

Democracy in Development

**Global consultations on the EU's role  
in democracy building**



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A report of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

Democracy in Development: Global consultations on the EU's role in democracy building

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# Preface

This report presents the first ever peer review of the European Union's external policies and practices on support for democracy and democracy building around the world. With the support of Sweden holding the incoming EU presidency, International IDEA has engaged counterparts and partners of the EU in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab world, South Asia and Southeast Asia<sup>1</sup> in a series of multi-regional consultations to get their feedback on the impact of these policies on democracy and democracy building in their respective regions.

We organized this process of multi-regional consultations in response to some monumental failures in the name of international democracy promotion in recent years – such as efforts to impose democratic solutions from the outside and a refusal to accept democratic outcomes from within. Today it seems to be widely recognized that democracy cannot be brought about in a top-down and outside-in way. This recognition urgently needs to be translated into true dialogue between peers in a way which is active but not aggressive, critical but not condescending, honest but not humiliating.

The need for new approaches to democracy building is further underscored by continuing global political and economic power shifts. The message from partners is that the EU is well placed to take a leadership role in shaping new approaches. The EU is seen by counterparts in other regions as arguably the biggest democratic success story in history. It is seen as an attractive and reliable cooperation partner, marked by long-term commitments and a transparent agenda. The EU's own internal achievements are frequently held up as a source of inspiration: peace, democracy, economic development, social cohesion and regional integration.

However, partners also lament the inability of the EU to step up to that leadership role, and its inability to translate its own experiences of integration into a more integrated approach to supporting sustainable democracy across the world. Foreign and security policy, development cooperation, enlargement policy, agricultural, trade and migration policies all impact on the opportunity for and sustainability of democracy. While partners experience the breadth of such impact, they do not experience the EU as acting in an integrated way.

On this basis the recommendations emerging from the multi-regional consultations urge the EU to build on its strengths to improve its policies, practices and partnerships in four ways:

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<sup>1</sup> Roundtable conferences were organized in collaboration with the African Union (AU), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the League of Arab States (LAS). In Southeast Asia and South Asia the roundtables were organized in collaboration with leading think-tank partners of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) respectively: the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS). Three global meetings encompassing all regions including EU institutions were also held in the process. In addition, background papers and articles were commissioned and individual interviews conducted to support the consultations.

1. The EU needs to articulate its own experiences of democracy building, in order to respond to the great interest in the EU story and to inspire political dialogue and shared learning across regions.
2. The EU needs to reflect its internal achievements in its external action. The broad understanding of democracy as integrating political, social and economic rights which has been so successful in Europe itself, should be reflected in the EU's external action as well. Such an effort will require more interconnectedness between policy areas within the EU.
3. The EU needs to stand by its basic principles, reaffirming its long-term commitment to democracy even in situations where short-term interests might lead to difficult compromises.
4. The EU must turn its rhetoric of partnership into a reality perceived by partners if progress on democracy building is to be achieved.

### ***Share Europe's own story***

European discourse about itself is often gloomy. Yet the good news is that the EU is clearly perceived to be more of a success story in other regions than at home. Seen from the rest of the world, EU member states have grown peace, democracy and prosperity out of the ashes of brutality and bloodshed. They have nurtured an unrivalled combination of individual freedom, economic dynamism and social protection and cohesion.

As many countries across the world struggle to find the right balance between the citizen and the state, there is considerable interest in how Europe has achieved just this: and which political and economic processes were put in place to make it work so well? The EU's partners are actually rather puzzled that the EU does not make more of its success. There is a common demand by partners for information-sharing at peer level as a basis for political dialogue and assistance programmes. This is why they want to see the EU articulate its own experience into a more coherent policy in support of democracy building world wide.

### ***Apply abroad what you apply at home***

When other regions look to European democracies, they see more than merely electoral democracy. They see human rights understood and applied as an interdependent whole: civil and political rights as well as social, economic and cultural rights. They see democracies that by and large deliver on the needs and expectations of their citizens.

This very ability of democracy to deliver social and economic development is at the top of the agendas of the EU's partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Arab world. Lack of social cohesion is fuelling human insecurity and political instability. A state unable to stimulate economic and social development often results in discontent about how democracy works. In turn, this leads to dissatisfaction with international democracy assistance which is seen to advocate free and fair elections but not always freedom in everyday life.

Herein is the giant paradox which the EU needs to address: when other regions experience EU external action, they see a much narrower, procedural, election-focused



approach than what successfully characterizes democracies in Europe. If the EU is to capitalize on its own experience and attractiveness, it needs to seek synergies between democracy and development cooperation. This, in turn, requires synergies between development cooperation and foreign and security policy.

### ***Stand by long-term commitments and avoid double standards***

Even though democracy holds such a central place in the European story, the EU is largely known as a trade bloc in the rest of the world. The EU is seen as surprisingly shy when it comes to maintaining Europe's fundamental principles, with democracy often giving way to short-term economic or security priorities. This leads counterparts and partners to express doubts about the EU's commitment to democracy in other regions of the world.

When times are tough, should the commitment to democracy and human rights be the first to fall by the wayside? True, political reality is that interests and priorities compete at times. The message from partners is that the EU should be transparent about its choices in situations where other goals are given precedence. Such transparency would help manage expectations and enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the EU's long-term commitment to democracy. Lack of transparency, on the other hand, paves the way for accusations of double standards.

The European response to the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections in 2006 is quoted in all regions, not only in the Arab world, as the prime example of double standards that undermine the credibility of EU calls for democracy and free elections. European credibility is however also weakened by what is labeled as protectionist agricultural, trade and migration policies. For the EU's counterparts, trade is not merely an economic issue: it is a decisive question of whether democratic governments in less prosperous countries will have the opportunity to create economic and social development from within and thereby strengthen the sustainability and accountability of their own democracy.

### ***Partnerships not preaching, dialogue not declarations***

Partnerships are well established terminology in EU relations with other regions, but less well established in practice. The EU's counterparts strongly express a wish to see the EU meeting them as partners and not as students. The donor-recipient approach to relationships must be abandoned. Resolutions, sanctions and isolation normally lead nowhere. The focus should be on nurturing home-grown initiatives in dialogue with partners. In line with this, the language of democracy promotion, which is seen as a one-way activity, should be replaced by more collaborative language of shared democracy building. In a world where power relations are changing, this is an urgently important message for the EU to take in.

One may ask if such an approach goes well with the insistence that the EU needs to stand by its principles. The resounding response from the multi-regional consultations is yes: true partnerships also include honest dialogue on difficult issues, the willingness to listen not least when there is disagreement. In actual fact the very process of consultations reflected in this report has demonstrated the potential of dialogue. The invitation for partners to scrutinize the EU resulted in more: the deliberations were equally marked

by openness about the weaknesses of and challenges to democracy in the various regions themselves. They also produced a desire to take the discussions further towards a shared common agenda for democracy building across the many regions. The desire for such a process holds even more promise than the report itself.

