



# REDEMOS

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

**REDEMOS Policy Paper D2.3**

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# Contrasting EU and EU member states' democracy support action

**Vassilis Karokis-Mavrikos, University of Surrey**

**Theofanis Exadaktylos, University of Surrey**

**Laura Chapell, University of Surrey**

**Arusyak Aleksanyan, Yerevan State University**

**Valentina Gevorgyan, Yerevan State University**

**Alexander Maltsev, Yerevan State University**

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## Executive Summary

The REDEMOS Policy Paper D2.3 examines the normative consistency and instrumental complementarity of democracy support efforts by EU institutions and Member States across the Eastern Neighbourhood.

The paper proposes a new analytical framework for evaluating democracy support, structured along two dimensions: normative consistency – the degree to which the EU and its Member States promote a shared set of democratic standards – and instrumental complementarity – the extent to which their operational approaches reinforce and compensate for each other.

Drawing on REDEMOS Deliverables D2.1 and D2.2, which provide a systematic stocktaking of democracy support initiatives by the EU and key EU Member States in the Eastern Neighbourhood drawing on EU and OECD Official Development Assistance data, and using comparative case study approach, the paper assesses the degree of consistency and complementarity for all six Eastern Neighbourhood countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. Consistency in norms is assessed with respect to the rule of law, fundamental rights, civil society empowerment, and resilience, while complementarity in instruments is evaluated in relation to the nature and channels of democracy support delivery, sectoral prioritisation, and agility.

The comparative case study analysis reveals considerable variation in the democracy support models followed across the region. Ukraine and Moldova display both high consistency and high complementarity, reflecting, on aggregate mutually reinforcing EU and Member State approaches. Georgia exhibits high complementarity but low consistency: while instruments are well coordinated, normative fragmentation has limited strategic focus and has left space for democratic backsliding. Armenia, conversely, demonstrates high consistency but low complementarity as shared commitments to democracy promotion coexist with fragmented operational engagement. Azerbaijan and Belarus stand at the opposite end of the spectrum, with low consistency and low complementarity, as authoritarian resistance and restrictive conditions have reduced democracy support to a disjointed and largely reactive effort.

Crucially, drawing on the analysis, the policy paper identifies sources of strength and weakness, risks, and democracy support priorities for future policymaking, tailored to each Eastern Neighbourhood country.

Moreover, five cross-cutting implications are identified across the region. First, democracy is increasingly being framed as a security good, risking the subordination of democratic objectives to stability imperatives. Second, while resilience has become a guiding principle since the 2016 EU Global Strategy, its meaning and operationalisation remain uneven, demanding more context-sensitive application. Third, technocratic tendencies of EU democracy support have prioritised governance outcomes over value entrenchment, limiting the societal embedding of democratic norms. Fourth, consistency and complementarity must be treated as mutually reinforcing but distinct principles: normative alignment does not automatically produce operational synergy, and vice versa. Nevertheless, both are essential for an effective democracy support strategy. Finally, across all six countries, institutionalised participation, judicial oversight, and executive accountability remain under-addressed, and should feature more prominently as priorities in future efforts.

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSF	Civil Society Facility
DCFTAs	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EED	European Endowment for Democracy
EN	Eastern Neighbourhood
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EU	European Union
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
GIZ	German Association for International
IcSP	Instrument for Stability and Peace
MDCP	Multiannual Development Cooperation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MS	Member States
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGG	Partnership for Good Governance
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UN	United Nations

# 1 Introduction

This paper examines the consistency and complementarity of democracy support efforts by EU institutions and Member States in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The EU is frequently described as the world's largest development donor, providing over €50 billion annually to alleviate poverty and advance *global development* (European Commission n.d.). As a key element of this endeavour, the Union has committed to promoting “the values of democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights for all [...] across the full range of partnerships and instruments in all situations and in all countries, including through development action” (European Council et al. 2017: 32). These values are viewed as essential – not only in normative terms but also as preconditions for sustainable development and stability, due to their role in fostering resilience to both internal and external shocks (European Council et al. 2017: 32).

Featuring prominently among the EU's democracy support efforts are the countries of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, given their geographical proximity and resulting interdependence across key policy areas – including security and defence, trade, and environmental protection (Schimmelfennig et al. 2015). From its inception, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative has aimed to foster deeper relations with countries in Eastern Europe, under the direct oversight of the European Commission, thereby integrating them more closely into the communitarian core of EU governance (Whitman and Wolff 2010; Runner 2008). The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood has established the closest institutional ties with the EU of any external region (Langbein 2014), linking domestic development trajectories to alignment with Union-wide standards (European Commission 2008; Wolczuk 2009; Börzel 2014; Van Hüllen 2015). Ultimately, the EaP reflects the EU's ambition to act as a transformative power, seeking to bring about structural change in the norms, values, procedures, and practices of its partner countries (Börzel and Risse 2009b; Dimitrova et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, while the Union is often described as a ‘unitary actor’ that speaks with a single voice on the international stage (Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014), this understanding is increasingly being challenged. Evidence of this can be seen in divergences between the EU's stated goals and its actions (Börzel & van Hüllen, 2014), between its declared ‘international posture’ and its external behaviour (Balfour, 2012; Börzel, 2022), and in its varying approaches to norms support across regions (Börzel & Risse, 2004; Cenker-Özek & Çakmaklı, 2025). Further inconsistencies are also observed in how EU standards are defined and communicated in its external actions (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009; Barbé et al., 2009; Langbein & Börzel, 2013; Vandendriessche et al., 2025), as well as in the instruments it employs and the level of impact it exerts – whether at the macro-political or meso-policy level (Freyburg et al., 2009; Casier, 2011; Freyburg, 2018).

These divergences are further compounded by the fact that decision-making within the EU occurs at multiple levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Bache & Flinders, 2004), which may or may not engage with external actors in a consistent or complementary manner. Scholars have repeatedly identified mismatches between the communitarian level – represented by EU institutions such as the European Commission – and the member state level, particularly in how each engages with third countries (Olsen, 2008; Mangott, 2013; Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017a).

Yet little is known about whether, and to what extent, these mismatches characterise EU democracy support in the Eastern Neighbourhood region – specifically, whether the actions of EU member states are consistent with or complementary to those of EU institutions in this context. This question is particularly relevant given that the EU has long sought to make the support of its normative agenda vis-à-vis its eastern neighbours more effective, especially in light of the underwhelming results achieved so far (European Commission, 2023a, 2023b).

While the governments of Belarus and Azerbaijan have long been known for their autocratic tendencies, more recently, even countries once considered ‘front runners’ in aligning with EU standards – namely Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – have experienced discouraging domestic developments (see e.g., Börzel and Lebanidze 2017b; Dandashly and Noutcheva 2019; Panchulidze and Youngs, 2025). Georgia, for instance, has been widely described as teetering on the brink of authoritarianism, with its EU accession negotiations

currently suspended. Meanwhile, Moldova and Ukraine continue to exhibit institutional fragility and frequent setbacks in implementing EU standards, with Russian influence posing a persistent threat to democratisation (European Commission 2024).

It is therefore crucial – particularly for decision-makers and policy stakeholders – to understand if, how, and to what extent inconsistencies between the activities of EU institutions and Member States affect the Union’s democracy support across the Eastern Neighbourhood region.

To this end, the paper maps (a) the consistency and (b) the complementarity between the EU’s institutions, on the one hand, and its Member States, on the other, in their democracy support efforts across the Eastern Neighbourhood between 2010 and 2021. It introduces a policy-oriented typology and derives a set of takeaways on the effectiveness of established democracy support models in the region. In doing so, the analysis draws on the dataset developed under project deliverable D2.5, mapping EU and Member States’ democracy support actions towards the Eastern Neighbourhood, as well as on related findings from deliverables D2.1 and D2.2 (Exadakylos et al., 2024; Aleksanyan et al., 2024a; Aleksanyan et al., 2024b). It is important to note that the key aim of this *Policy Paper* is to transform the academic research conducted throughout WP2 into policy-relevant takeaways and to introduce a policy-facing analytical approach for relevant stakeholders to assess democracy support patterns in the Eastern Neighbourhood region.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the analytical framework and delineates the policy-facing innovations of the paper, while also providing the rationale for the choice of evaluation categories. Section 3 presents the analysis of consistency and complementarity in the democracy promotion efforts of the EU and its member states across the six Eastern Neighbourhood countries. Section 4 summarises the aggregate assessment and outlines policy takeaways for each country, followed by a reflection on democracy promotion across the region and the final conclusions.

## 2 Analytical Framework: Consistency and Complementarity

To evaluate the degree of consistency and complementarity in the democracy support strategies and programmes of the EU and its Member States, this policy paper draws on an assessment of norms and instruments.

Norms are “standards of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). They encompass “beliefs about what is appropriate, legitimate, or just regarding the goals, ends, and modalities” of an actor, strategy, or process (Meyer, 2006, p. 20). Policy instruments, or tools, on the other hand, are the means through which policy actors or institutions promote their intended norms and pursue their policy objectives. They may include both mechanisms and procedures, with the former referring more narrowly to financial, regulatory, organisational, or other practices, and the latter encompassing more broadly elements of strategy, management, and monitoring infrastructure (Howlett, 2020; McNutt, 2014; Exadakylos, 2012; Fung, 2003).

In foreign policy analysis, consistency is recognised as essential for ensuring that external action effectively achieves its goals (Olsen, 2008; Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017a). Although the terms consistency and coherence are often used interchangeably, Olsen (2008) distinguishes between *horizontal coherence*, referring to the alignment between pursued policy objectives, and *institutional consistency*, which captures the degree of similarity across structures and procedures within EU institutions. Krenzler and Schneider (1997), on the other hand, differentiate between *horizontal consistency* – the alignment between the goals set out in the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and their implementation in external action – and *vertical consistency*, which concerns the alignment of goals and actions between EU institutions and Member States.

This policy paper combines the concepts of consistency and complementarity to enhance the analytical and policy relevance of democracy support evaluations. It starts from the premise, closely related to the notion of *vertical consistency*, that the various levels of the EU’s decision-making system can be treated as independent actors, each possessing agency and potentially pursuing distinct objectives (Nuttall, 2005).

Within this framework, *consistency* refers to the extent to which the norms promoted externally across these levels are aligned. As such, a consistent EU approach to democracy support entails the external projection of a uniform set of standards by both EU institutions and Member States. *Complementarity*, by contrast, refers to the extent to which the different levels of the EU's decision-making system function in ways that strengthen one another and compensate for each other's limitations. In the context of EU democracy support, complementarity therefore concerns the degree to which policy instruments deployed within and between levels of governance – horizontally (among Member States) and vertically (between Member States and EU institutions) – address procedural and capacity imbalances, thereby enabling the more effective external support of democratic norms.

Under this rationale, the paper proposes a simple analytical typology combining *consistency* (in norms) and *complementarity* (in instruments) to jointly and comparatively evaluate the democracy support actions of EU institutions and Member States vis-à-vis Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Specifically, it distinguishes four possible constellations:

- I) high consistency and high complementarity;
- II) high consistency but low complementarity;
- III) low consistency but high complementarity; and
- IV) low consistency and low complementarity.

This classification enables the examination of four expectations regarding the EU's democracy support in the Eastern Partnership region, as follows:

1. **High consistency in norms and high complementarity in instruments:** EU institutions and Member States are expected to promote a uniform set of standards while filling operational gaps left by one another. This configuration should result in a comprehensive and coherent democracy support agenda.
2. **High consistency in norms but low complementarity in instruments:** EU institutions and Member States are expected to promote a uniform set of standards but fail to address operational gaps. This leads to a fragmented democracy support agenda, characterised by overlaps and operational imbalances.
3. **Low consistency in norms but high complementarity in instruments:** EU institutions and Member States are expected to promote non-uniform standards while compensating for each other's procedural or capacity gaps. This leads to an operationally functional but unfocused democracy support agenda.
4. **Low consistency in norms and low complementarity in instruments:** EU institutions and Member States are expected to promote distinct and potentially competing standards, while leaving existing operational gaps unaddressed. This leads to a disjointed and counterproductive democracy support agenda.

