georgia, located close to Abkhazia). With regard to autonomous regions, this point can be illustrated by the 2016-2018 Swedish initiative, aimed at providing the government of Moldova with support to efficiently exercise Gagauzia’s autonomous powers (USD 210 169 million), not accompanied or followed-up by comparable initiatives. Overall, the EU’s and member states’ engagement with Gagauzia looks quite sporadic, with only some projects funded over the researched period (e.g. two Slovakia-funded projects, namely “Modernisation projects for Gagausia” (2017, USD 116 657) and “Activation of youth and responsible citizenship (USD 47 228). Even though the EU and member states have consistently invested considerable funds in the operation of the EUMM Georgia, the focus on Georgia’s regions in the immediate proximity to the conflict has been limited (e.g. “Sharing V4 experience with Georgian self-governments: regional development and green innovations”, funded by Hungary (USD 16 371)).

The multiplicity of EU and member states’ democracy initiatives in EN countries can be well justified by the comprehensiveness of the democracy concept and a rich and nuanced stakeholder landscape in partner countries. Nonetheless, the focus on short-term projects and quick change in EU and member states’ funding priorities may both undermine the effectiveness of EU and member states-funded projects and present an obstacle to civil society development in partner countries. Guided by this thinking, the analysis suggests **the European Commission and member states to explore opportunities for close and continued engagement with certain themes in partner countries**, alongside the engagement with and support for civil society.

Recommendation 5

- **To consider multi-stakeholder action in support of decentralisation and local empowerment in Ukraine “U-LEAD with Europe” as a potential model for long-term support of priority reforms in partner countries in the EN region and beyond.**

#Recommendation 5 further supports the idea, as presented in #Recommendation 4, that a multi-stakeholder partnership focused on one key sector / reform area can be seen as a viable alternative to the proliferation of diverse and difficult-to-coordinate small-scale projects. The experience of the “U-LEAD with Europe” (Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme) in Ukraine, also in the context of the programme’s transformation under Russia’s full-scale invasion, is illustrative of not only the effectiveness, but the flexibility and resilience of such a funding format. This feature of coordinated multi-stakeholder action can be deemed particularly important, given the turbulent (geo)political dynamics and high conflict potentials in EN countries.

The history of Ukraine’s decentralisation reform goes back to the period immediately following the 2013/2014 Euromaidan Revolution and amidst Russia’s hybrid actions in Crimea, preceding its annexation

of the peninsula.³³ Despite this context and Russia's subsequent "occupation by proxy" of parts of Eastern Ukraine,³⁴ Ukraine's concept of decentralisation reform focused on the empowerment of municipalities through their amalgamation, broader competencies and enhanced access to resources, rather than conflict management.³⁵ Such a focus was reflected in international projects in support of decentralisation, both early ones (e.g. "Expert Deployment for Governance and Economic Growth (EDGE), funded by the Government of Canada) and those that were launched later, such as the "U-LEAD programme".³⁶

"U LEAD" represents a multi-stakeholder initiative, co-funded by the EU, Germany, Poland, Denmark and Slovenia and implemented by the German Corporation for International Development (GIZ). Between 2016 and 2024, the total sum of funding for the "U-LEAD" initiative accounted for EUR 217 million (USD 228 722). Alongside the multi-stakeholder design, presupposing coordination between the EU and member states, the "U-LEAD" experience can be of interest as a model for EU and member states' democracy support across the participatory, egalitarian and, potentially, peace and feminist models due to the following features / experiences it bears:

- **The programme's adaptation to providing support to Ukrainian municipalities in variegated contexts** of the reform (repeatedly assessed as the most successful one among the post-Euromaidan reforms in Ukraine,³⁷ war and planned post-war recovery.³⁸
- **The programme's elaborate organisational structure, with the Regional Operations Unit encompassing 24 regional offices within the four regional hubs.** Extensive presence on the ground can be seen as an important factor that has contributed to the programme's ability to quickly meet the challenges of Russia's full-scale invasion, i.e. by using regional offices as points for sorting and provision of humanitarian assistance.³⁹
- **The "U-LEAD" experience of simultaneous engagement with various governance levels in Ukraine,** ranging from the Ministry for Communities and Territorial Development of Ukraine to regional administrations and municipalities, as well as with private sector and NGOs.
- **The pre-war attempts to launch the Decentralisation Donor Board in Ukraine, with the "U-LEAD" playing a central role in coordinating smaller projects both within and beyond the multi-stakeholder partnerships.** Except for varying thematic contributions by members of the multi-stakeholder partnership, the Donor Board worked together to align priorities and actions under relevant projects, as exercised by other donors, such as the USA, Canada, Switzerland, the Council of Europe and other international organisations. As the last publicly available information regarding

³³ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. 2014. 'On the approval of the Concept for the Reform of Local Self-Government and the Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine.' Ordeal No 333-p. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/333-2014-%D1%80#Text>.