Stockholm, June 2009

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vidar Helgesen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vidar Helgesen

Secretary-General  
International IDEA

# List of acronyms

ACP	Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific
APF	African Peace Facility
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AU	African Union
CA	Constituent Assembly (of Nepal)
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSOs	civil society organizations
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
LACs	Latin American and the Caribbean
LAS	League of Arab States
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PERP	Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs (in Bangladesh)
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SACEPS	South Asia Centre for Policy Studies
TDCA	Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

# Summary of findings

EU intentions	Partner perceptions	Gap	Policy options
Democracy is one of the fundamental objectives of EU external action.	The EU is primarily a trade partner and an economic actor.	There are different ideas on what the EU does, and what role it could and should play in democracy building.	<p>The EU should tap its own internal experiences to inform its external action.</p> <p>The EU needs to apply a broad understanding of democracy.</p> <p>The EU needs to stand by its long-term commitments.</p> <p>The EU should move towards genuine partnerships.</p>
<b>Tap the EU's internal experiences to inform external action</b>			
The only explicit reference to the EU's own internal experiences is found in the security policy.	Partners would find it useful to have information about EU's internal experiences across more policy areas.	EU internal experiences across a broad range of areas are an under-utilized resource that could be further exploited.	The EU should formulate its own narrative on democracy building based on the individual experiences of its member states and on the positive story about EU regional integration. Interest in these experiences relates to a range of areas including mechanisms for successful integration, gender equality, fiscal systems, anti-corruption efforts, minority protection and management of diversity, judicial reform, and democratic control of armed forces. The EU should make these experiences globally available through accessible communications tools.
<b>Apply a broad understanding of democracy</b>			
The EU supports democracy building primarily through electoral assistance and human rights promotion. In its development cooperation, the EU has set democracy as an explicit objective.	EU support for democracy building focuses too much on electoral assistance and human rights promotion and too little on the delivery aspects of democracy. There is a divide between the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and development in terms of policy and action relating to democracy building. This difference is reflected by different language and understandings of democracy.	The EU applies a narrow understanding of democracy: it does not adequately link its support for democracy building to the delivery aspects of democracy. There is scope to explore synergies between the CFSP and development cooperation based on their different characteristics and applications on democracy.	<p>The EU should apply a broad understanding of democracy in its external action, seeing democracy as more than a procedure, as something which also needs to deliver the basic needs of the citizens.</p> <p>In order to do so, the CFSP and development cooperation need to be more closely linked. In general terms, development policy focuses on good governance, while the CFSP to a large extent projects support to democracy building as human rights activities, electoral assistance and promotion of fundamental values. The EU should make an effort to further align the focus, contents, approach and methodology of both policy areas. The EU could initiate inter-institutional task forces, bringing together experts to make use of their different perspectives and develop synergies for more effective support to democracy building.</p> <p>Education plays a key role in fostering democrats. This should be taken into account by the EU and its partners.</p>

Stand by the EU's long-term commitments			
Democracy is one of the long-term objectives of the EU's external action.	The EU prioritizes short-term stability and trade objectives over the long-term objectives for support to democracy building.	The EU is not able to sustain its long-term democracy objectives in its external action.	Credibility and legitimacy are prerequisites for effective support to democracy building. The EU should signal its commitments and its limitations to its partners in a clear and transparent way to confirm the long-term objectives and to manage partners' expectations.
EU policies and actions are coherent and consistent; the EU takes democracy into account within all policy areas.	At the Union level, the EU sometimes comes across as inconsistent and unable to find common positions. It does not consider the effects of its migration, trade, agriculture or security policy on democracy building. Differences come across between the EU on the one hand and the EU member states on the other; this sometimes causes confusion and sometimes provides alternatives.	Coherence and consistency are not always achieved between policy areas at the EU level. Democracy is not fully covered within all relevant policy areas affecting partners. Member states and EU institutions sometimes come across with different messages; using the same concepts but with different interpretations.	The EU should explore further building synergies between the CFSP, development cooperation and other relevant policy areas, recognizing and considering the effects of policies such as trade and migration on democracy building in other regions.  The EU should use the advantage of being 27 different member states to strengthen the common agenda, while strongly discouraging discrepancies between the EU member states' actions and the agreed EU agenda in cases where these affect democracy building adversely.
Move towards genuine partnerships			
The EU employs "democracy promotion" to meet its objectives.	"Democracy promotion" is interpreted as one-way communication. It implies a donor-recipient relationship.	The understanding of genuine partnerships differs between the EU and its partners.	Partnerships should be pursued in a spirit of finding mutual benefits. Dialogue is a core element of partnerships. The EU should undertake a review of its policies and procedures to strengthen its dialogue mechanisms. It should review its work processes to ensure that dialogue with partners is incorporated from an early stage and throughout the entire programme cycle.
The EU employs a <i>partnership approach</i> to meet its long-term objectives on democracy building. The EU addresses democracy building activities with a wide range of actors.	The EU's commitment to partnership as an approach is not fully realized in action, dialogue and attitudes. EU support for democracy building comes across as disproportionately in favour of civil society activities.	There is unexploited potential in further developing the partnership approach. The EU does not reach a wide range of actors in its democracy building activities.	The EU should meet the partners where they need the EU. The EU should continue to develop inter-regional partnerships where appropriate and feasible. Possible avenues for cooperation at the regional level could be with regional organizations and their democracy initiatives. Inclusive consultation is a tool that should be used more frequently in this regard. Genuine partnerships should be pursued at several levels and with a broad range of actors.

# Part I

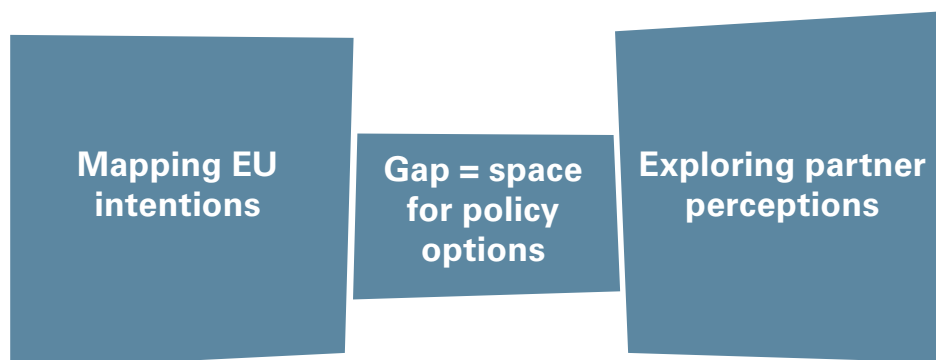
# Introduction

This report provides options for strengthening EU policies, practices and partnerships in support of democracy building. The policy options presented emerge from comparing the EU's *intentions* in democracy building with the *perceptions* of EU policies and actions by partners. In 2008 and 2009, the International IDEA project *Democracy in Development – global consultations on the EU's role in democracy building* probed the views of partners by holding consultations with regional organizations and think tanks in Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Part 1 of the report outlines the objectives and methodology of the project. Part 2 compares the EU's intentions with the perceptions of its partners, followed by an analysis of any gaps between intentions and perceptions. Finally, Part 3 provides options for EU policies, practices and partnerships.

## Methodology and hypothesis

The hypothesis underpinning this assessment is, in essence, that a gap exists between the intentions of EU policies and actions and the perceptions of regional partners. Identifying and clearly articulating this gap provides an opportunity to improve dialogue between the EU and its partners in an effort to better develop policies, practices and partnerships.



To identify the EU's *intentions* the project went to EU documents: the treaties, policy documents and strategies which express ambitions, commitments, values and objectives.

**“Perceptions matter – because they are a basis for understanding and a foundation upon which actors make choices and decisions. Understanding the perceptions and perspectives of the “other” side can provide a basis for improved communication and give guidance on policy adjustments.”**

**Ms Ingrid Wetterqvist,  
Director, International IDEA**

The *perceptions* of EU interventions were mapped by engaging partners directly: those who have practical experience of the implementation of the EU's actions and policies at regional and country levels. Five regions were covered: Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Regional organizations, which are the EU's counterparts, are proxy voices for partner perceptions.

The consultations were organized in close cooperation with regional organizations. In the case of Africa, the Arab world and Latin America and the Caribbean, the consultations

were organized with their respective regional organizations: the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS), and the Organization of American States (OAS). In the case of South Asia and Southeast Asia, after communication with the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the consultations were organized with their leading think tanks, the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), respectively.

Key questions addressed during the consultations included: when you look at the EU, what do you see? How do you think EU policies and actions affect democracy building

## Box 1: Our partners

**The African Union (AU)** is an intergovernmental organization consisting of 53 African states. It was established in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The AU's secretariat, the African Union Commission, is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

**The League of Arab States (LAS)** is an intergovernmental organization of 22 Arab states in Southwest Asia, and North and Northeast Africa. It was formed in 1945. The General Secretariat is placed in Cairo, Egypt.

**The Organization of American States (OAS)** was, in its modern shape, formed in 1948. It consists of 35 states in the Americas and the Caribbean; however, Cuba has been suspended from active participation since 1962. The OAS General Secretariat is located in Washington D.C., USA.