In methodological terms, the paper employs a comparative case study analysis focusing on the democracy support provided by EU institutions (the European Council, European Parliament, and European Commission) and seven Member States – Germany, Poland, Sweden, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – to each of the six Eastern Neighbourhood countries – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan – during the period 2010-2021. The analysis is informed by the dataset developed under REDEMOS D2.5, drawing on EU and OECD ODA data as well as on related findings from deliverables D2.1 and D2.2 (Exadaktylos et al., 2024; Aleksanyan et al., 2024a, Aleksanyan et al., 2024b)

The selection of Member States follows the same criteria outlined in Exadaktylos et al. (2024). Specifically, countries were chosen based on (1) the nominal and relative scale of their contributions, and (2) the relative importance of the Eastern Neighbourhood (EN) region within their overall official development assistance (ODA) portfolios. For instance, Germany was included due to its exceptionally high nominal contributions, while France was excluded despite its large absolute figures, as it ranks significantly lower in both per-capita contributions and the proportion of ODA directed to the EN (less than 1%). Sweden, conversely, was selected despite a modest EN share in its total ODA because of its outstanding per-capita contributions and overall

high level of expenditure. The remaining cases – Romania, Poland, and the three Baltic states – were selected given the EN’s substantial weight in their ODA portfolios. Most of these countries, except Latvia, also rank among the top ten per-capita contributors, reflecting the strong reciprocal significance between their ODA efforts and the EN region.

## 2.1 Consistency: The normative backbone of EU Democracy Support

Democracy support has been a cornerstone of the EU’s political agenda, particularly since the adoption of the Single European Act in 1987 (Börzel & Risse, 2009). The launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 marked the first consolidation of the EU’s democracy support priorities in neighbouring states, including the six Eastern Neighbourhood countries. The ENP offered partner countries a “privileged relationship” built on mutual commitment to shared values, defined as *respect for human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles, and sustainable development* (European Commission, 2004). Despite its broad geographical scope – covering sixteen of the EU’s closest neighbours – the ENP was conceived as “chiefly a bilateral policy between the European Union and each partner country” (European Council, n.d.), with the “level of ambition of the relationship” being conditional on the extent to which these common values were shared (European Commission, 2004).

The signing of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 further embedded the pursuit and support of democracy within the EU’s mission and purpose. Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) consolidated the principle that “the functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative democracy” (European Union, 2012a), while the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* was granted legally binding status (European Union, 2007; European Union, 2012b). In the same year, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was launched, and the Council adopted the *EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in External Relations*, which explicitly enumerated the Union’s core values, norms, and principles guiding democracy assistance (Council of the European Union, 2009).

These principles were summarised within a three-pillar structure encompassing: *fundamental rights and non-discrimination, accountable and participatory governance, and the rule of law*. For the EU, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – such as freedom of expression and association – and equality before the law, including non-discrimination and the political participation of women, were defined as cornerstones of democratic governance. Democracy, in this understanding, also required that rulers be held accountable to the people; leaders and officials must answer to citizens, with anti-corruption efforts regarded as essential to maintaining public trust and legitimacy.

The EU pledged support for the “broad participation of all stakeholders,” encouraging civil society organisations, NGOs, independent media, and other non-state actors to engage in democracy-building processes. It committed particular attention to strengthening elected institutions across the full electoral cycle, supporting political parties and parliaments, and reinforcing independent media as watchdogs of government accountability. Finally, democracy was defined to include the rule of law and justice administered by independent and impartial courts (Council of the European Union, 2009).

Ultimately, the EU’s democracy support agenda came to encompass the full spectrum of liberal-democratic norms, thereby cementing the normative baseline of its external action. In 2011, this canon of norms was encapsulated in the notion of “*deep and sustainable democracy*”, introduced by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2011). Democracy was no longer conceived merely as a value but also as a strategic interest – promoted through aid, conditionality, and partnership to advance stability, prosperity, and legitimacy abroad. Crucially, this evolution was accompanied by the introduction of the “*more for more*” principle, linking EU support and incentives (e.g., greater aid or market access) to a partner’s commitment to the norms and values of deep democracy (European Commission, & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011).

A comprehensive review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2015, conducted in the aftermath of Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, further refined the EU's normative focus. The revised approach advocated concentrating on a limited number of key priorities in each partner country. Within this framework, the EU underscored *accountable public administration* as "key to democratic governance and economic development." It called for thorough public administration reform, including the depoliticisation of the civil service, the strengthening of independent institutions, and greater transparency and accountability in governmental operations (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015).

At the same time, the EU placed renewed emphasis on *citizen empowerment* as part of its norm-support toolkit. The ENP Review pledged that "the EU will look to support citizens' ability to hold governments accountable" and to foster an enabling environment for independent media and civil society. Strengthening civil society – including youth and grassroots initiatives – was presented as a means to broaden participation in reform processes and enhance demands for governmental accountability. Finally, the Review stressed joint ownership of reforms, coining the notion of "*shared responsibility*", to signal that both partner governments and EU Member States should be jointly responsible for upholding these norms in the implementation of ENP commitments (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015).

In 2016, the adoption of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) reaffirmed the Union's commitment to "peace, democracy and a rules-based global order," while introducing *resilience* as an additional guiding concept for its external aid and support, particularly in relation to the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. The EUGS defined resilience as "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises." Crucially, it also underscored that "repressive states are inherently fragile in the long term," thereby linking resilience to the set of liberal-democratic norms the EU had long promoted. As the Strategy made explicit, "a resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development" represents the ultimate goal (European Union, 2016).

Furthermore, the EUGS committed the EU to "support different paths to resilience" in each partner country, "focusing on the most acute dimensions" of fragility. This signalled an intention to apply its normative framework more contextually and to allow greater flexibility in how it supports political and societal change. Ultimately, the Strategy reframed democracy support through the lens of institutional and societal robustness. The EU's normative fundamentals – human rights, accountable governance, and the rule of law – remained intact yet were rearticulated within a new overarching principle: *resilience*, aimed to reflect greater sensitivity to the particularities of each partner country.

The evolution in the EU's normative priorities regarding democracy in the Eastern Neighbourhood is summarised in Figure 1. The rule of law, fundamental rights, civil society empowerment and political participation, and resilience are therefore identified as key normative benchmarks to assess consistency in democracy promotion between the EU and its member states.

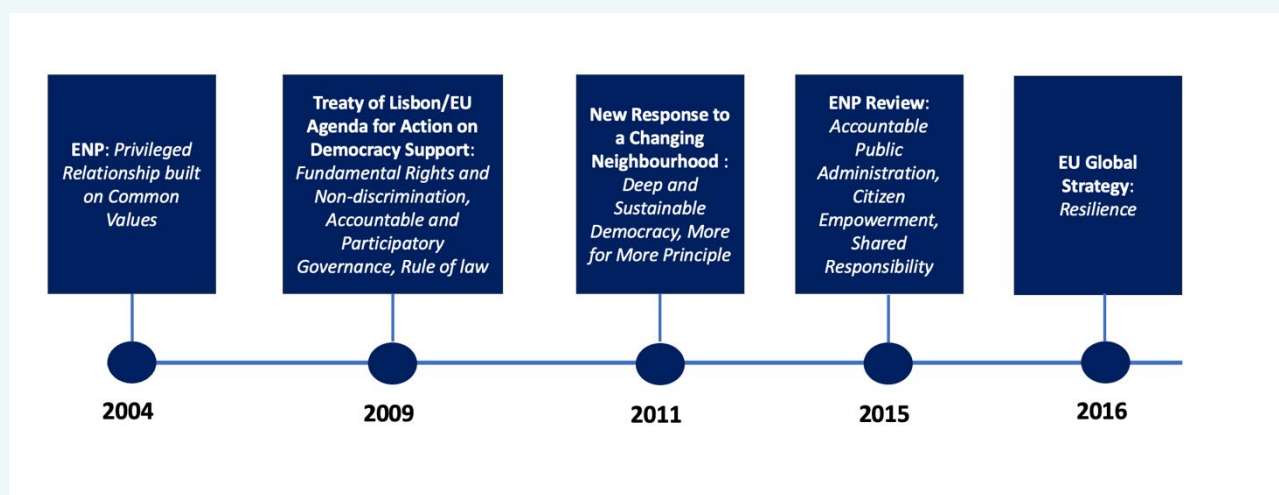


Figure 1: Evolution in the Normative Priorities of EU Democracy Support in the Eastern Neighbourhood

## 2.2 Complementarity: The operational architecture of EU democracy support in the Eastern Neighbourhood

The EU's democracy support architecture has undergone a gradual yet significant transformation since the early 2000s, evolving from project-based assistance to an institutional framework combining political dialogue, financial instruments, and technical cooperation. These instruments operate through a dual logic of inducement and enforcement – encouraging reform through partnership incentives while reserving conditionality as leverage for compliance.

At the core of the EU's operational toolkit are inductive instruments, designed to align partner-country incentives with democratic reform. These include financial instruments, such as grants, loans, and budget support, deployed to reward institutional transparency, accountability, and rule-of-law progress. During the first phase (2004-2009), inductive tools were managed primarily through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), introduced alongside the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Under the ENPI, bilateral Action Plans and Association Agendas linked financial cooperation to governance benchmarks, integrating democracy support within broader economic and administrative reforms (European Commission, 2004).

The EU's technical instruments complemented these inductive tools by promoting administrative and institutional convergence. Twinning and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) were introduced to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange between EU Member States and partner administrations, strengthening public management, judicial independence, and anti-corruption frameworks. These mechanisms represented a technocratic interpretation of democracy support, anchored in state modernisation rather than political contestation. Their country-specific application aimed to deepen ties with reform-oriented governments but left gaps in grassroots participation and rights protection.

A second generation of instruments emerged between 2010 and 2015, marking a shift toward participatory and political instruments. The European Endowment for Democracy (EED), established in 2013, represented a turning point, following the emergence of the "deep and sustainable democracy" principle at the start of the decade (European Commission & High Representative, 2011). The EED was designed as a highly flexible, demand-driven fund able to support independent journalists, grassroots activists, and unregistered NGOs in politically restrictive environments such as Belarus and Azerbaijan, aiming to fill a notable agility gap in the EU's aid architecture. In parallel, the Civil Society Facility (CSF) expanded support for NGOs and civic networks, while the Instrument for Stability and Peace (IcSP) incorporated governance and human rights into its conflict-prevention portfolio.

Alongside inductive measures, the EU developed enforcing instruments, intended to leverage compliance through conditionality. These instruments derive primarily from political and economic agreements, such as the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) signed with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, which condition access to EU markets and financial assistance on meeting democratic and rule-of-law standards. Macro-Financial Assistance packages have served a similar purpose: they link disbursements to reforms in transparency, electoral integrity, and judicial independence. However, in practice, the enforcement logic remains applied selectively. While associated countries benefit from these conditional frameworks, non-associated states, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus, receive limited democracy-linked aid, often confined to technical cooperation or humanitarian assistance.

The EU's democracy support also relies on a web of political instruments aimed at institutional engagement and dialogue. These include election observation missions, parliamentary diplomacy (notably through the Jean Monnet Dialogues and the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group), and structured policy dialogues under the ENP and Eastern Partnership frameworks. The EU's cooperation with the Council of Europe through the Partnership for Good Governance (PGG) adds a multilateral layer, focusing on judicial reform, anti-discrimination, and gender equality.

Moreover, since 2016, the EU's democracy-support instruments have been integrated through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and subsequently the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI). The NDICI, launched in 2021, merged multiple legacy instruments – EIDHR, ENI, CSF – under a single financial envelope, creating a three-tiered structure of geographic, thematic, and rapid-response programmes (European Commission, 2021). This unification aimed at enhancing strategic coordination between democracy, human rights, and governance initiatives.

When assessing the complementarity between the EU and its Member States in the use of democracy support instruments, four variables should be considered. First, bilateral aid initiatives should complement the democracy support activities of other actors, adding value rather than duplicating or undermining existing efforts. Second, democracy support channels (e.g., governmental or civil society) should demonstrate diversity and a holistic approach. Third, Member States are expected to address gaps in under-supported democracy sectors, thereby enhancing overall coverage. Fourth, Member States should display agility in responding to emerging challenges, compensating for potential rigidities in EU-level democracy support mechanisms.