³⁴ Kalandarishvili-Mueller, Natia. 2022. 'Russia's "Occupation by Proxy" of Eastern Ukraine – Implications Under the Geneva Conventions.' *Just Security*. Accessed January 28, 2025. February, 2022. <https://www.justsecurity.org/80314/russias-occupation-by-proxy-of-eastern-ukraine-implications-under-the-geneva-conventions>.

³⁵ Rabinovych, Maryna, and Andrea Gawrich. 2023. 'The Conflict in Eastern Ukraine and International Support for the Decentralization Reform (2014–2022): Theory-Guided Observations.' *East European Politics and Societies* 37(3): 1036–1058.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Romanova, Valentyna, and Andreas Umland. 2019. 'Ukraine's Decentralization Reforms Since 2014 Initial Achievements and Future Challenges.' *Chatham House Research Paper*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-09-24-UkraineDecentralization.pdf>; Darkovich, Andrii, and Myroslava Savisko. 2024. '(De)Centralization? Challenges to Local-Level Governance under Martial Law in Ukraine.' PONARS Eurasia. July, 31. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/decentralization-challenges-to-local-level-governance-under-martial-law-in-ukraine>.

³⁸ U LEAD with Europe. 2024. 'Empowering municipalities: U-LEAD with Europe's achievements.' Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://decentralization.ua/uploads/library/file/364/2.pdf>.

³⁹ Pintsch, Anne, and Maryna Rabinovych. 2023. 'Geopolitical and Technocratic: EU International Actorness and Russia's War Against Ukraine.' *Schuman Papers* n°657. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/657-geopolitical-and-technocratic-eu-international-actorness-and-russia-s-war-against-ukraine>.

the Donor Board dates back to 2019,⁴⁰ additional research is needed to obtain an insight into its operation (which can be particularly relevant for coordinating donor efforts in connection with Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery).

Notably, the focus on multi-stakeholder action in priority areas by no means excludes the EU and member states' funding for NGO-led projects in priority reform areas and beyond. In the former case, long-term adaptive multi-stakeholder action can be seen as an axis smaller projects can be organised around. In this way, **multi-stakeholder action can be seen as enabling the EU and member states' long-term, yet flexible engagement with priority reform areas in EN countries, offering stronger predictability for both partner countries' governments and civil society organisations.** Importantly, however, such actions should be designed to take into account a potential "stability-democracy dilemma",⁴¹ so that the EU action does not contribute to the consolidation of hybrid or even autocratic regimes, as in the case of Belarus.⁴² Thus, given the ambitiousness of multi-stakeholder actions, the benefits of their potential establishment should be carefully balanced against possible threats and, as # Recommendation 6 suggests, long-termism should not be seen as a must. Furthermore, to ensure the effectiveness and adaptability of such actions, regular reviews and assessments should be conducted as a basis for funding decisions, allowing the EU and member states to refine their approach in response to changing circumstances and emerging challenges.

Recommendation 6

- **Not to see long-termism and continuity as an imperative for EU and member states' engagement in partner countries but use portfolio assessments to assess the relevance and potential contribution of projects in a long run.**

In Working Paper D 3.1., Freyburg et al⁴³ formulated one strategic and one reactive hypothesis related to continuity and change in EU democracy assistance to EN countries:

- **Strategic hypothesis:** EU democracy assistance in its eastern neighbourhood is influenced by its strategic outlook and policy substance.
- **Reactive hypothesis:** EU democracy assistance in its eastern neighbourhood is influenced by external shocks and events.

The empirical mapping of patterns and trends in EU democracy assistance, however, revealed 'a mixed picture', making it impossible to argue whether the 2005-2022 assistance landscape had been dominated by either the strategic or the reactionary modus. An in-depth study of the substance of EU and member states' democracy assistance informing this policy paper confirms this preliminary finding.