**The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** is an economic and political organization of eight countries in South Asia. SAARC was established in 1985 by India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan. In April 2007,

Afghanistan became its eighth member. The SAARC Secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

**The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is an intergovernmental organization established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei became a member in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Burma in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. The organization's secretariat is in Jakarta, Indonesia.

**The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)**, Jakarta, Indonesia, is a non-profit independent organization established in 1971 and focused on policy-oriented studies. The CSIS is actively involved with regional and international networks of 'track-two' institutions and is also a founding institute of the Council for Asia Europe Cooperation (CAEC).

**The South Asia Center for Policy Studies (SACEPS)** is a network organization involved in addressing issues of regional concern in South Asia. It is an independent, non-profit making, regional, non-governmental organization with a permanent Secretariat established in 2005 and based in Kathmandu, Nepal.



in your region? What works? What does not? What would you like the EU to do less of, more of or simply differently?

Consultations took place mainly in the form of round table meetings complemented by individual interviews. A number of commissioned articles were used to generate discussion. Stakeholder meetings in Brussels, Strasbourg and Stockholm were also held as a means of reaching out to more actors.

## Definitions

International IDEA does not subscribe to any official definition of democracy, but its *State of Democracy* assessment framework has developed a useful working definition of what the term means.

### Box 2: IDEA “State of Democracy” principles of Democracy

The two fundamental principles to democracy, according to the International IDEA “State of Democracy” framework, are popular control over decisions and decision makers and equality of respect and voice between citizens in the exercise of that control.

The realization of these two principles is made possible through seven mediating values: participation, authorization, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and solidarity (International IDEA 2008).

*Democracy* is understood as a political system where public decision making is subject to popular control and where all citizens have an equal right to participate in this process. Whilst levels of democracy cannot easily be compared between states and democracy can not be easily measured, there are ways to make assessments of the quality of democracy in a state at a given time.

*Democracy building* is about creating the conditions that allow the principles of democracy to be put into practice. In order to be effective, such efforts must be led from within a country – though they can also be supported from the outside. Democracy does not develop in a vacuum: international relations and actions by external parties may affect national and local realities too.

*Democratization* is a long-term and never-ending process aiming to increase the quality of democratic institutions and processes and to build a democratic culture.

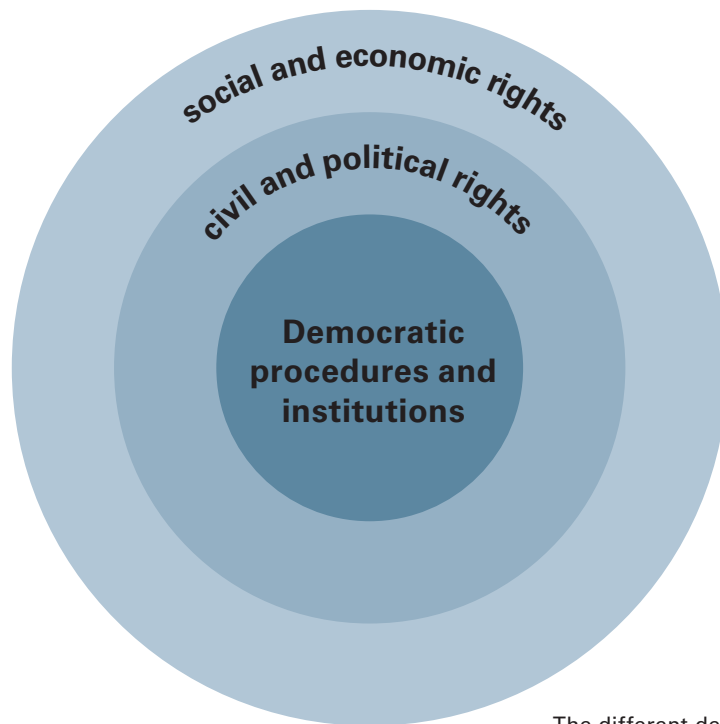
Other definitions go beyond International IDEA’s working definition of democracy and include reference to its *contents* and substance. These perspectives and wider understanding of what constitutes democracy emerged in several regions during the consultations (See Box 3: Three definitions of democracy).

### Box 3: Three definitions of democracy

**“Procedural definitions”** view democracy within the framework of the two dimensions of *contestation* and *participation*. Democracy is seen in terms of the procedures and institutions connected to *elections*.

**“Liberal definitions”** add references to the protection of civil and political rights as criteria for democracy. These definitions contain both an *institutional* dimension and a *rights* dimension.

**“Substantive definitions”** of democracy include social, economic and cultural rights; adding emphasis on provision of a minimum standard of living (“welfare”) and the progressive realization of the social, economic and cultural rights.<sup>2</sup>



The different definitions of democracy, as presented here, are seen as cumulative.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on democracy definitions, see for example Landman, 2009



# Part II

# Intentions and perceptions

This section reviews EU policy documents and treaties in order to provide an understanding of EU *intentions* on democracy building. Second, it presents a summary of the perceptions identified based primarily on the findings of IDEA's consultations with EU partners in Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Finally, it analyses the gap between stated intentions and perceptions.

## Intentions: EU policy documents on democracy building

To understand the EU's intentions and limitations, the institutional complexity of the organization must be recognized. The EU's three main bodies are the European Parliament, representing the people of Europe; the Council of the European Union, representing national governments; and the European Commission, representing the common EU interest. Both the Parliament and the Council have Secretariats. Within the Parliament, the Council and the Commission, and on all levels, there are organizational divides to mirror the separate policy areas. Some policy areas are decided on the common EU level. This is known as the EU *first pillar* and includes for example trade and development cooperation. The Common Foreign and Security Policy, on the other hand, falls under the jurisdiction of the EU member states in the Council, and is commonly known as the issues under the *second pillar*. In addition, EU member states have their individual agendas and policies at the national level.

The legal basis for the EU's joint commitment to democracy is found in the Treaty of the European Union, as amended by the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, which defines democracy as one of the principles underpinning the EU's external action.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Article 6, Treaty on European Union, 2006; with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty democracy would instead become one of the values underpinning the external policy (see Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community 2007, Article 2)

## Box 4: EU pillars

The Treaty of Maastricht, which established the European Union, divided EU policies into three “pillars”:

- The European Community pillar, including policy areas of trade and development cooperation (first pillar);
- The pillar devoted to the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which comes under Title V of the EU Treaty (second pillar);
- The pillar devoted to police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (third pillar).

The three pillars function on the basis of different decision-making procedures: the Community procedure for the first pillar, and the intergovernmental procedure for the other two. In the case of the first pillar, only the Commission can submit proposals to the Council and Parliament, and a qualified majority is sufficient for a Council act to be adopted. In the case of the second and third pillars, this right of initiative is shared between the Commission and the member states, and unanimity in the Council is generally necessary.

## Box 5: The Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing European Communities: legal framework for democracy in EU external action<sup>4</sup>

“[EU] is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles that are common to the member states”.<sup>5</sup>

“The Union shall define and implement a common foreign and security policy covering all areas of foreign and security policy, the objectives of which shall be: [...]— to develop and consolidate democracy

and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.<sup>6</sup>

“Community policy in [the area of development cooperation] shall contribute to the general objective of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, and to the objective of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms”.<sup>7</sup>

Democracy is referred to as an essential objective for the EU.<sup>8</sup> Democracy is, under the Treaty on European Union, a general objective but also an explicit objective to be applied to development cooperation and economic, financial and technical cooperation with third countries.<sup>9</sup>

Should the Lisbon Treaty enter into force, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union will become legally binding. While the Charter is mainly focused on human rights protection, it also includes several provisions on elements of democracy. The Lisbon Treaty, as well as the existing Treaty on European Union, also refers to other relevant documents such as the Paris Charter for a New Europe (1990) where democracy is referred to and defined in greater detail.