The following section integrates these complementarity considerations with the four key normative categories outlined above, assessing both consistency (in norms) and complementarity (in instruments) in the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States towards the Eastern Neighbourhood.

### 3 Analysis

This section evaluates consistency (in norms) and complementarity (in instruments) in the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States towards the Eastern Neighbourhood countries. The assessments are summarised in Table 1.

Consistency and complementarity are each assessed as *high* or *low* across eight categories – four pertaining to consistency and four to complementarity –, as identified in the preceding sections. These individual assessments are then synthesised to produce aggregate evaluations of consistency and complementarity for each country, in line with the typology outlined in the *Analytical Framework* section. Drawing on the strengths of comparative case study analysis, the evaluation seeks to capture the nuances within each parameter, thereby enabling focused and context-sensitive policy insights. Therefore, even in cases where both consistency and complementarity are rated as high, the analysis differentiates between more and less robust dimensions, highlighting areas where further alignment may be needed. A similar approach is applied to cases where the assessments are more ambiguous (e.g., two of the four elements are rated high and two low), whereby the aggregate evaluation is guided by whether the high or low dimensions are expressed more unambiguously. For example, even if countries score high on rule of law and civil society empowerment but

low on fundamental rights and resilience, they may receive different aggregate evaluations depending on which set of components is more pronounced in the individual case. Most importantly, the accompanying discussion unpacks the implications of these counter-directional elements for democracy support.

Table 1: Consistency-Complementarity Analysis by Category							
Category		Country					
		Ukraine	Moldova	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus
Consistency	Rule of Law	H	H	H	H	L	L
	Fundamental Rights	H	H	L	L	L	H
	Civil Society Empowerment/Participation	H	H	H	H	H	H
	Resilience	H	H	L	L	L	L
Complementarity	Nature of Delivery (bilateralism/multilateralism)	H	H	L	L	L	H
	Sectoral Prioritisation	H	H	H	L	L	L
	Democracy Support Channels	H	H	H	L	L	L
	Agility	H	L	H	H	L	H

**Table 1: Consistency-Complementarity Analysis by Category**

## 3.1 Ukraine

### 3.1.1 Consistency

EU member states have consistently made the *rule of law* a declared priority in their democracy support to Ukraine. Germany and Poland, for example, explicitly identified strengthening the rule of law and anti-corruption as central goals in their development policies (Andersen 2021; MDCP, 2018). This translated into programmes on the ground: Germany’s GIZ implemented initiatives to support Ukraine’s public finance management and judicial reforms, aiming to promote “good financial governance” and accountability (GIZ, n.d.). Poland’s development cooperation likewise highlighted good governance reforms – in Ukraine’s case setting seven sub-goals under the “good governance” heading, including fighting corruption and enhancing civic oversight of reforms (MDCP, 2018). These efforts have aligned with the EU’s rule of law principles and the “deep and sustainable democracy” approach (European Commission, & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011; Council of the European Union, 2009).

Similarly, *fundamental rights* have received consistent emphasis in the democracy support efforts of both the EU and its member states. For instance, Poland’s Solidarity Fund places an explicit thematic focus on “promoting respect for human rights” (Government of Poland, n.d.), with Ukraine among its key recipient countries and hosting a dedicated Solidarity Fund office (OECD, 2023). Likewise, human rights and inclusion – including gender equality – feature as priority areas in the development programmes of both Estonia and Latvia vis-à-vis Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, 2016; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2011).

Moreover, *civil society empowerment and public participation* have arguably represented the most consistent dimension of EU and member state democracy support to Ukraine. Aid priorities have strongly reflected the understanding that a vibrant civil society is a key driver of “deep and sustainable democracy” (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011). Significant resources have been allocated to supporting NGOs, independent media, and local communities. German aid data, for instance, indicate that programmes under the “government and civil society” heading

accounted for €60 million out of the more than €90 million directed to the region (EU Aid Explorer). Germany has also emphasized cooperation with civil society in project implementation – such as a GIZ programme on public finance in Ukraine, which sought to “foster close cooperation with civil society partners” to strengthen public oversight (GIZ, n.d.). Poland and the Baltic states similarly placed civil society at the centre of their support efforts: Poland’s 2016-2020 multiannual aid programme explicitly aimed to “improve engagement of the civic society to support reforms” (MDCP, 2018), while Estonia’s cooperation strategy identified the “building of a stable democratic society” in Ukraine as a long-term objective, explicitly linking the country’s well-being to an active civil society and citizen participation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, 2016). These efforts were complemented by Sweden’s and Romania’s support for participatory reforms (Maksymenko & Grabina, 2024; Akhvlediani, 2022).

Finally, EU member states successfully internalized the EU’s post-2016 narrative on *resilience* (European Union, 2016). Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland explicitly linked their democracy support policies to strengthening the resilience of neighbouring countries, viewing a stable and self-reliant Ukraine as vital to regional security. Latvia’s policy, for instance, noted that inadequate self-dependence and resilience among Eastern Partnership countries directly generate security and welfare risks for Latvia; accordingly, Riga consistently framed the strengthening of Ukraine’s state infrastructure as a security investment during 2011-2021 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2024). Moreover, other resilience-building activities have ranged from energy security projects aimed at reducing Ukraine’s dependence on Russian gas to initiatives supporting internally displaced persons and peacebuilding dialogues.

**As such, democracy support to Ukraine is characterised by high consistency in norms.**

### 3.1.2 Complementarity

On the operational side of democracy support, member states have complemented the EU’s efforts through both *bilateral* and *multilateral* channels. Poland has long been a leading contributor to multilateral ODA through the EU budget, Sweden and Germany maintain large UN contributions and member states like Estonia have engaged in bilateral support strategies (OECD, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia 2016). Similarly, high horizontal (across member states) and vertical (between the EU and member states) complementarity has been observed in the *sectoral focus* and of democracy support, which has ranged from public finance reform programmes and local community development through the Ukrainian Social Investment Fund (GIZ n.d.; Ukrainian Social Investment Fund n.d), to education (Lithuania), human rights and gender equality (Sweden) and e-governance (Estonia). This has gone hand in hand with complementarity in aid distribution channels, ranging from civil society to government entities and private sector partners (Exadaktylos et al., 2024).

Finally, it should be noted that the 2010-2021 period in Ukraine was marked by sudden political shifts and crises – and EU Member States often proved *agile* in responding when the EU’s own machinery was slower or constrained. A prominent example is the aftermath of the 2013–14 Euromaidan revolution. Member States reacted swiftly to Ukraine’s new democratic opening in 2014 and by 2015, Germany had more than tripled its bilateral aid to Ukraine (from €109 million in 2014 to around €337 million in 2015) in clear response to the change of government and urgent reform needs (EU Aid Explorer). Other donors exhibited similar surges – overall ODA to the Eastern Neighbourhood doubled between 2013 and 2015, largely due to Ukraine. This rapid scaling-up of support filled an immediate void, delivering democracy assistance (and financial relief) in the critical post-revolution years before larger EU programmes fully kicked in. Member States could also move flexibly in specific niches. For instance, right after war erupted in Eastern Ukraine, Germany financed a project in 2015 to “Overcome the consequences of war together,” training Ukrainian civil society actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

**As such, democracy support to Ukraine is further characterised by high complementarity in instruments.**

## 3.2 Moldova

### 3.2.1 Consistency

Like in the case of Ukraine, the *rule of law* and *fundamental rights* have consistently been stated priorities in the democracy support efforts of both the EU and its member states towards Moldova. For example, Germany has launched dedicated initiatives, including the 2020 GIZ project ‘Strengthening the Rule of Law & Anti-Corruption Mechanisms in the Republic of Moldova’, while in 2014 a delegation of the German Bundestag met with Moldovan political leadership to emphasise “the fight against organised crime and human trafficking, human rights, and the situation of ethnic minorities” (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2014). Meanwhile, Romania’s development strategy vis-à-vis Moldova explicitly lists promoting good governance and the rule of law as core objectives, strongly tied to future European integration (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Furthermore, the Baltic states have emphasised improvements in state infrastructure, such as counselling the Tax Inspectorate of Moldova in reforming tax administration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, 2016).

Similarly, *support for civil society and public participation* has been a cornerstone of democracy assistance in Moldova. For example, Poland has established an information center in Ialoveni, Moldova, to support local authorities, NGOs, and grassroots groups in “strengthen[ing] local democracy” and better absorbing external aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2019; MDCP, 2018). Poland’s Solidarity Fund has further supported rural areas in Moldova since 2017, creating so-called “Local Action Groups (...) bringing together local government officials, entrepreneurs, and active residents of municipalities” (Solidarity Fund, 2021). Likewise, civic education, independent media, and youth exchanges feature prominently in the democracy support programs of Romania, Germany, Sweden, and the Baltic states.

Lastly, resilience has increasingly been prioritised, particularly since 2014, when the EU Association Agreement with Moldova was signed (European Union, European Atomic Energy Community, & Republic of Moldova, 2014). In Romania’s case, resilience has primarily been approached through conflict resolution in Transnistria, supported by EU-led initiatives, enhanced Romanian efforts, and, increasingly, initiatives by other EU member states as well, such as Germany (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016; IPN Press Agency, 2015).

**As such, democracy support to Moldova is characterised by high consistency in norms.**

### 3.2.2 Complementarity

A mixture of *bilateral and multilateral initiatives* involving EU member states have complemented EU democracy support efforts in Moldova. Sweden, Poland and Germany have established firmly embedded bilateral programmes, while Romania has favoured heavy investment in multilateral programmes, in collaboration with EU institutions (UNDP, 2021; Moldovan Social Investment Fund N.d.)

Furthermore, EU member states have employed a *diverse range of aid delivery channels*, enhancing the reach and flexibility of democracy assistance in Moldova. Joining government-to-government funding have been multilateral and non-governmental channels. For instance, Poland’s aid agency works through the Polish Solidarity Fund’s local office in Chişinău, which issues competitive grants to Moldovan NGOs and communities (OECD, 2023). Similarly, Germany has engaged political foundations and civic organizations to implement projects, while the Baltic states have partnered with universities, private firms (Institut für Europäische Politik 2021), and EU instruments to share expertise in state infrastructure (EU Aid Explorer).

Democracy support programmes in Moldova have spanned multiple sectors, ranging from public administration and civic skill-building to long-term economic development, thereby enhancing overall complementarity. However, it should be noted that several of Moldova’s key donors, including Poland and particularly Romania, devote the vast majority of their democracy aid to education-related projects (for example, Romania allocated almost 74% of its aid between 2014 and 2021 to the education sector; EU Aid Explorer). While this pattern reflects Moldova’s comparatively strong institutional progress relative to other

countries in the region, it risks creating gaps in more direct areas of democratic support, such as electoral system consolidation and judicial independence.

EU Member States have demonstrated some, though mostly isolated and non-systematic, flexibility in scaling up aid at critical junctures or pivoting focus in response to crises. For example, when Moldova's democratic reform process gained momentum following the pro-EU coalition's breakthrough in 2012, Germany more than doubled its financial support the following year. By contrast, after the landmark election of reformist President Maia Sandu in late 2020, Berlin's response was far more restrained – a comparatively weaker reaction than to earlier political shifts (Exadaktylos et al., 2024; EU Aid Explorer).

**All in all, democracy support to Moldova is further characterised by high complementarity in instruments.**

### 3.3 Georgia:

#### 3.3.1 Consistency

EU member states have consistently supported *rule of law* reforms in Georgia, aligning with the EU's governance agenda. Germany in particular invested in aligning Georgia's legal and judicial system with European standards through regional programmes (German Association for International Cooperation, 2017). Estonia likewise targeted rule of law in its democracy support (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia 2021). Such efforts – including German advisory projects on judicial reform and public finance management – have aimed to strengthen legal frameworks and accountability in line with EU norms (GIZ, 2017b; GIZ, 2016).