Notably, though donors' attention to different democracy models has been uneven and often channeled through short-term small-scale projects, the funding over the researched period featured all the democracy models (see Figure 3 above). This statement is also relevant for assistance disaggregated by donor. Even though the proliferation of conflicts in the region and the EU contribution to their management has led to the rise in the peacebuilding model (see Figure 7 below), it also continued funding projects under other models, such as the liberal and participatory one, respectively:

⁴⁰ Council of Europe Office in Ukraine. 2019. 'Decentralisation Donor Board and other meetings to support local governance reform in Ukraine.' October 22. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/decentralisation-donor-board-and-other-meetings-to-support-local-governance-reform-in-ukraine>.

⁴¹ Smith, Nicholas Ross, Nina Markovic Khaze, and Maja Kovacevic. 2021. "The EU's Stability-Democracy Dilemma in the Context of the Problematic Accession of the Western Balkan States." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29(2): 169-183.

⁴² Bosse, Giselle. 2021. 'Authoritarian Consolidation in Belarus: What Role for the EU?' *European View* 20(2): 201-210.

⁴³ Freyburg, Tina, Dobrescu, Madalina, and Anastasiia Vlasenko. 2024. 'Conceptual framework EU democracy funding. Unpacking EU democracy assistance. What model of democracy does EU funding suit?'. *REDEMOS Working Paper D 3.1*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://redemos.eu/resources/publications/working-papers>.

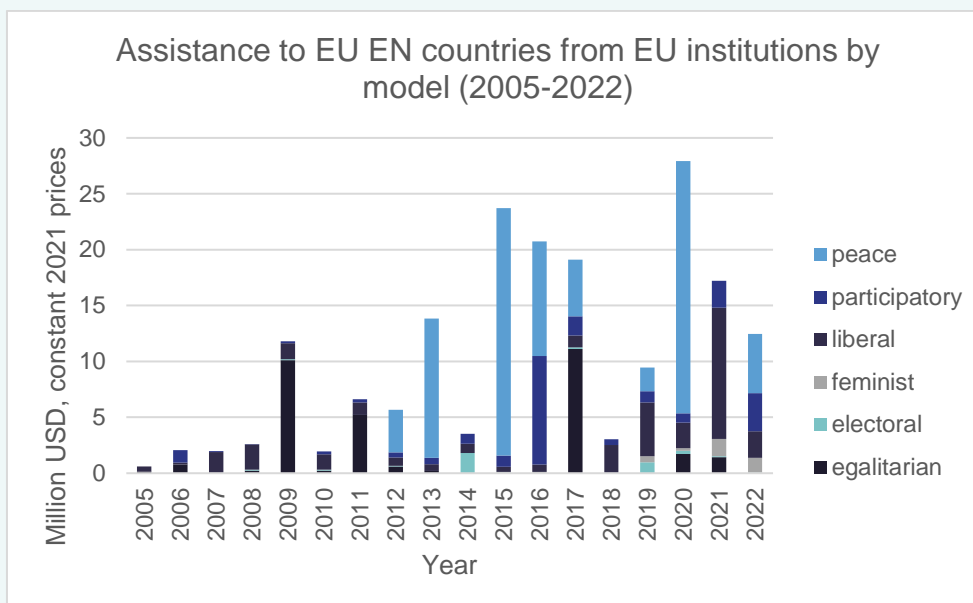


Figure 7: Assistance to EU EN countries by EU institutions by model (2005-2022)

A ‘multi-model’ picture is even more traceable in case of member states’ assistance, demonstrating their continued engagement with the liberal and participatory models:

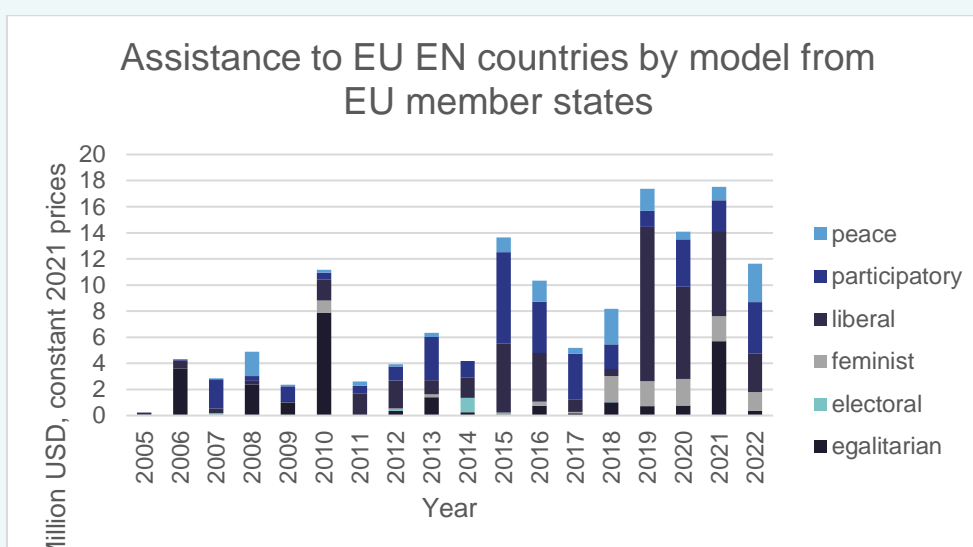


Figure 8: Assistance to EU EN countries by EU member states by model (2005-2022)

While according to Freyburg et al⁴⁴, donors’ continued commitment to advancing the liberal democratic model in the EN region speaks particularly to the strategic hypothesis, a closer look at the substance of funded projects showcases the EU and member states’ ability to react, on occasion, to political events in the region and changing needs of partner countries. This statement can be supported by the number of cases of EU member states’ projects in Ukraine in connection with Russia’s aggression in Donbas, e.g. “Supporting Ukrainian CSO advocacy work in IDP policies and human rights education activities in Eastern Ukraine” (Estonia, 2017, USD 80 735); “Human rights protection in Eastern Ukraine” (Germany, 2016, USD 282 775) or “Strengthening of resources for a sustainable development of hosting communities in Eastern Ukraine” (Germany, 2021, USD 4.87 million).

⁴⁴ Freyburg, Tina, Dobrescu, Madalina, and Anastasiia Vlasenko. 2024. ‘Conceptual framework EU democracy funding. Unpacking EU democracy assistance. What model of democracy does EU funding suit?’. *REDEMOS Working Paper D 3.1*. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://redemos.eu/resources/publications/working-papers>.

The case of EU and member states' support to decentralisation in Ukraine (# Recommendation 5) and in connection with the war in Donbas, referred to above, can be seen as a **reactionary turn, yet resulting in donors' continued engagement with a certain topic**. It thus simultaneously testifies to the ability of EU and member states' assistance to both meet evolving needs of partner countries and continuously engage with the needs, persisting over a long-term.

Therefore, though emphasising the value of continued thematic engagement (especially over small-scale, quickly discontinuing projects), the analysis in this paper points to the **importance of flexibility in the programming and exercise of assistance**. Such flexibility is needed to ensure that the EU and its member states are able to both meet evolving needs of partner countries and **make timely decisions to stop funding of programmes and projects that demonstrate low relevance or inability to meet their goals (ineffectiveness)**. Although such an approach may seem to be rather simple and logical, it may be challenging to exercise in practice, given the proliferation of democracy projects of different scale and ambition, run by donors in the region.

In this view, it is suggested that the EU, its member states and, when applicable, other donors cooperate to **develop portfolio assessments of democracy projects in the region**. The portfolio approach would enable donors to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of single programmes or projects against the broader landscape of democracy interventions in a recipient country. It would also contribute to the identification of key themes for long-term engagement and those, where only particular gaps are to be filled. More broadly, portfolio assessments can serve as a useful tool for comparing the rationale for substance and outcomes of EU engagement across regions and promoting the cross-region exchange of best practices.

In a nutshell, as a counterbalance to the previously voiced emphasis on long-termism and continuity, this paper points to the importance of flexibility, needed to meet both the changing needs of partner countries and address the evidence from portfolio assessments.

Conclusions

The objective of this policy paper is **to present policy recommendations based on an analysis of the patterns and trends in democracy funding in the EU's six Eastern Neighbourhood (EN) countries**, provided by the EU and its member states between 2005 and 2022, as captured by the REDEMOS dataset of democracy funding in the region.

The work with the dataset has highlighted several interconnected aspects of complexity in researching democracy funding. First, this complexity arises from the **"essentially contested" nature of the concept of democracy**, which results in multifaceted and often **ambiguous relationships with closely related concepts** such as the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality. Understanding and disentangling these relationships is crucial for accurately assessing the scope, focus, and impact of democracy funding initiatives.

Second, this challenge is compounded by the **multiplicity of actors involved in democracy funding**. These include the EU, its member states, other bilateral donors, and multilateral organisations, each with their own priorities, definitions, and approaches. The diversity of these agendas often hinders efforts to align and coordinate funding strategies, leading to fragmented or overlapping interventions.