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<sup>4</sup> The framework will change if the Lisbon Treaty enters into force

<sup>5</sup> Article 6, Treaty on European Union, 2006

<sup>6</sup> Article 11, Treaty on European Union 2006

<sup>7</sup> Article 177:2, Treaty establishing the European Community, 2006, see also *ibid.*, Article 181a on Economic, Financial and Technical Cooperation with Third Countries.

<sup>8</sup> The European Union’s role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries, 2001, p.4

<sup>9</sup> Article 177:2 and 181a, Treaty establishing the European Community, 2006

## Box 6: Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

“Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law”.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the commitment to respect, promote and protect democracy and its principles is often mentioned as an *essential element* of the Community’s agreements with third countries, like in the European Consensus on Development.<sup>11</sup>

## Box 7: The European Consensus on Development

The European Consensus on Development was established in 2006 and is a framework of common principles within which the EU and its member states will implement their development policies with all third countries. E.g. in the consensus it is stated that “Democracy, Good Governance, Human rights and the rights of children will be promoted in partnership with all countries receiving Community development assistance”.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Building on the EU’s own experiences***

Interestingly, the EU’s own experiences of democracy and democratic governance are not given much elaboration in policy documents. The EU’s internal experiences are referred to only with regard to the *newer member states* and in relation to *security policy*. In the areas of conflict prevention and resolution, the EU’s own experiences are considered to be a strength, making the EU a possible model for other regions.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Understanding democracy***

Explicit definitions of democracy are rare in EU policy documents. Democracy is more often described in terms of its procedures, structures and institutions. Policy documents contain different concepts of democracy, including good governance, pluralist democracy, democratic governance, democratization, democracy promotion and democracy building. However, indirectly there are more concrete definitions through the Paris Charter as referred to in the Treaties.

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<sup>10</sup> Preamble, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000

<sup>11</sup> Communication from the Commission on the inclusion of respect for democratic principles and human rights in agreements between the Community and third countries’, 1995; European Consensus on Development, 2006

<sup>12</sup> European Consensus on Development, 2006

<sup>13</sup> Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention, 2001

## Box 8: The Paris Charter for a New Europe<sup>14</sup>

“We undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations”.

“Democratic government is based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections. Democracy has as its foundation respect for the human person and the rule of law. Democracy is the best safeguard of freedom of expression, toler-

ance of all groups of society, and equality of opportunity for each person”.

“Democracy, with its representative and pluralist character, entails accountability to the electorate, the obligation of public authorities to comply with the law and justice administered impartially. No one will be above the law”.<sup>15</sup>

In general terms, policy documents dealing with development policy focus on *good governance* and the related delivery aspects of democracy<sup>16</sup> while the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) focuses more on *democracy promotion* and support for human rights, political institutions and citizens’ participation via civil society and elections. Election observation and electoral assistance are emphasized as important components of the EU’s support for democracy building<sup>17</sup>. Yet the EU also reaffirms its view that democracy consists of more than just elections. Meanwhile, a Commission Communication has proposed *democratic governance* as a broader understanding of democracy which could link the EU’s development cooperation to its external relations.<sup>18</sup>

It is stressed that human rights and democratization are closely linked. Human rights play a prominent role in EU policy documents related to democracy. The emphasis on the link between human rights and democracy sometimes goes so far as to equate human rights activities with support for democracy building.<sup>19</sup>

## Box 9: Regulation 1889/2006: Establishing a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide

“Democracy and human rights are inextricably linked. The fundamental freedoms of expression and association are the preconditions for political pluralism and democratic process, whereas democratic control and

separation of powers are essential to sustain an independent judiciary and the rule of law which in turn are required for effective protection of human rights”.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union refers to the objectives of Paris Charter for a New Europe in connection to the provisions on a Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Paris Charter is referred to in connection to the policy objective of peace and international security, but the Paris Charter explicitly links peace building and democracy objectives and can therefore be seen as a link between these policy areas.

<sup>15</sup> Charter of Paris for a New Europe, 1990, pp 3–5

<sup>16</sup> “Governance concerns the state’s ability to serve the citizens ... Governance refers to the rules, processes, and behaviour by which the interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in society” (Communication from the Commission, Governance and Development, 2003, p.3)

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. the Commission Communication of 11 April 2000 on EU Election Assistance and Observation

<sup>18</sup> Governance in the European Consensus on Development Towards a harmonised approach within the European Union, 2006, p.4

<sup>19</sup> See for example the Commission paper The European Union: Furthering human rights and democracy across the globe, 2007, which, in spite of the title, only speaks of human rights.

<sup>20</sup> EC regulation no 1889/2006, Establishing a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide, paragraph 8



## Mainstreaming and coherence

Democracy is mainstreamed in all policies. It is discussed in several policy documents as a prerequisite for the achievement of other objectives; for example in development or security. Links between democracy and trade, the environment, migration and other policy areas are also commonly mentioned.<sup>21</sup>

*EU foreign policy* tools include traditional diplomacy and financial instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The *EU security policy* states that the EU views democracy and security objectives as dependent on each other.<sup>23</sup> However, there is no discussion of how to incorporate support for democracy building into security policy.

**“In addition to its approach towards co-operation programmes the Commission, consistent with its commitment to respect EU Charter will ensure that in the formulation of other policies, any negative effect on human rights and democratisation is always avoided, and wherever possible, policies are adapted to have a positive impact.”<sup>22</sup>**

## Box 10: The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

The EIDHR was established in 2006 as part of the European Community’s external cooperation programmes tools and it replaced an initiative established already in 1994. The aim is to provide support for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide. The annual budget for this instrument is approximately 116 million Euro. The legal base is Regulation 1889/2006.

There are five objectives for the EIDHR for the period 2007–2010:

- 1) Enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries and regions where they are most at risk;
- 2) Strengthening the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform;
- 3) Supporting actions on human rights and democracy issues in areas covered by EU Guidelines, including on human rights dialogues, on human rights defenders, on the death penalty, on torture, and on children and armed conflict;
- 4) Supporting and strengthening the international and regional framework for the protection of human rights, justice, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy;
- 5) Building confidence in and enhancing the reliability and transparency of democratic electoral processes, in particular through EU Election Observation Missions.<sup>24</sup>

*EU development policy*, a first pillar matter, also stresses democracy building as a prerequisite for development. Links between development, democracy, and, in particular, good governance are frequently highlighted. Development policy uses tools such as incentives, aid conditionality and essential elements clauses in agreements to encourage democracy building.

**“Progress in the protection of human rights, good governance and democratisation is fundamental for poverty reduction and sustainable development.”<sup>25</sup>**

<sup>21</sup> See European Commission, The European Union’s role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries, 2001

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, The European Union’s role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries, 2001, p.7

<sup>23</sup> See European Commission, Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention, 2001

<sup>24</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/eidhr/details\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/eidhr/details_en.htm)

<sup>25</sup> European Consensus on Development, 2005, paragraph 86

## Box 11: The Governance Incentive Tranche

In EU development cooperation with the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, a “governance incentive tranche” has been introduced. It is an incentive mechanism giving ACP countries access to additional funding from the European Community based

on these countries’ commitments to deliver on governance reforms. A total of €2.7 billion from the 10th European Development Fund has been reserved for such incentives.

The Treaties provide no explicit reference to democracy as an objective for *EU trade policy*.<sup>26</sup> However, since democracy is a general objective of EU external action, it applies implicitly also to this policy area.<sup>27</sup> Democracy and political dialogue are also often included as essential components of Economic Partnership Agreements, Free Trade Agreements and Association Agreements negotiated between the EU and its partners.

*The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)* is described as “a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values” of which democracy is one.<sup>28</sup> The ENP consistently uses the term *democracy*, emphasizing the importance of this common value for the whole neighbourhood policy.

*Migration issues* fall under the area of Justice and Home Affairs. While there are no references in the relevant migration policy documents to democracy, links between immigration policy and development cooperation exist due to the impact of the movement of human capital and the importance of remittances.