Moreover, EU member states have further consistently recognised the importance of *civil society support* as a pathway to sustainable democracy. For example, Poland carried out an Academy of Local Leaders in Kazbegi in 2015, through which it “familiarise[d] young people with the purpose of a youth council and the activities they can undertake. An important part of the meetings was to increase the participants' knowledge of project planning and to come up with and plan their own activities” (Solidarity Fund 2015). Similarly, member states like Sweden and the Baltic states have routinely financed grassroots initiatives, civic education, and youth leadership programs (Exadaktylos et al., 2024).

However, democracy support specifically targeting *fundamental rights* has been limited in scale. Much support for rights in Georgia was indirect – channelled through broader governance programmes. No single Member State made human rights promotion its exclusive focus in Georgia, and sensitive areas like judiciary independence or minority rights saw only incremental attention. Member states often balanced rights concerns with other interests (e.g. security or economic ties) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. 2024). Moreover, the relative financial weight of democracy and human rights aid remained modest compared to infrastructure or economic aid (EU Aid Explorer).

Similarly, a coherent resilience agenda has also been missing. While some member states have prioritised immediate vulnerabilities (like conflict or weak governance), they have paid less attention to emerging resilience challenges such as disinformation or hybrid threats. Moreover, member states have approached resilience through different and inconsistent definitions, such as e-governance (Estonia), cybersecurity (Latvia), or conflict (Germany) (Exadaktylos et al., 2024).

**As such, democracy support to Georgia is characterised by low consistency in norms.**

#### 3.3.2 Complementarity:

Member states have maintained significant bilateral engagement with Georgia, in ways that have largely complemented EU efforts. Germany, Poland, Sweden, Romania and the Baltic states have all run tailored bilateral programs for Georgia. Moreover, the scale of bilateral aid has been significant: Germany, for instance, provided almost €900 million in official development assistance to Georgia from 2010-2021, making

Georgia one of its top per-capita aid recipients worldwide (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021). Likewise, Poland and Sweden have consistently included Georgia in their list of priority partners (EU Aid Explorer), with Georgia remaining among Poland's core recipients even after Poland's 2016 aid strategy refocus (MDCP, 2018). These national efforts have supported reforms mandated in the EU-Georgia Association Agreement with bilateral technical aid, thereby complementing EU-level action.

Similarly, the EU and member have utilised a variety of *aid channels* in Georgia, which have enhanced the reach and flexibility of democracy assistance. Democracy assistance has ranged from direct budget support and technical twinning, to grants for NGOs and contributions to multilateral funds. Germany, for example, partnered closely with Georgian state institutions via its development agencies while also supporting non-state actors through political foundations (Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, 2022). Moreover, several Member States used multilateral democracy support mechanisms as part of their toolkit. For instance, Sweden, the Netherlands, and most recently Romania have been major contributors to the European Endowment for Democracy (EED).

High complementarity has further been observed in the sectoral focus of EU and member state democracy support. Germany's bilateral aid has combined governance reforms with economic development (GIZ, 2016); Poland has focused on community-level democracy, such as local government training, civic participation initiatives, and social infrastructure; The Baltic states have tried to export e-governance and support independent media and Latvia has invested in election observation support and civic resilience during crises. Moreover, Sweden has consistently prioritized gender equality and social inclusion in its aid portfolio.

However, in terms of agility, democracy support in Georgia has not been defined by high complementarity. For example, during Georgia's 2018-2020 episodes of democratic backsliding, responses like conditionality or mediation were largely driven by the EU as a whole, with Member States providing backing rather than independent agile initiatives. Most member states, such as Poland and Sweden, have not deviated significantly from their multi-annual programmes (MDCP, 2018).

**Overall, democracy support to Georgia is characterised by high complementarity in instruments.**

## 3.4 Armenia

### 3.4.1 Consistency

The EU and its member states have consistently prioritised rule of law and civil society reforms in Armenia as part of their democracy support efforts. Germany, in particular, implemented extensive programmes to strengthen judicial and legal frameworks. Notably, the Advice on Legal and Judicial Reform in the South Caucasus project (2015-2018) aimed to align Armenia's legal system with European standards through reform advisory and regional networking. Germany also supported public administration reforms – for instance, the Public Finance Management project (2017-2020) sought to bring Armenia's budgeting and audit processes in line with EU and international standards of efficiency and accountability (German Association for International Cooperation, 2017; GIZ, 2017a).

At the same time, member states have consistently funded Armenian NGOs, grassroots initiatives, and people-to-people exchanges, seeing these as effective means to empower citizens and strengthen accountability. Germany supported Armenian civil society both indirectly through its political foundations and directly via local development projects. Its long-running Local Governance Programme South Caucasus (since 2009) has aimed to establish citizen service offices and foster participatory local budgeting in Armenian municipalities – initiatives that have promoted greater citizen involvement in local decision-making (GIZ, n.d.).

Nevertheless, support for fundamental rights in Armenia has not been uniformly robust. Unlike economic development or state infrastructure, human rights advocacy ranked lower among member state priorities.

For example, Romania and Poland invested relatively little in direct human rights or media freedom work in Armenia, focusing more on their immediate neighbours (EU Aid Explorer).

Similarly, for most of the 2010-2021 period, resilience remained more of a policy buzzword than a systematically implemented objective in Armenia. Few member state projects explicitly targeted the long-term resilience of Armenian democracy until the very end of the period. The support that was provided tended to be reactive – responding to unfolding events – rather than proactively building immunity to future crises. Ultimately, dedicated funding lines for resilience-building in Armenia were not established during 2010-2019, unlike in some other Eastern Partnership states where security concerns were more acute.

**Nevertheless, on aggregate, democracy support to Armenia is characterised by high consistency in norms.**

### 3.4.2 Complementarity

Democracy support to Armenia has been characterised by limited complementarity in the nature of aid delivery. On the one hand, some member states have pursued a distinctly bilateral approach. As discussed earlier, Germany has implemented substantial bilateral projects in Armenia covering governance, infrastructure, and civil society, with Armenia ranking among Germany's top recipients in per-capita terms. Sweden has likewise established a significant bilateral presence in recent years through SIDA, focusing on institutional development, anti-corruption mechanisms, and the development of civil society and media (Embassy of Sweden in Armenia, 2019). On the other hand, several member states have shown notable restraint in their bilateral engagement. Poland, for example, channelled the vast majority of its development assistance through the EU and multilateral funds and removed Armenia from its list of priority countries in 2016 (MDCP, 2018).

Similar patterns emerge in terms of sectoral prioritisation and aid delivery channels. Reflecting broader inconsistencies in norm promotion, civil society has long-attracted support from both the EU and most member states, whereas areas such as parliamentary institutions have received comparatively limited attention. Moreover, a large share of member state aid – especially Germany's – has been directed toward what might be described as democracy-adjacent sectors (e.g., energy, finance, regional development), reinforcing gaps in support for democratic processes. Romanian assistance has followed a similar pattern, prioritising education over direct democracy support (EU Aid Explorer). Additionally, smaller donors have often mirrored EU or larger member state initiatives rather than filling specific niches; for instance, while several actors funded media literacy projects around the same time, few engaged with judicial reform.

At the same time, however, EU member states have demonstrated considerable agility in adjusting their democracy support to Armenia's evolving political context. Between 2010 and 2021, they showed the capacity to respond rapidly to both opportunities and crises. A prime example was Armenia's 2018 "Velvet Revolution." In the lead-up to and aftermath of this democratic breakthrough, key donors swiftly recalibrated their assistance to seize the opening. Germany, for instance, nearly doubled its disbursements to Armenia between 2016 and 2017 (from under €40 million to approximately €85 million), anticipating and responding to the country's political transformation (EU Aid Explorer). This surge, linked to Armenia's pro-democratic shifts, illustrates a flexible reallocation of resources to encourage nascent reforms. Sweden likewise deepened its engagement with the traditionally under-prioritised Armenia as a response to the events of 2018 (Embassy of Sweden in Armenia, 2019).

**Overall, democracy support to Armenia is characterised by low complementarity in instruments.**

## 3.5 Azerbaijan

### 3.5.1 Consistency

In the case of Azerbaijan, the normative consistency of democracy support has been inherently impeded by the relative adherence of both the EU and its Member States to the *more for more* principle (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011). To that end,

while Member States such as Estonia (2020) and Germany have financed South Caucasus legal reform and local governance projects that included Azerbaijan (e.g., German Association for International Cooperation, 2017), the *rule of law* has not been consistently promoted in the country, reflecting low conditionality. Similarly, *fundamental rights* have remained a limited priority, as even Member States traditionally emphasising human rights in their democracy promotion have maintained limited engagement with Azerbaijan (e.g., Sweden devoted only approximately €12 million in total ODA to the country; EU Aid Explorer).

A similar lack of consistency is observed in the area of *resilience*. However, aspects related to *civil society empowerment and participation* have received more consistent emphasis – both from Member States (such as Germany’s GIZ local governance programme, which included training local leaders, including 100 female politicians, in the Aran economic region; GIZ, 2020) and from EU institutions, which have prioritised “Government & Civil Society” themes among aid sectors (OECD, 2024).

**Overall, democracy support to Azerbaijan is characterised by low consistency in norms.**

### 3.5.2 Complementarity

Similarly to consistency, complementarity has also been low. Most Member States contribute virtually no aid to Azerbaijan (e.g., Latvia, Lithuania), while Poland dropped Azerbaijan from its aid priorities in 2016 (MCDP, 2018). As such, initiatives by Member States such as Germany or Estonia tend to occur in an autonomous and disjointed fashion. *Sectoral priorities* likewise lack complementarity, with only isolated efforts – such as Romania’s focus on education – attempting to fill specific gaps. In terms of *aid channels*, Estonia’s strong reputation for channelling regional aid through NGOs and multilateral organisations has echoed the EU’s normative calls, yet effectively leveraging civil society in Azerbaijan remains politically difficult. Finally, no notable *agile* recalibration of aid priorities has been observed among Member States, despite recent wars in the South Caucasus region.

**Overall, democracy support to Azerbaijan is characterised by low complementarity in instruments.**

## 3.6 Belarus

### 3.6.1 Consistency

Similar to Azerbaijan, the consistency of norm promotion in EU and member-state democracy support to Belarus has been hampered by limited engagement resulting from the country’s long-standing authoritarianism. This is particularly evident in areas such as the *rule of law*, where conditionality requirements have impeded partnerships with governmental and institutional actors who remain highly suspicious of, and resistant to, EU- and member state-funded initiatives. Similarly, *resilience* efforts – particularly from EU institutions – have focused on strengthening Belarus’s financial independence from Russia (OECD, 2024), yet these have not evolved into a coordinated effort across member states.

Nevertheless, *fundamental rights* and *civil society empowerment* have seen more consistent prioritisation. Poland, for instance, has devoted financial support worth USD 10.6 million to Belsat, “the only TV station that provides the Belarusians with reliable news free from propaganda” (Belsat, 2024), in light of the regime’s control over the media. This single year of support in 2019 alone accounted for more than three-quarters of Poland’s total direct democracy-support actions in the European Neighbourhood during 2013-2021 (Vlasenko & Freyburg, 2024). Likewise, Germany ran a long-running €20 million *Belarus Support Program* (2002–2020) for NGOs and local development projects (Internationales Bildungs- und Begegnungswerk, n.d.), maintaining engagement through non-state channels despite political restrictions.

**On aggregate, democracy support to Belarus is characterised by low consistency in norms.**

### 3.6.2 Complementarity

A mixture of *bilateral and multilateral aid projects* has generated significant complementarity in democracy support to Belarus among the EU and its member states. EU funding has been complemented by major contributions from Poland, primarily directed through multilateral giving via EU bodies, as well as other channels such as Romania’s support through the European Endowment for Democracy, alongside bilateral projects by Sweden and Germany (EU Aid Explorer; Internationales Bildungs- und Begegnungswerk, n.d.). Moreover, member-state efforts have demonstrated *high agility*, exemplified by Germany quadrupling its Belarus aid (from €12 million to €45 million) immediately after the 2020 protests, while Sweden and Lithuania also increased their funding in response (EU Aid Explorer).