Third, these differences in priorities and approaches frequently manifest as **inconsistencies in reporting practices**. Variations in how democracy assistance projects are described, classified, and documented—ranging from detailed descriptions to vague statements such as "democratic participation and civil society"—make it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of funding patterns. Furthermore, the lack of standardised criteria for project classification, along with the inconsistent inclusion of related concepts such as the rule of law or gender equality, introduces further complexity.

This fragmentation in reporting affects not only the ability to analyse democracy funding comprehensively but also the coherence and strategic alignment of donor efforts. Discrepancies in data reporting, particularly regarding timelines and financial allocations, further complicate the evaluation of multi-annual projects and their cumulative impact. As a result, the absence of uniform standards in reporting undermines the potential for a cohesive, evidence-based approach to democracy assistance in the EN region.

Based on REDEMOS' work with the dataset, **this paper highlights the need for unified standards regarding the scope and classification of EU and member states' democracy assistance projects reported through the OECD library (Recommendation 1)**. Despite the increase in democracy assistance to EN countries, inconsistencies in project titles and descriptions, ranging from detailed accounts to vague statements like "democratic participation and civil society," complicate the classification of projects and their categorisation as democracy assistance. Additionally, the lack of clear indications regarding project timing makes it challenging to track multi-annual projects within EU democracy funding research.

The analysis further emphasises the importance of aligning funding priorities and enhancing coordination among the EU, its member states, and other actors in the EN region. With diverse democracy models promoted by donors and varying engagement with key concepts like governance, human rights, the rule of law, and gender equality, **it is crucial to ensure strategic coherence in interventions (Recommendation 2)**.

A key finding is the **need for stronger EU and member state support for the electoral model of democracy in EN partner countries (Recommendation 3)**. Although free and fair elections are central to democracy, this area has received the least funding, especially amidst the interference by illiberal powers. Therefore, continuity in funding for electoral processes should be prioritised to maximise the effectiveness of EU democracy support and create solid basis for the advancement of further aspects of democracy.

The paper also highlights **the significance of continuity in donor engagement (Recommendation 5)**. It shows that small-scale projects in areas like civil society and women's rights are often not followed up, limiting their long-term impact. A positive case in point is the EU and member states' multi-stakeholder support for Ukraine's decentralisation reform, which demonstrates the potential for effective long-term support in priority reform areas.

Finally, **the paper stresses that continuity should not be pursued at the expense of responsiveness to changing geopolitical dynamics (Recommendation 6)**. A balance is needed between long-term support and adapting to evolving circumstances. To this end, assessing the effectiveness of democracy assistance projects should consider not just individual projects but **apply portfolio assessments as a tool to capture the whole spectrum of the EU and member states' initiatives in the region, their interplay and evolution against the background of the changing global, region-level and domestic dynamics**.

In conclusion, **research on democracy funding is crucial for understanding trends in democracy promotion and identifying gaps in current efforts**. By analysing funding patterns and donor strategies, this research highlights areas where democracy assistance may be lacking or where more impactful interventions are needed. It provides key insights into the effectiveness of various approaches and helps ensure that democracy assistance is better tailored to the challenges of partner countries, enhancing its strategic coherence and long-term success in a shifting geopolitical context.

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Annex

Table 4. Models of Democracy Assistance by DAC/CRS Purpose Codes (Freyburg, et al. 2024)

Purpose code	Description	Title
Electoral core		
15151	Elections	“Electoral management bodies and processes, election observation, voters' education. (Use code 15230 when in the context of an international peacekeeping operation.)”
15152	Legislatures and political parties	“Assistance to strengthen key functions of legislatures/ parliaments including subnational assemblies and councils (representation; oversight; legislation), such as improving the capacity of legislative bodies, improving legislatures’ committees and administrative procedures; research and information management systems; providing training programmes for legislators and support personnel. Assistance to political parties and strengthening of party systems.”
Liberal dimension		
15113	Anti-corruption organisations and institutions	“Specialised organisations, institutions and frameworks for the prevention of and combat against corruption, bribery, moneylaundering and other aspects of organised crime, with or without law enforcement powers, e.g. anti-corruption commissions and monitoring bodies, special investigation services, institutions and initiatives of integrity and ethics oversight, specialised NGOs, other civil society and citizens’ organisations directly concerned with corruption.”
15130	Legal and judicial development	“Support to institutions, systems and procedures of the justice sector, both formal and informal; support to ministries of justice, the interior and home affairs; judges and courts; legal drafting services; bar and lawyers associations; professional legal education; maintenance of law and order and public safety; border management; law enforcement agencies, police, prisons and their supervision; ombudsmen; alternative dispute resolution, arbitration and mediation; legal aid and counsel; traditional, indigenous and paralegal practices that fall outside the formal legal system. Measures that support the improvement of legal frameworks, constitutions, laws and regulations; legislative and constitutional drafting and review; legal reform; integration of formal and informal systems of law. Public legal education; dissemination of information on entitlements and remedies for injustice; awareness campaigns.”
15153	Media and flow of information	“Activities that support free and uncensored flow of information on public issues; activities that increase the editorial and technical skills and the integrity of the print and broadcast media, e.g. training of journalists.”
15160	Human Rights	“Measures to support specialised official human rights institutions and mechanisms at universal, regional, national and local levels in their statutory roles to promote and protect civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights as defined in international conventions and covenants; translation of international human rights commitments into national legislation; reporting and followup; human rights dialogue. Human rights defenders and human rights NGOs; human rights advocacy, activism, mobilisation;