*Enlargement policy* is generally seen as the policy area where support for democracy building has been the most successful. Countries seeking membership of the EU must meet a set of criteria including “stable institutions guaranteeing democracy”.<sup>29</sup> The term *democracy* is used throughout the policy documents related to enlargement.<sup>30</sup>

## Box 12: Conditions for EU Accession – the Copenhagen Criteria

In 1993, the Copenhagen European Council established the criteria for membership of the EU. A new member state must meet certain political and eco-

nomic criteria including “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities”.<sup>31</sup>

Many of the different policy documents reviewed point to the need to strengthen coherence with respect to support for democracy building between different policy areas and between EU institutions.

<sup>26</sup> Compare Article 133 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, 2006, to for example Article 177:2 on Development Policy in the same Treaty. See also [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/index_en.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Article 6, Treaty on European Union, 2006. See also Article 301, Treaty on European Union, 2006

<sup>28</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm)

<sup>29</sup> Conclusions of the Presidency, European Council in Copenhagen, 1993

<sup>30</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/world/what/enlargement/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/what/enlargement/index_en.htm)

<sup>31</sup> Conclusions of the Presidency, European Council in Copenhagen, 1993

## Box 13: European Regional Development Fund

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was set up by the European Community in 1975 to promote regional development and to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions. The legal base is Regulation 1080/2006.

### Partnership

Many EU policy documents stress the importance of *partnership*. Strategy documents and work programmes exist for the EU's cooperation with each partner region. Although EU Treaties establish the same fundamental principles for all EU external action, the region-specific documents vary in language, scope and emphasis.

*Africa-EU relations* are guided by the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership which defines the long-term policy orientations between Africa and the EU. It identifies eight thematic partnerships, including one on Democratic Governance and Human Rights. The Partnership on Democratic Governance and Human Rights enables a comprehensive "continent-to-continent dialogue and cooperation" on democratic principles, the fight against corruption, and the accountable management of public funds.

*EU-Arab world cooperation* is encapsulated in EU cooperation with the Mediterranean region, as formulated and agreed in the Barcelona and Euro-Med declarations.<sup>33</sup> These are primarily concerned with security and trade relations but also emphasize political dialogue and the importance of democracy. Democracy is referred to in a vague manner, implying that the EU takes a more pragmatic approach to democracy in its cooperation with this region.

The *EU-Latin America strategy* is comprehensive. This document acknowledges that most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have established democracies. The strategy therefore goes deeper into the needs and possibilities of the region, using the concept *democratic governance*. Democracy is defined in broader terms here than in the other regional strategies, linking institution-focused support to democracy building with aspects of participation and democracy as a means to deliver also on social, economic and cultural rights, social cohesion and equality issues.<sup>35</sup>

**"The Parties reaffirm that democratisation, development and the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Democratic principles are universally recognised principles underpinning the organisation of the State to ensure the legitimacy of its authority, the legality of its actions reflected in its constitutional, legislative and regulatory system, and the existence of participatory mechanisms. On the basis of universally recognised principles, each country develops its democratic culture."**<sup>32</sup>

**"The parties agree to develop the rule of law and democracy in their political systems while recognizing in this framework the right of each of them to choose and freely develop its own political, socio-cultural, economic and judicial system."**<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Article 9(2), Cotonou Agreement, 2000

<sup>33</sup> Communication from The European Commission: Barcelona Process – Union for the Mediterranean, 1995; Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, 2008

<sup>34</sup> Communication from The European Commission: Barcelona Process – Union for the Mediterranean, 1995

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, Latin America: Regional Programming document 2007-2013, 2007

**“In Latin America democratic governance and social cohesion are closely connected: exclusion, poverty, limited access to education and health-care and a lack of prospects restrict the exercise of civic and political rights.”<sup>36</sup>**

*EU-Asia cooperation* defines democracy, human rights and good governance as objectives, to be supported by the EU in all its relations with Asia. However, while encouraging dialogue and partnership, the strategy documents are vague on which actions are being taken.

The Europe and Asia Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership<sup>37</sup> provides that in order for the EU to increase its political and economic presence in the Asian region, the EU should contribute to the spreading of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. In line with this, the EU shall strengthen bilateral and multilateral dialogue with Asian partners, encourage civil society dialogue, and ensure that human rights and governance issues are mainstreamed in cooperation activities.

The new EU partnership with Southeast Asia<sup>38</sup> provides that the EU shall build constructive partnerships with ASEAN and national governments in Southeast Asia based on dialogue. New bilateral agreements with countries of the region should all contain an ‘essential element’ clause referring to human rights. Moreover, recognizing that good governance is crucial for a stable and prosperous society, the EU’s development cooperation efforts put sufficient emphasis on strengthening institutional and regulatory frameworks and fighting corruption in Southeast Asia.

**“The situation in several parts of the region in terms of governance, human rights, democracy and the rule of law is of concern, and will be addressed through the EIDHR.”<sup>39</sup>**

*EU relations with Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP)* are further guided by the Cotonou Agreement,<sup>40</sup> aiming at promoting development of the ACP countries. The Cotonou Agreement also aims at “promoting a stable and democratic political environment”. It is explicitly based on the principles of the equality of partners, participation of both government and non-government actors, dialogue and the fulfillment of mutual obligations, differentiation and regionalization. The Agreement identifies good governance as essential, the violation of which may lead to the partial or complete suspension of development cooperation.<sup>41</sup>

**“I think the European Union should play the role of a leader in the promotion of democracy outside of Europe, because EU is a particularly credible role model.”**

**Ms Saumura Tioulong,  
Member of Parliament, Cambodia**

## **Perceptions from the partner regions**

Although the five partner regions display fundamental differences – and despite the fact that they all pursue very different relations with the EU – they hold a remarkable number of views in common.

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, A stronger partnership between The European Union and Latin America, 2005, p.8

<sup>37</sup> Communication from the Commission, Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships, 2001

<sup>38</sup> Communication from the Commission, A New Partnership with Southeast Asia, 2003

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, Regional Programming for Asia: Strategy Document 2007-2013, 2007

<sup>40</sup> Cotonou Agreement, 2000

<sup>41</sup> Article 9, Cotonou Agreement, 2000

All five regions express the view that the EU, as a political actor, is an attractive partner in democracy building. At the same time, it must be pointed out that the EU is largely perceived as a trade partner and an economic actor.

### **Interest in the EU's internal experiences**

The EU is recognized by its partners as a successful model of economic development and democracy building. The EU's history in economic and political regional integration is seen as an inspiration to other regions seeking to achieve similar levels of integration. The success of the EU in building peaceful cooperation structures and deepening integration was a recurrent theme in discussions, as well as EU experiences in managing diversity. Across all regions, there is an expressed interest in learning more from the EU's experiences, especially in democracy building.

The EU is seen to have managed to combine democratic politics with social stability and economic dynamism. EU member states are stable and provide the basic needs of human security, human dignity and equal opportunities for citizens, including progress on gender equality. Living standards have improved dramatically in EU member states.

Europe has moved successfully from being a continent ravaged by war to becoming a region that resolves conflict peacefully. Military power has given way to the dominance of *civilian rule* – rule built on value-based social structures, the rule of law and inclusive political systems.

The EU is also an example of successful regional integration. By creating working structures and mechanisms for regional cooperation the EU has improved its position in global negotiations. Common challenges in the region are met more efficiently through common discussion and common solutions. Although the EU is sometimes accused of being overly bureaucratic or its decisions based on the “lowest common denominator”, it is nevertheless viewed as an impressive and functional mechanism for inter-state cooperation.

### **Narrow understanding of democracy**

Across all regions there is a strong emphasis on *social cohesion, inequality, social instability/insecurity* as well as the *inability of governments to deliver*. All consultations stressed the link between a democratic system and visible changes in societies. Generally, partners consider that the EU applies a narrow understanding of democracy, failing to link procedural democracy to the delivery aspects of democracy.