At the same time, *sectoral prioritisation* has remained uneven and fragmented, with both the EU and member states engaging primarily in projects to strengthen civil society and independent media. OECD data highlight that Belarus received substantially lower total aid and fewer sector-diverse projects than other Eastern Neighbourhood countries (OECD, 2024). Furthermore, regarding *aid channels*, the near-total reliance on civil-society organisations as the principal route for democracy assistance has constrained complementarity among instruments, limiting the diversity of delivery mechanisms.

**On aggregate, democracy support to Belarus is characterised by low complementarity in instruments.**

## 4 Policy Takeaways

This section draws on the previous analysis and evaluates the aggregate consistency (in norms) and complementarity (in instruments) in the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. Recommendations are drawn for the democracy support strategies of the EU and EU Member States moving forward. The assessments are summarised in Table 2.

		COMPLEMENTARITY IN INSTRUMENTS	
		LOW	HIGH
CONSISTENCY IN NORMS	LOW	Disjointed and counterproductive democracy support agenda <b>[Azerbaijan, Belarus]</b>	Operationally functional but unfocused democracy support agenda <b>[Georgia]</b>
	HIGH	Fragmented democracy support agenda, characterised by overlaps and operational imbalances <b>[Armenia]</b>	Comprehensive and coherent democracy support agenda <b>[Moldova, Ukraine]</b>

**Table 2: Aggregate Consistency and Complementarity**

### 4.1 Ukraine

The Ukrainian case demonstrates both high consistency in norms and high complementarity in instruments within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States, thereby facilitating the development of a comprehensive and coherent democracy support agenda. Member States have largely mirrored the EU’s emphasis on the rule of law, accountability, and civic participation, creating a mutually reinforcing framework. The period following the Euromaidan revolution stands out as an instance of agile and well-coordinated engagement, during which Member States rapidly scaled up bilateral assistance. This capacity for swift mobilisation proved essential in stabilising Ukraine’s reform trajectory.

Nevertheless, the analysis also points to a growing need for deeper rather than broader engagement. Future democracy support would benefit from a sustained focus on the institutional consolidation of reforms, particularly in the judiciary and anti-corruption sectors. While previous efforts have successfully channelled assistance through civil society, there remains a need to strengthen institutionalised forms of political participation and reinforce the separation of powers. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has understandably reshaped the priorities of external assistance, yet neither the EU nor its Member States should overlook the vulnerabilities to democratic backsliding that characterised democracy support cycles. Consistency in rule of law promotion and an unambiguous definition of what resilience entails in a conflict-ridden state, as well as democracy support programmes that complement peacebuilding efforts with enhanced democratic participation and parliamentarism, should be mainstays of the democracy support agendas of EU and its member states moving forward.

## 4.2 Moldova

The Moldovan case also demonstrates both high consistency in norms and high complementarity in instruments within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States, thereby facilitating the development of a comprehensive and coherent democracy support agenda. For the most part, EU Member States have consistently aligned their democracy support with the EU's emphasis on the rule of law, good governance, and civic participation, building a mutually reinforcing framework. Moldova's democracy support landscape has benefited from close coordination between EU-level and bilateral initiatives, underpinned by the country's European integration trajectory and active engagement of Central and Eastern European Member States such as Romania and Poland. This alignment has been particularly visible in areas like public administration reform and local democracy.

Nevertheless, several operational weaknesses remain. First, while democracy support has been broad and coordinated, it has focused primarily towards education, civic engagement, and soft governance projects, leaving critical gaps in judicial reform and electoral system consolidation. Second, responsiveness has been uneven, and, as a result, agility has been inconsistent. While Germany and Poland demonstrated flexibility in scaling up assistance during reform breakthroughs (e.g., in 2012), the reaction to recent political openings, such as President Maia Sandu's 2020 election, has proven more restrained.

Moving forward, democracy support to Moldova would benefit from a sharper focus on deep institutional reform and resilience. In operational terms, this entails prioritising state capacity building more robustly on the road to accession and establishing flexible funding mechanisms to respond more effectively to political windows of opportunity. Support and expertise in those areas will require the involvement of less established partners as well, beyond Germany, Poland and Moldova.

## 4.3 Georgia

The Georgian case demonstrates low consistency in norms but high complementarity in instruments within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States, resulting in an operationally functional yet strategically unfocused democracy support agenda that lacks coordination. EU and Member State initiatives have shown a strong record of cooperation in practical terms, with extensive bilateral engagement and a diverse range of aid channels. Germany, Poland, Sweden, Romania, and the Baltic States have all maintained tailored programmes combining governance reforms with local community initiatives and civic participation.

However, these efforts have not been underpinned by consistent normative alignment. While Member States have prioritised rule of law and civil society development, less emphasis has been placed on fundamental rights and resilience, which have often remained secondary to broader governance or stability concerns. Member States have also applied varying understandings of resilience and have shown limited agility in responding to democratic backsliding, undermining conditionality. Taken together, democracy support to Georgia has operated relatively effectively across instruments but without a clear normative compass. The experience highlights the EU and Member States' ability to sustain a high level of operational engagement while underscoring the need for clearer strategic coordination and more consistent normative emphasis – particularly in the areas of fundamental rights and resilience – to consolidate democratic progress over time.

Ultimately, the Georgian trajectory highlights the risks of applying a technocratic approach to democracy support without a coordinated strategy to manage national normative sensitivities. Ultimately, the Georgian trajectory highlights the risks of applying a technocratic approach to democracy support without a coordinated sensitivity to normative foundations. Norm consistency is the “glue” that enables complementary practices to “stick.” Georgia’s recent democratic backsliding illustrates that technical assistance alone cannot compensate for the absence of entrenched democratic values, reaffirming the need to anchor democracy support in local belief systems and to ensure that programmes reflect societal needs and political realities.

#### 4.4 Armenia

The Armenian case demonstrates high consistency in norms but low complementarity in instruments within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States, resulting in a fragmented democracy support agenda characterised by overlaps and uneven effectiveness. Normatively, both the EU and Member States have maintained a shared focus on the rule of law, good governance, and civil society empowerment, particularly in the aftermath of the 2018 Velvet Revolution. The rapid recalibration of support during this period – marked by Germany’s and Sweden’s swift increases in bilateral funding – reflected a strong collective commitment to Armenia’s democratic opening and the intention to reinforce domestic reform momentum.

Yet, areas such fundamental rights’ promotion have seen weaker normative alignment. Human rights and media freedom have ranked lower among Member State priorities and limited resources have been directed toward direct rights advocacy or judicial independence. Moreover, resilience has not been approached as a systematically operationalised principle and, unlike in other Eastern Partnership countries, where conflict threats and security imperatives drove enhanced resilience funding.

On the instrumental side, complementarity has been negatively impacted by the fluidity of bilateral aid programmes. While countries like Germany and Sweden have maintained substantial bilateral portfolios, other Member States, notably Poland, withdrew from bilateral engagement, removing Armenia from its list of priority countries in 2016. This pattern has extended to sectoral focus. Much of the aid has been directed toward democracy-adjacent areas such as energy, finance, and regional development, rather than targeting the strengthening of democratic institutions and the Armenian demos directly.

Ultimately, Armenia’s experience underscores that normative alignment alone is insufficient when operational complementarity is lacking, as it leads to a diffusion of effort and diminished democratic impact. When instruments are fragmented, shared democratic principles lose traction, and the EU’s normative leadership risks remaining declaratory. To ensure that democracy promotion in Armenia translates to sustainable democracy outcomes, Member States should systematise engagement, diversify sources of support, focus more strongly on institutional empowerment and capitalise on the momentum of democratic openings.

#### 4.5 Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani case demonstrates low consistency in norms and low complementarity in instruments within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States, resulting in a disjointed and counterproductive democracy support agenda. The application of the EU’s “more for more” principle and Azerbaijan’s entrenched authoritarianism have constrained both engagement and normative coherence. While Member States such as Germany and Estonia have included Azerbaijan within regional governance and legal reform programmes, these efforts have been largely technical and peripheral to the country’s core democratic deficits. Human rights, political pluralism, and media freedom have remained marginal themes, and no coherent framework has emerged to align Member State and EU priorities in these areas.

Instrumentally, democracy support has been sparse and disconnected. Only a handful of Member States maintain any meaningful bilateral engagement, while others, including Poland, have withdrawn the country from their priority lists altogether. Sectoral coverage has been narrow, with isolated projects in education or local governance doing little to compensate for the broader absence of rule of law and civil society support.

The restrictive political environment has further limited the scope for using diverse aid channels, leaving few opportunities to work directly with non-state actors. Future democracy support would benefit from adopting a more context-sensitive approach, focused on maintaining entry points for engagement and reinforcing civil society resilience even in constrained political settings. This calls for greater flexibility in the criteria applied by the EU and its Member States both when deciding to launch democracy support programmes, and when evaluating their effectiveness.

## 4.6 Belarus

The Belarusian case demonstrates low consistency in norms and low complementarity in instruments within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States, resulting in a disjointed and counterproductive democracy support agenda. Persistent authoritarianism and the absence of formal political dialogue have restricted the capacity of both EU institutions and Member States to promote democratic norms coherently. Engagement has largely been confined to support for civil society and independent media, while systemic reforms in the rule of law, accountability, or governance have remained beyond reach. This has produced an asymmetrical democracy support profile, where the EU and its Member States share broad normative commitments but lack consistent coordination in applying them.

Operationally, democracy support instruments have been fragmented and reactive. Member States such as Poland, Germany, and Sweden have maintained engagement through civil society organisations and media platforms like Belsat, but these efforts have remained largely disconnected from EU-level programming. The near-total reliance on non-state channels has limited the diversity of instruments and hindered long-term institutional impact. Although some agility was demonstrated in 2020 – when several Member States sharply increased assistance following the post-election protests – these responses were ad hoc rather than strategically embedded. The Belarusian experience thus illustrates the structural limits of democracy support under conditions of entrenched authoritarianism. Moving forward, a more durable approach requires sustained coordination between EU and Member State efforts and a sustained emphasis on maintaining civic spaces that can outlast political repression – inside, or outside the country. This means revisiting conditionality, placing greater emphasis on democratic progress among civil society and the demos despite the lack of institutional democracy anchors.

## 5 Aggregate Reflection

The comparative analysis of consistency and complementarity in EU and Member State democracy support across the Eastern Neighbourhood highlights several cross-cutting implications that must inform future policymaking.

First, democracy, as operationalised through the norms and instruments of democracy support, is increasingly being approached as a “*security good*.” For example, Romanian democracy assistance is closely tied to the strategic importance of Moldova and Ukraine as security buffers, while Poland explicitly links partner selection for democracy assistance to maintaining “a stable international environment for Poland” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2021). Recent wars in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine have further reinforced this trend, leading to an emphasis on peacebuilding and conflict management within the EU’s democratisation agenda. However, this securitisation of democracy support risks undermining its longer-term success. In terms of normative consistency, it can shift attention away from rule of law and value entrenchment toward short-term threat management. In terms of complementarity, it can distort the conditions under which democracy programmes are scaled-up or down. Ultimately, there is a growing risk that democracy assistance becomes increasingly tethered to strategic securitisation concerns, to the point where democratic progress – under the “more for more” principle – or the pursuit of cross-cutting programmes designed to leverage the comparative strengths of different external partners become undermined.

Second, while *resilience* has ranked prominently in the EU’s external action since the 2016 Global Strategy, its practical application has lacked conceptual consistency. The Strategy defines resilience as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises,” further

clarifying that “a resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development” represents the ultimate goal (European Union, 2016). Yet, in practice, resilience has been unevenly interpreted across contexts. To be pursued effectively, it requires a context-specific diagnosis of the areas most in need of support within each Eastern Neighbourhood country. In Georgia and Armenia, this means linking resilience to institutional consolidation and inclusive public participation, whereas in war-affected contexts such as Ukraine, it must be rooted in the interplay between peacebuilding and constitutional checks and balances. From a complementarity perspective, the effective pursuit of resilience demands an agile democracy support infrastructure – one capable of seizing democratic openings, sustaining reform momentum, and balancing short-term stabilisation with long-term democratic resilience.