		awareness raising and public human rights education. Human rights programming targeting specific groups, e.g. children, persons with disabilities, migrants, ethnic, religious, linguistic and sexual minorities, indigenous people and those suffering from caste discrimination, victims of trafficking, victims of torture.”
22030	Radio/television/print media	Radio and TV links, equipment; newspapers; printing and publishing.
Participatory dimension		
15150	Democratic participation and civil society	“Support to the exercise of democracy and diverse forms of participation of citizens beyond elections (15151); direct democracy instruments such as referenda and citizens’ initiatives; support to organisations to [...] help citizens learn to act in the public sphere; curricula and teaching for civic education at various levels. (This purpose code is restricted to activities targeting governance issues. When assistance to civil society is for non-governance purposes use other appropriate purpose codes.)
15112	Decentralisation and support to subnational government	“Decentralisation processes (including political, administrative and fiscal dimensions); intergovernmental relations and federalism; strengthening departments of regional and local government, regional and local authorities and their national associations.”
Egalitarian dimension		
16010	Social protection	“Social protection or social security strategies, legislation and administration; institution capacity building and advice; social security and other social schemes; support programmes, cash benefits, pensions and special programmes for older persons, orphans, persons with disabilities, children, mothers with newborns, those living in poverty, without jobs and other vulnerable groups; social dimensions of structural adjustment.”
16020	Employment creation	“Employment policy and planning; institution capacity building and advice; employment creation and income generation programmes; including activities specifically designed for the needs of vulnerable groups.”
16050	Multisector aid for basic social services	“Basic social services are defined to include basic education, basic health, basic nutrition, population/reproductive health and basic drinking water supply and basic sanitation.”
16070	Labour Rights	“Advocacy for international labour standards, labour law, fundamental principles and rights at work (child labour, forced labour, non-discrimination in the workplace, freedom of association and collective bargaining); formalisation of informal work, occupational safety and health.”
16080	Social Dialogue	“Capacity building and advice in support of social dialogue; support to social dialogue institutions, bodies and mechanisms; capacity building of workers' and employers' organisations.”
Peacebuilding dimension		
15220	Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution	“Support for civilian activities related to peace building, conflict prevention and resolution, including capacity building, monitoring, dialogue and information exchange. Bilateral participation in international civilian peace missions such as those conducted by the UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDP) or the European Union (European Security and Defence Policy), and contributions to civilian peace funds or commissions (e.g. Peacebuilding




		Commission, Peacebuilding thematic window of the MDG achievement fund etc.). The contributions can take the form of financing or provision of equipment or civilian or military personnel (e.g. for training civilians):”
15210	Security system management and reform	“Technical co-operation provided to parliament, government ministries, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to assist review and reform of the security system to improve democratic governance and civilian control; technical co-operation provided to government to improve civilian oversight and democratic control of budgeting, management, accountability and auditing of security expenditure, including military budgets, as part of a public expenditure management programme; assistance to civil society to enhance its competence and capacity to scrutinise the security system so that it is managed in accordance with democratic norms and principles of accountability, transparency and good governance.”
Feminist dimension		
15170	Women's equality organisations and institutions	“Support for institutions and organisations (governmental and nongovernmental) working for gender equality and women’s empowerment.”
15180	Ending violence against women and girls	“Support for institutions and organisations (governmental and nongovernmental) working for gender equality and women’s empowerment.”



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Dr Mădălina Dobrescu, NTNU
info@redemos.eu

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