**“EU stands for equality in terms of access and opportunity.”**

**Ambassador Muhammad Zamir,  
former Permanent Representative of Bangladesh  
to the European Communities**

**“Europe can show us in Asia how they managed to develop their community, how they developed a more caring social welfare system, how they managed to lift everybody up from poverty where some of the European countries also suffered before, by giving us the best practices and not just by preaching.”**

**Dr Dewi Fortuna Anwar,  
Deputy Chairman for Social Sciences and  
Humanities, Indonesian Institute of Sciences**

**“The experience of EU in overcoming threats to democracy and achieving prosperity for the people is something I think EU should spread the word about; not just the economic integration but overcoming involvement of the military, overcoming the problems of poverty and discussing the redistribution of the fruits of national and regional progress, tolerance of religious minorities and upholding the rule of law.”**

**Ambassador Rodolfo Severino,  
former Secretary-General of ASEAN**

**“EU cannot play a direct role – these are proud countries and do not like an intrusive approach of dictating what is to be done – but must have a low-key, low profile constructive approach, for example by sharing best practices.”**

**Ambassador A. N. Ram,  
former Ambassador of India to the EU**

**“Perhaps the biggest challenge which we are faced with today is how to make democracy an every-day business of the people, not just an event that occurs intermittently once every four years.”**

**Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, Executive Director, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and member of the International IDEA Board of Advisers**

**“A fixation on natural electoral practices, without considerations of broader democratic practices in the economy and social sphere, creates skepticism. There is much in the African experience that suggests that a broader view of democracy building that encompasses social dynamics is not only necessary, but essential for any of the policy perspectives that we are seeking to establish.”**

**H.E. Sir Ketumile Masire, former President of Botswana**

**“Protecting human rights is not democracy. Human rights are essential for democracy and there are no contradictions between them. Human rights protection, however, is not the priority area in terms of democracy building.”**

**Professor S.D. Muni Senior Visiting Scholar, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore**

**“There is a serious need for the EU to reconsider its present approach to the issue of promoting democracy in the Arab World. There are structural problems reflected in a conflict between the main objectives of many members of the EU: security and trade on the one hand and the promotion of democracy on the other.”**

**Dr Kheir el-Din Haseeb, Director-General, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Lebanon**

There is also some inconsistency in EU terminology. The term *democracy* is used in the Neighbourhood Policy or in the CFSP to refer primarily to human rights and the procedural aspects of democratic practice. In other policy areas the term *democracy* is absent, or appears in the form of an adjective. Development cooperation emphasizes the concept of *good governance* which it links to democracy.

However, the EU appears to have separated the procedural and institutional aspects of democracy from what it can deliver. The EU's partners perceive the EU to focus disproportionately on civil society, elections and human rights activities. Partners also reiterate that democracy is more than elections and must not simply be equated with human rights but must also deliver in a broader sense.

### ***EU long-term commitments***

The EU is often described as a credible partner which prefers to use soft power in international relations, rather than hard power or military might. This is considered to be a positive feature from a developmental perspective. The EU should consider putting a higher value on its soft power approach rather than focusing too much on the difficulty it often encounters in exercising hard power.

On a more negative note, partners perceive the EU to apply double standards and be unable to transform its policies into action. EU support for democracy building is sometimes viewed as a paper commitment only. In particular, the EU's commitment to stand by democracy even in the face of *realpolitik* is questioned: the EU is accused of allowing economic and security interests to override long-term support for democracy building. At times, this creates a credibility gap.

The discrepancy between EU policies and actions is a particularly striking perception in the Arab world. The 2006 elections in the Palestinian Territories are frequently cited as an example of the EU failing to stand by its commitment to democracy as it was seen not to accept the outcome of an election which was widely recognized as free and fair. Another example is how the EU Return Directive in migration policy is perceived to have affected Latin American development adversely. Both examples are seen to seriously affect the EU's credibility.

The EU does not come across with a coherent message in the area of democracy building. It is seen to send inconsistent

messages across the partner regions and countries, demonstrating different levels of commitment and setting different standards in different cases. This is considered to be an impediment to effective cooperation.

There is also a perceived incoherence and inconsistency between the Common Foreign and Security Policy and development cooperation. These policy areas move along different timelines, work according to divergent logics under separate pillars and legal provisions, and using different sets of tools. As long as these two policy areas operate in isolation, the lack of coherence is not problematic. When they cross paths however – as is regularly the case with support for democracy building – this produces unnecessary tension and inconsistency in how the EU operates.

The EU's policy documents are clear in their commitment to coherence and the mainstreaming of democracy. The need for consistency is widely recognized. In spite of this, EU partners stress the lack of mainstreaming and consistency as one of the main challenges in their relationship with the EU, and that the EU does not recognize and consider the effects that its actions may have on democracy building in the partner regions. Discrepancy in the messages and the effects of e.g. migration policy, agricultural policy or trade/tariffs as compared to the ambitions of the EU's foreign and security policy and development cooperation was identified, especially by the partners in Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, mainstreaming efforts seem not to include all relevant EU policy areas.

Another source of scepticism is the observation by many of the EU's partners that sometimes the priorities of a few individual member states guide EU priorities; in which case the EU is perceived to be a vehicle for pursuing narrow national interests. National cooperation programmes are not necessarily carried out in concert with EU support for democracy building. Sometimes there is even perceived competition between individual member states and EU agendas. This perception is however balanced with recognition by partners that there are also occasions where the different experiences and approaches of individual EU member states are an asset and can be useful for comparative purposes.

Partners emphasize the need for a long-term approach. Support for democracy building today is seen as too short-term, while all agree that democracy building should be a long-term endeavour.

### **Partnership**

The partners affirm outright that democracy must be built from within. They

**“EU really has not developed a common agenda on democracy.”**

**Professor Rehman Sobhan,  
Founder and Executive Chairman,  
Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh**

**“If Europe does not align its migration policy with its trade policy, with its democracy promotion policy, we are in serious trouble. If the Europe we perceive is a Europe that turns back immigrants, that imposes tariffs in commerce and at the same time a Europe that asks how they can help us – then there is a very important contradiction. On the contrary, the type of relation that we need is one based on mutual respect and common interest.”**

**Dr Daniel Zovatto,  
Regional Director for Latin America, International IDEA**

**“EU engages, disengages, connects, and then disconnects, so its efforts become very sporadic and very disjointed. At the end of the day it is all fragmented and nothing hangs together as a big picture. I think the EU needs to have a complete vision of where it wants Africa to be and then begin to channel its assistance towards this broader vision.”**

**Dr Annie Chikwanha,  
Member of the International IDEA Board of Advisers  
and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Security  
Studies in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

condemn democracy promotion as an approach which essentially embodies one-way communication. Democracy promotion is seen to be arrogant, based on a belief that European values can be exported to other regions.

**“It is necessary that we take a broader view of our neighbors and appreciate that there is much that we can learn and much greater value can be derived from mutually respectful relationships.”**

H.E. Sir Ketumile Masire, former President of Botswana

**“EU countries are models of democracy and democracy is deep rooted in their culture and the political system. But at the same time, the problems of EU and the problems of the developing world are different; therefore local emphasis, local focus and local variation are also necessary.”**

Dr S.Y. Quraishi, Election Commissioner, India

**“There should be a change in attitude. If we say there is an equal partnership then I say we are lying to ourselves – everyone knows that it is not. Sometimes our voices are not taken note of, our concerns are not registered. Once we acknowledge that, we can work from that basis and develop a real partnership. Let us treat each other with respect, let us acknowledge each other, let us jointly work towards our common objectives, and let us listen to each other.”**

Mr Andrew Bradley,  
Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and  
Human Development of the ACP Secretariat  
in Brussels, Belgium

The perception is that *democracy promotion*, understood to a large extent to be a way of preaching, still dominates the EU’s repertoire. EU partners have an interest in cooperating with the EU on democracy and therefore emphasize that alternative approaches built on *dialogue* must be developed.

The desire for *real partnership* is a recurring theme across the regions. Partners stress the need for processes in which both parties participate as equals and where there is a mutual exchange of ideas, priorities and information. The EU is seen as heading in the right direction in this regard, but there is still a long way to go. Too often initiatives relating to a region or a country are effectively developed in Brussels and then presented to, rather than discussed with, the region or country in question.