Third, the EU’s democracy support model – even when reinforced by Member State initiatives – continues to place disproportionate emphasis on technocratic governance reform. On the one hand, this has led to a focus on institutional restructuring without an equivalent investment in cultivating democratic values that resonate within Eastern Neighbourhood societies, leaving space for democratic backsliding. On the other, a strong preference for administratively measurable outputs – such as electoral integrity or public administration efficiency – has created rigidity in the EU’s and Member States’ decisions on when to launch or sustain democracy support programmes, as seen in cases like Belarus and Azerbaijan. Moving forward, democracy support requires a recalibration. Greater emphasis should be placed on embedding the democratic values that underpin participation and institutional reform, alongside a more adaptive and context-sensitive approach to assessing progress.

Fourth, the analysis suggests that consistency and complementarity can reinforce each other but do not automatically do so. When the EU and Member States share a common normative orientation – as in Ukraine or Moldova – their actions are more likely to align and mutually amplify impact. Yet, high consistency in norms does not always produce high complementarity in instruments. The Armenian case illustrates that even when normative objectives are for the most part shared, fragmented implementation can diffuse effort and limit democratic traction. Conversely, high complementarity without a clear normative anchor – as seen in Georgia – can perpetuate gaps in rights promotion or democratic oversight. The consistency-complementarity distinction is therefore not only analytical but also prescriptive. Democracy support decision-making, and respective evaluations, should focus on whether programmes promote a consistent set of norms and whether bilateral and multilateral instruments complement one another.

Finally, despite the breadth of democracy support across the region, several core democratic dimensions remain consistently under-addressed. Institutionalised political participation, judicial oversight, and executive accountability receive limited attention across all Eastern Neighbourhood countries. This gap stems both from the EU’s and its Member States’ limited engagement with some partners, such as Azerbaijan and Belarus, and from the predominance of “softer” forms of assistance, particularly education-oriented support, in countries perceived as democratic frontrunners, such as Moldova. As the findings of REDEMOS Work Packages 3 and 5 indicate, weaknesses in electoral, judicial, and executive accountability continue to undermine democratic consolidation across the region, contributing to regime volatility in both its democracies and autocracies. Therefore, future strategies will need to establish these areas as priorities, albeit while avoiding one-size-fits-all models.

## 6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that the success of EU democracy support across the Eastern Neighbourhood depends on the delicate balance between normative consistency and instrumental complementarity. Where these dimensions align, democracy support agendas tend to be comprehensive and coherent; when either dimension lags, their overall effectiveness is undermined.

Moreover, assessing the degree of consistency and complementarity helps identify the key gaps within the democracy support efforts of the EU and its Member States. It highlights potential risks even in generally successful cases - such as Moldova and Ukraine - reveals structural sources of weakness in more ambiguous contexts - such as Armenia and Georgia - and indicates which democracy support dimensions could underpin more meaningful future engagement in less successful cases, such as Azerbaijan and Belarus.

Ultimately, this paper contributes both a set of topical policy insights tailored the six Eastern Neighbourhood countries and the region as a whole, and a blueprint to evaluate the strategic approaches followed by EU and national policymakers in the context of democracy support moving forward.

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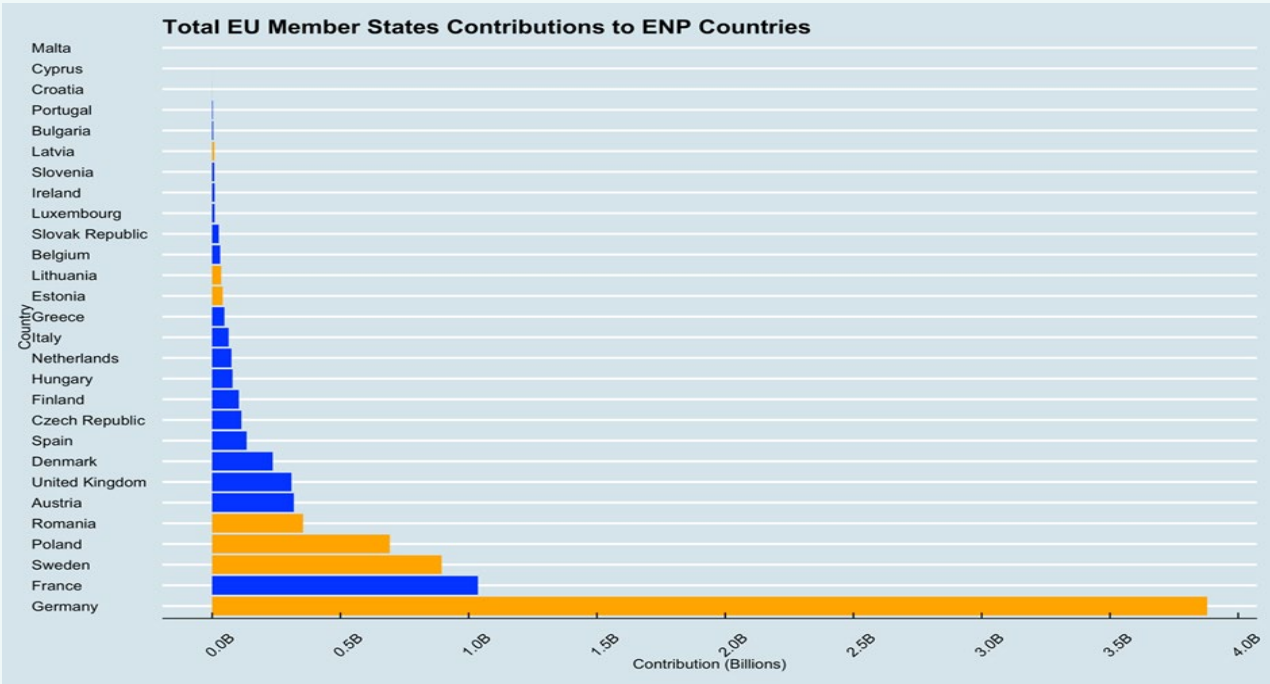
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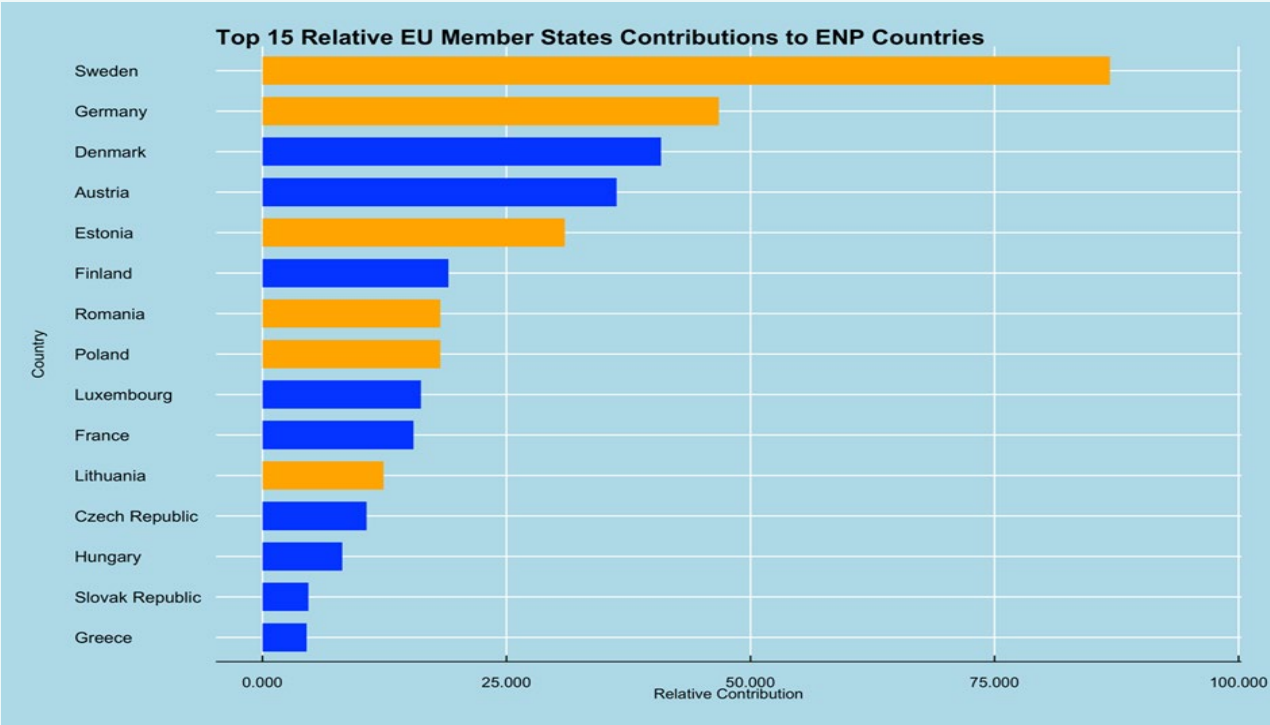
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# 8 Appendix<sup>1</sup>

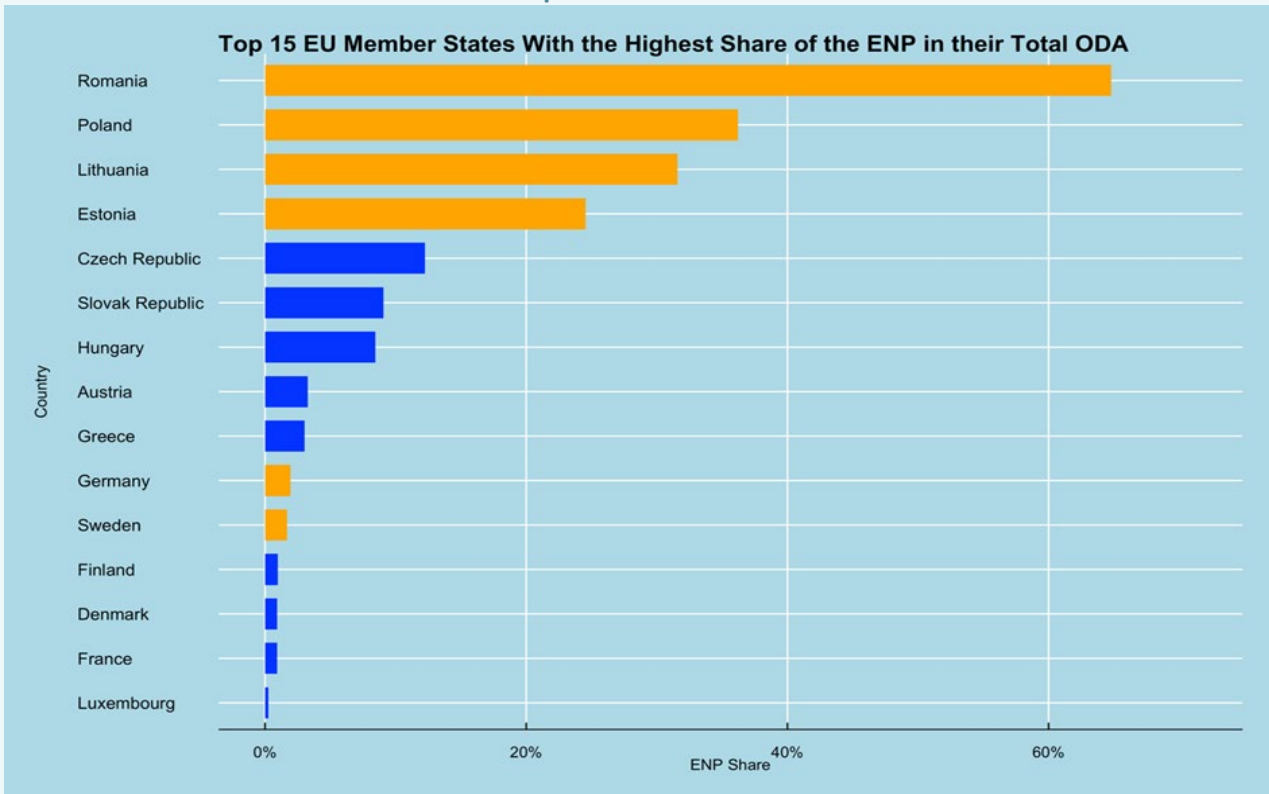


Appendix Figure 1: Total EU Member States contributions to EN countries.