There are concerns about exactly how much space for participation in dialogue and negotiation is left open for the partners. Partners often cite internal EU mechanisms which ensure that the 27 member states spend most of the time in designing and deciding on programmes. Decisions finally emerging from such wrangling leave little room for partners to actually have a say and have ownership: they come in too late in the process.

Partners emphasize the absence of consultative mechanisms between the EU and regional partners in the development of common strategies and cooperation agendas in the area of democracy building. This is an area where there is much unused potential.

Finally, there are strong feelings that the attitudes of some EU representatives show a lack of respect for cooperation partners. There are not infrequent claims that EU representatives “talk down” to their partners, thereby undermining the very foundations of partnership.

## **Gap analysis: mirroring perceptions and intentions**

Comparing the EU’s intentions with partner perceptions revealed various gaps. The EU has an interest in being a global actor in democracy building, a view which was endorsed in the consultations with partners. This provides common ground for continued discussion between the EU and its partners on *what* this engagement should entail and *how* it should be further developed.



Although the EU sees itself as both a political and an economic actor, some partners still see the EU primarily as a trade bloc – and thereby less relevant in democracy building. The EU, therefore, does not fully come across as the political actor it aspires to be.

### ***Interest in the EU's own experiences***

European success stories are a recurring theme across the other regions. Although all regions need to adapt solutions to the regional and local context, there is a widespread interest in accessing more information on the EU's own experience on democracy and development. There is a clear demand from all regions for the EU to share its experience and knowledge in an open and honest manner – offering information as inspiration, not preaching.

The significant interest of partners in information sharing on the EU's experience is not mentioned by the EU itself in any of its policies. EU internal experiences within a broad range of areas are an under-utilized resource that could be further exploited.

### ***A narrow or a broad understanding of democracy***

The EU applies a narrow understanding of democracy: it does not adequately link its support for democracy building to the delivery aspects of democracy. There is scope for the EU to develop this understanding of democracy to facilitate greater synergies between what its current policies term “democracy” and the activities defined as “good governance”.

European countries are themselves built on an understanding of democracy as something more than elections and the provision of a minimum of political or civil rights. All EU member states have systems and instruments to ensure that their citizens have the means and resources for meeting their basic needs. It could be argued that it would therefore be easy for the EU to embrace the broad understanding of democracy also in its external relations. This is an area of unexploited political credibility.

### ***Different understandings of the EU's long-term commitment to democracy***

Support for democracy building must not be seen to be the “first to go” when priorities conflict. To prioritize short-term stability concerns over long-term partnership- and democracy building will not solve security issues; most likely it will merely postpone them. It must be recognized that democracy building is part of the solution and not a hindrance to objectives such as trade and security. In the long run, supporting

**“When I look at the EU, I see a world power that does not know how powerful it is. I look at a world power that has a problem of identity. There is a problem in the communication of what the EU is.”**

**Dr Marta Lagos, Executive Director,  
Latinobarómetro, Chile**

**“For us, it is amazing to see that the whole of Europe is at peace. Maybe you in Europe take it so much for granted that you don't even realize that for us, this is a miracle.”**

**Ms Saumura Tioulong,  
Member of Parliament, Cambodia**

**“I think we are at a stage where we have to go from electing democratically to governing democratically. We should go beyond formal elections and fight corruption, ensure the separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, gender equity and freedom of expression.”**

**Dr Irene Klinger, Director,  
Department of International Affairs,  
Secretariat for External Relations,  
Organization of American States (OAS)**

**“I want to see that EU revisits different aspects of our relationship; because you are on top of the strongest candidates for us, the closest to us and therefore the one who should best understand us. But we and you need to change. We should be able to remove from our heads that you have a hidden agenda; and you should remove from your heads that you know the recipe for what needs to be done.”**

**Ambassador Raouf Saad,  
Senior Assistant to the Minister  
of Foreign Affairs of Egypt**

democracy building as a foundation for development, trade and security, is the most sustainable and effective approach.

At present, the EU is not able to sustain its long-term democracy objectives in its external action. Coherence and consistency are not always achieved between policy areas at the EU level. Democracy is not fully covered within all relevant policy areas affecting partners. Member states and EU institutions sometimes come across with different messages.

These issues are of vital importance because of the negative effects they have on the EU’s *credibility* as an actor – credibility which is a cornerstone for building partnerships.

### ***Different understandings of the EU’s partnership approach***

*Partnership* and the role of partners – the need to build inclusive and mutual relationships – are frequently emphasized in EU policies and strategies. Partners themselves appreciate this stance. Yet there are also perceptions that the EU is still playing too dominant a role in these so-called cooperative relations.

In this regard, the recurrent use of the term “promotion” in EU language is not seen as helpful as it does not indicate dialogue. If the EU truly believes that democracy is built from within, it must consider sometimes taking a step back and offer constructive advice in the form of options and information. The EU is more likely to be successful in reaching its ambitious objectives by adopting a more humble approach, while at the same time being prepared to act more forcefully when fundamental values are abused.

The understanding of real partnerships differs between the EU and its partners. However, there is unexploited potential to further develop the partnership approach.

The gaps identified here are most probably explained by a combination of miscommunication and a difficulty with translating principles into real action. Policy documents from different EU sources which say different things are a source of confusion. Overall, the EU’s policies are well developed and already contain the foundations and legal framework for a forward-oriented approach and commitment to democracy. The EU might need to bring these policies together on a common platform to support democracy-building; and to complement the policies with mechanisms to implement commitments in practice.

**“Democracy must be built from bottom to top and not from top to bottom.”**

**Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki,  
Chief Executive Officer of the NEPAD Secretariat  
and former Prime Minister of Niger**



# Part III

# A way forward

Across the various regions, gaps were identified between EU intentions and partner perceptions. The analysis also provided options for addressing these gaps and to inform the ongoing debate about EU support for democracy building. Four broad areas for policy development emerged: *tap the EU's internal experiences to inform external action, apply a broad understanding of democracy, stand by long-term commitments, and move towards genuine partnerships.*

## Tap the EU's internal experiences to inform external action

*The EU should formulate its own narrative on democracy building based on the individual experiences of its member states and its experience of becoming a community as a whole. These experiences relate to e.g. gender equality, fiscal systems, anti-corruption efforts, minority protection and management of diversity, judicial reform, and democratic control of armed forces. They also relate to regional integration. The EU should make these experiences available through accessible communications tools, thereby making them global public goods.*

Partners see the EU's own experiences as an asset that could be capitalized on, yet the EU makes little use of it. Although European experiences cannot simply be applied elsewhere, partners expressed a strong interest to learn from them.

*The EU should formulate its narrative.* Sharing information – not as a means of preaching but as a genuine offer to interested partners – will require a concerted effort by the EU to assemble and present its own experiences. This process would provide a much needed platform for EU policymakers to develop a consistent and coherent approach to democracy building. It will also force the EU to think about how to communicate in a clear and consistent way with partners.