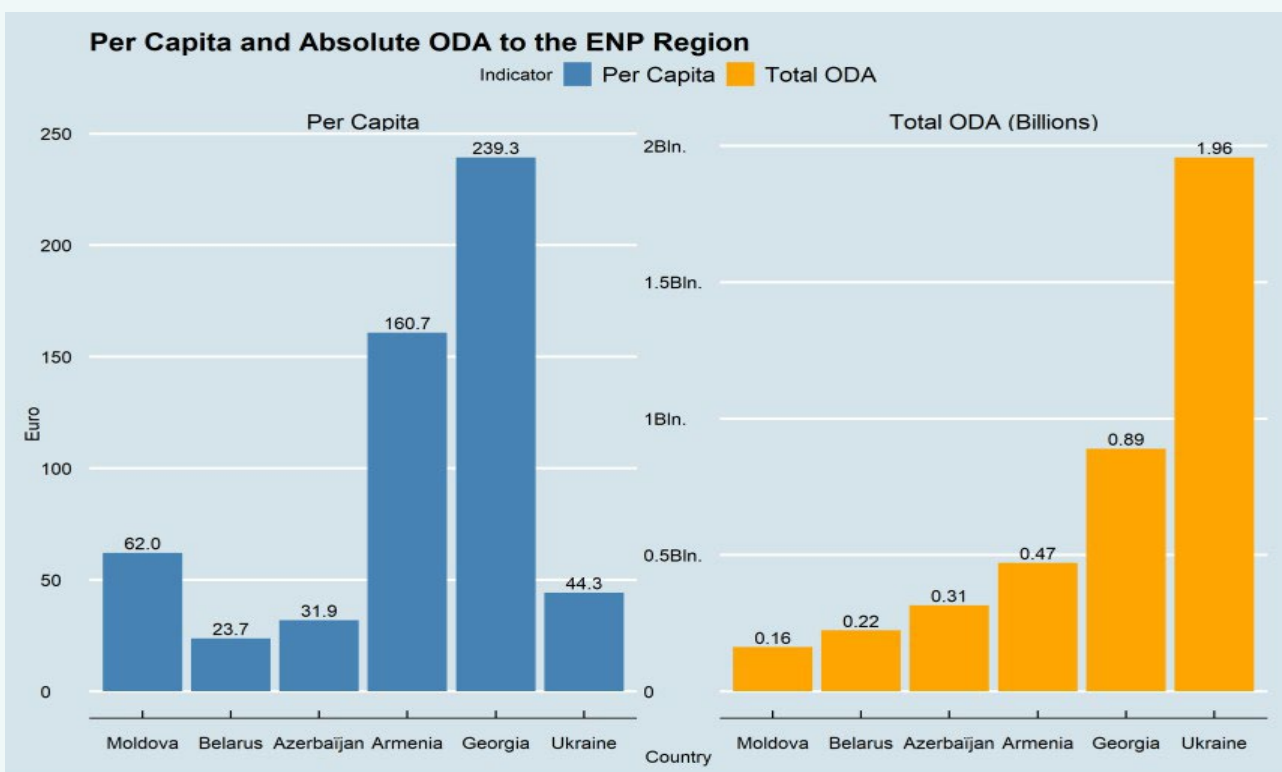


<sup>1</sup> The figures reported in the Appendix highlight the distribution of ODA by EU Member States to the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries and are drawn from REDEMOS D2.2 [Exadaktylos, T., Richter, M. M., Aleksanyan, A., Aleksanyan, A., Chappell, L., Denysenko, D., Gevorgyan, V., & Sherents, V. (2024). *Taking stock of EU Member States' democracy action towards the Eastern Neighbourhood* (REDEMOS Working Paper D2.2). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15011612>

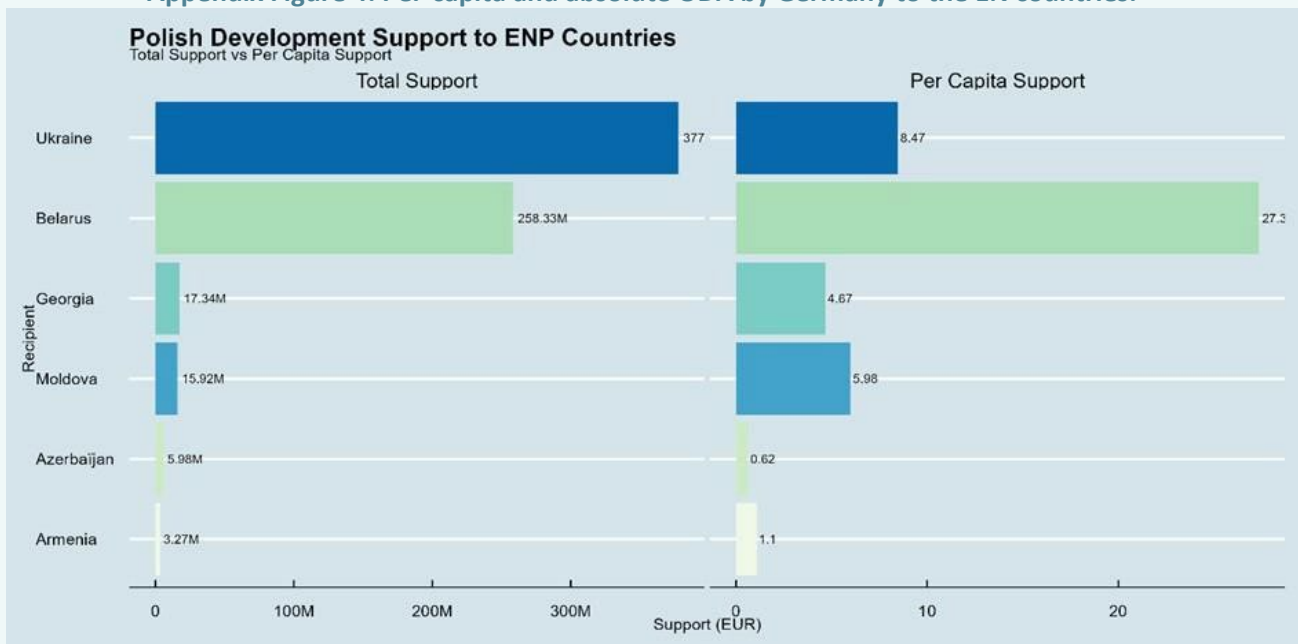
**Appendix Figure 2: Top 15 Relative EU Member States Contributions to EN Countries based on UN Population Fund data.**



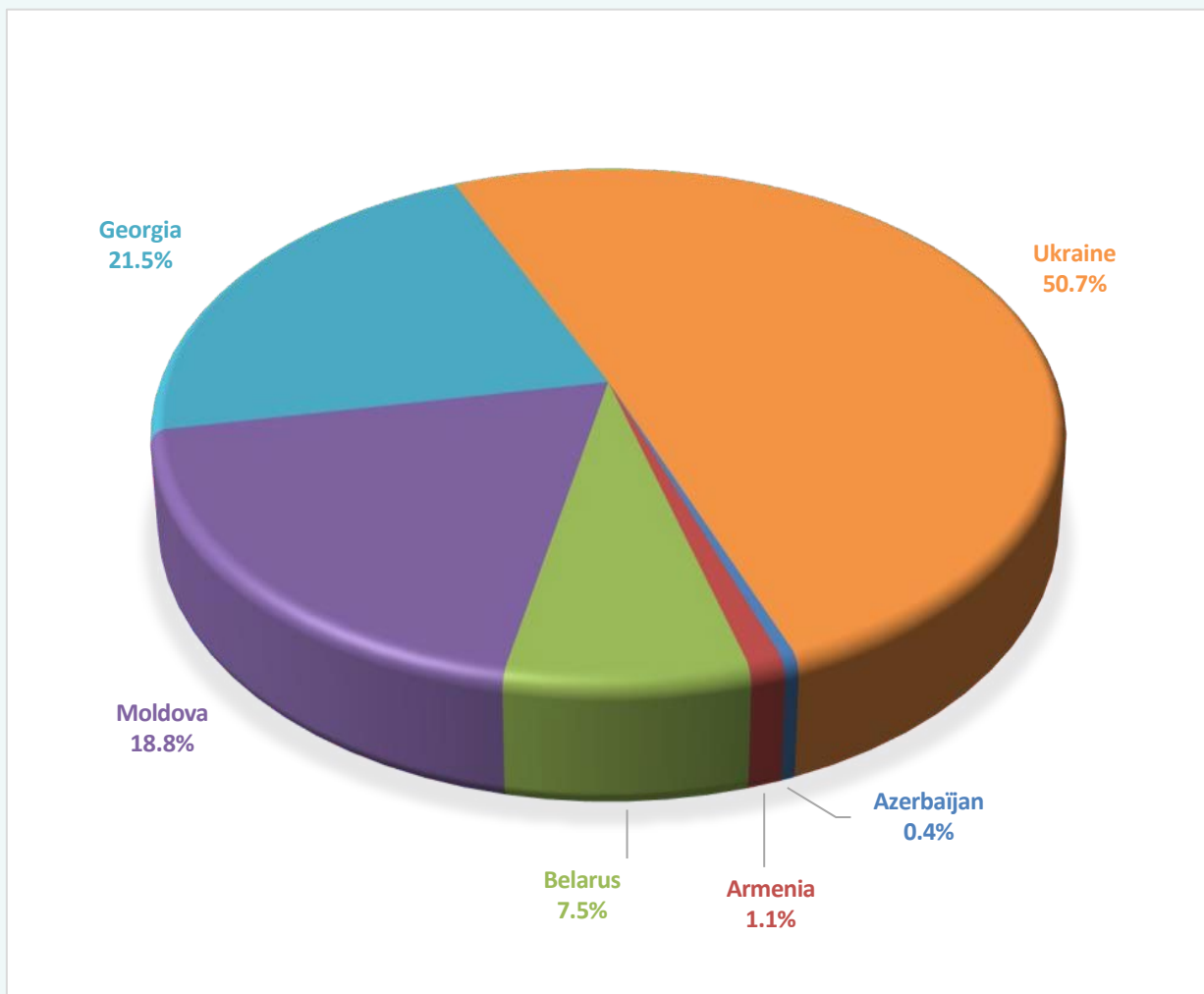
**Appendix Figure 3: Top 15 EU Member States with the Highest Share of the EN in their Total ODA.**



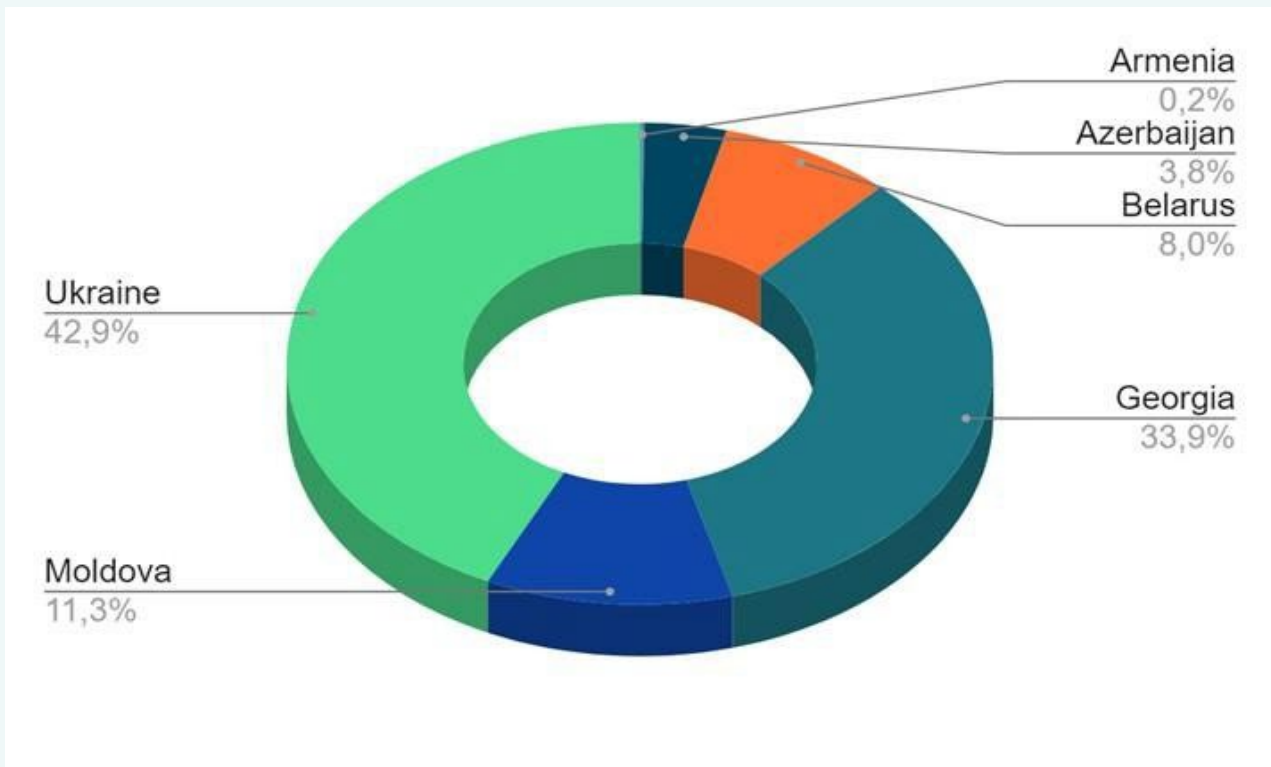
Appendix Figure 4: Per-capita and absolute ODA by Germany to the EN countries.



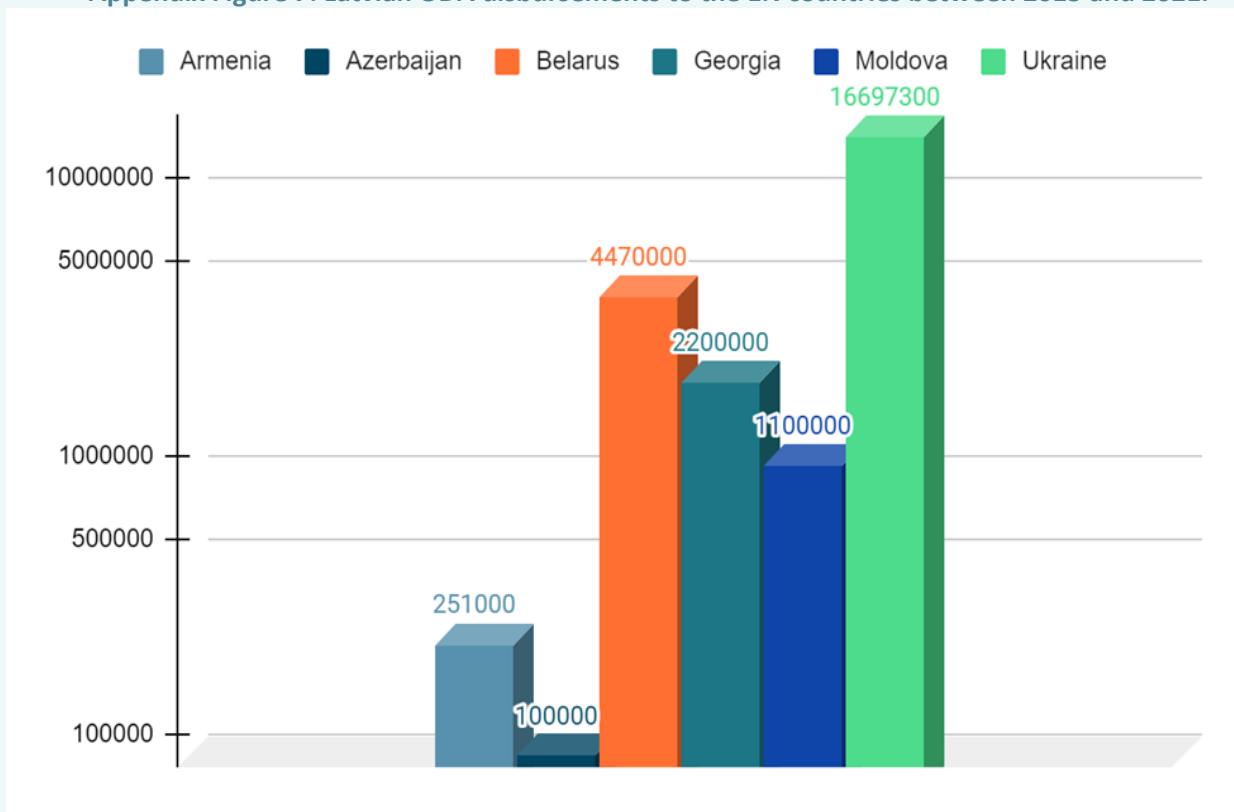
Appendix Figure 5: Polish ODA Disbursements to the EN countries between 2013 and 2021. All figures in Euro.



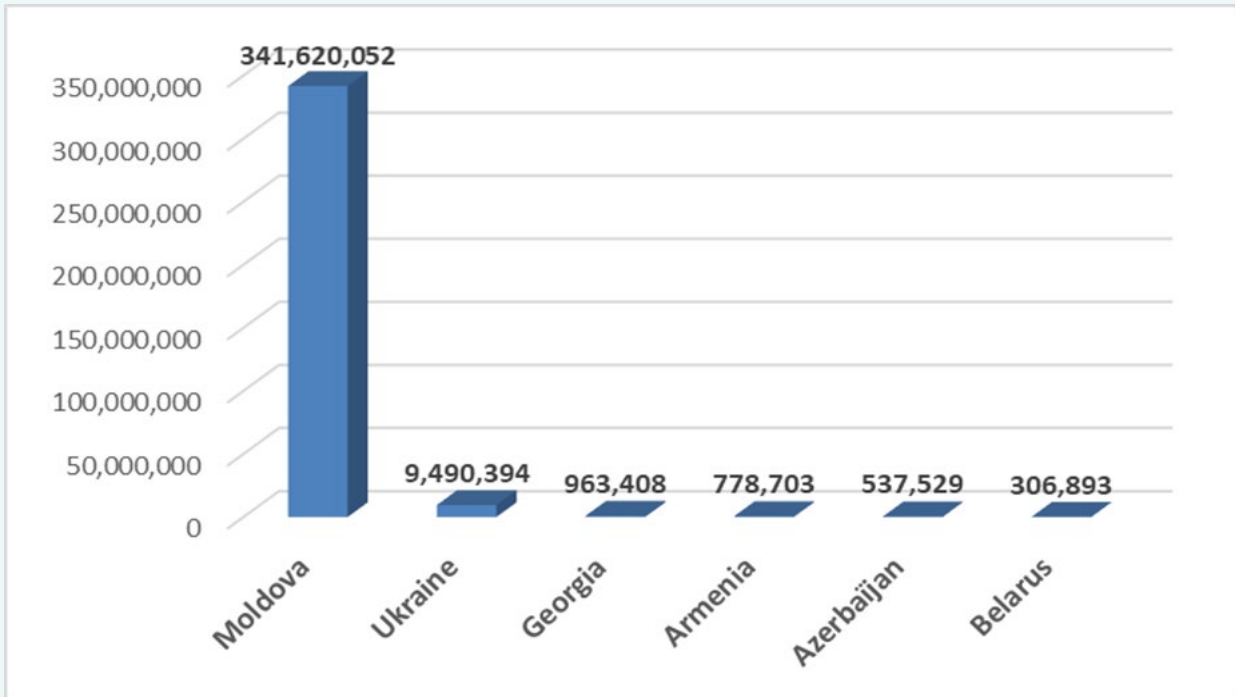
Appendix Figure 6: Estonian ODA disbursements to the EN countries between 2013 and 2021.



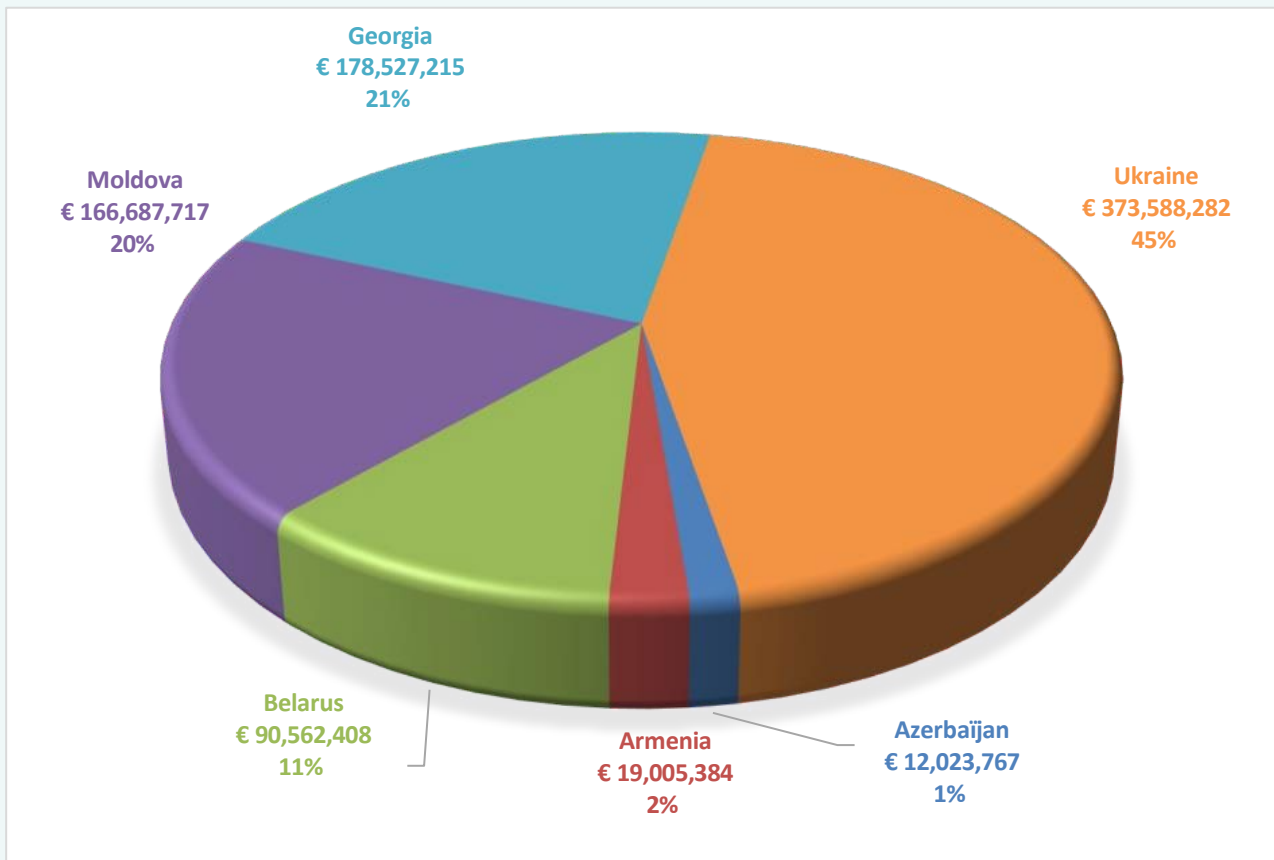
Appendix Figure 7: Latvian ODA disbursements to the EN countries between 2015 and 2021.



Appendix Figure 8: Aid Provided by Lithuania to EN Countries for Development Cooperation Projects in 2002– 2020 (amounts in euros).



Appendix Figure 9: Romanian ODA disbursements to the EN countries between 2014 and 2021. All figures in euro.






Appendix Figure 10: Swedish ODA Disbursements to the EN countries between 2009 and 2021.



**REDEMOS: REconfiguring EU DEMOcracy Support.  
Towards a sustained demos in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood**

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**Dr Mădălina Dobrescu, NTNU**  
**info@redemos.eu**

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