*The EU should capitalize on its own internal experiences both from individual member states and the Community as whole.* It would be advantageous to exploit both the EU common experiences and the 27 different stories of EU member states. The EU has

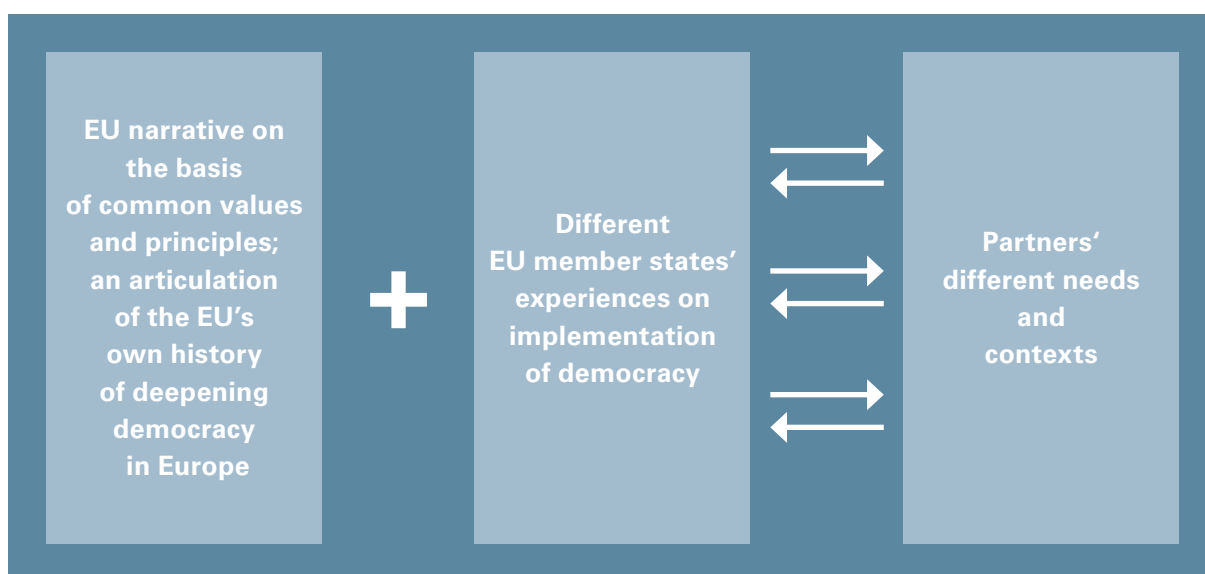
**“The European Union is our inspiration – not quite our model because of the differences among us – but an inspiration.”**

**Dr Surin Pitsuwan,  
Secretary-General of ASEAN**

**“Latin America can learn from the European experience of transitional processes... nations that have lived under former communist regimes or divided nations like the former Yugoslavian Republic, have experience of sharing diversity and cultures, and even of sharing democratic attitudes.”**

**Dr Lourdes Flores Nano,**  
President of Alianza Electoral Unidad Nacional and member of the International IDEA Board of Advisers

a common commitment to democracy as an objective but individual EU member states have implemented and translated the principles of democracy into processes and institutions in different ways. This represents a considerable resource to tap into from which the EU can formulate a range of policy options for democracy building. The material could be presented in the form of searchable databases or electronic libraries available for others to access. The EU should explore the best means available to facilitate access to its diverse experiences of democracy building as global public goods.



A number of specific areas were identified where the EU could usefully contribute its own experience: the relationship between the citizen and the state, accountability and responsiveness issues. There is also a demand for the EU to share its experience in areas of fiscal systems and how to achieve social cohesion and gender equality; anti-corruption efforts; minority protection; political inclusion; judicial reform and democratic control over the armed forces.

**“There are the varieties of so-called European experiences and models – the Scandinavian model, the UK model, the central European model... the role EU can play depends on which particular nuance in EU model is applicable for the time being for each individual country.”**

**Dr Juwono Sudarsono,**  
Minister of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia

There are also demands for information on regional integration within the EU and what has been learnt at different stages of EU enlargement. The Regional Development Funds and the use of the *Acquis Communautaire*<sup>42</sup> are particularly relevant because they are used respectively to promote home-grown development and provide concrete objectives to be achieved within a set time frame.

<sup>42</sup> The term *acquis communautaire* is used to refer to the total body of EU law accumulated thus far.

*The EU should make these experiences available globally through accessible communications methods. The exchange of information should go both ways. First, by inviting the EU and its partners to contribute and provide information, knowledge and lessons learned. Second, the EU should recognize that there are experiences in partner regions that the EU could learn from and which could help inform policy development. Such basic information sharing can provide a basis for a more constructive international discourse on democracy building. Moreover, it can be achieved in the short term and at little cost but potentially with significant gains for both sides.*

## **Apply a broad understanding of democracy**

*The EU should apply a broad understanding of democracy to its external actions by seeing democracy not only as a procedural affair, but also as a means of meeting the basic needs of citizens. Such an approach would require the Common Foreign and Security Policy to be more closely linked to development cooperation. The EU should make an effort to further align the focus, contents, approach and methodology of both policy areas. For this purpose, the EU could initiate inter-institutional task forces, bringing together experts and practitioners to make use of their different perspectives and develop synergies for more effective support to democracy building. The EU should also further strengthen its support for education as a contribution to long-term democracy building.*

*EU should apply a broad understanding of democracy to its external actions. The EU is seen by the partner regions as a success story, and the major reason is the European ability to combine political freedom with economic and social development for the population at large. EU partners find a paradox in that the EU has a more narrow approach to democracy in its external actions than it has so successfully applied at home.*

Across the regions, many countries face challenges of social cohesion because states are unable to meet the basic needs of citizens. This is often exacerbated by political polarization and disagreement about the “rules of the democratic game” in many countries. A failure to address this problem may lead to discontent with democracy, and in turn with support for democracy building. Economic exclusion can make democracy fragile and even more so if coupled with practices of political exclusion. EU partners understand this as they have presented a strong appeal for the EU to approach democracy

**“We have *something*, that is very important – we don’t have *everything*. We should not be carried away by our own European discourse but instead try to see the big picture.”**

**Prof Poul Nielson, former EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid**

**“EU should do more in terms of *strengthening institutional stability* and *work on the poverty problems*. Social cohesion should be linked very much with strengthening of democratic institutions.”**

**Dr José Miguel Insulza,  
Secretary-General of the Organization  
of American States**

**“In Thai we use the word *eatable democracy*, meaning that we have to make democracy work for the poor to make them have a better life, better healthcare, better education... that is eatable democracy.”**

**Dr Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee,  
Associate Professor, Department of Government,  
Chulalongkorn University, Thailand**

**“If you don’t have the basic social and economic rights seen to, going to vote seems like a luxury one cannot afford. The key message to EU should be the need to contribute to a better life for individuals, by empowering them economically and politically.”**

**Ms Anissa Hassouna,  
Board Member and Treasurer of  
the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, Egypt**

and development in a connected fashion – dealing with both democracy and governance issues. A central message is that democracy must deliver and the EU should affirm its intention to work with the partners on this assumption.

**“Having been Minister for both development cooperation and foreign affairs, I must admit that bringing these policy areas together might at times seem like a huge challenge. It is however, very important to continue this ambition, since reality is about the whole, not the parts.”**

**Ms Lena Hjelm-Wallén,  
Chairperson of the International IDEA  
Board of Advisers, Sweden**

**“The uneducated and unemployed youth is the political dent in Africa. If we do not intervene, democracy will be in peril.”**

**Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki,  
Chief Executive Officer of NEPAD,  
Former Prime Minister of Niger**

**“The fundamental foundation of a democracy is the people; the level of education is key to the political culture of the population. Political culture is whether people accept dictatorship, accept democratic principles. I think the European Union can play a great role in shaping this political culture through strengthening educational development.”**

**Mr Virak Ou,  
President of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights,  
General Secretary of the Alliance for  
Freedom of Expression**

*The EU foreign and security policy and development cooperation need to be more closely interlinked. The EU should make an effort to further align the focus, contents, approach and methodology of both policy areas.* The two policy areas most actively addressing democracy building are development cooperation and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. These policy areas work under different pillars, logics, time frames and with different tools. The potential of the EU could be better realized by combining the efforts of these policy areas, thereby developing synergies. If the speed and decisiveness of the foreign and security policy could be complemented with the long-term engagement and partnership approach of development cooperation – with its emphasis on local context and local ownership – and if the technical knowledge of development cooperation could be combined with the political approach of foreign and security policy, the EU’s democracy building efforts would become more effective.

*The EU could initiate inter-institutional task forces.* To this end, the EU could benefit from initiating joint task forces, where appropriate, to facilitate cross-pillar and inter-institutional discussion and action on democracy issues. By bringing together foreign and security policy and development policy experts and practitioners to make use of their different perspectives, synergies can be developed for a more effective approach to democracy building. Establishing democracy in its own right and for the long-term as a policy area for the EU is an option to be considered.

*The EU should further strengthen and develop its education support as means of supporting long-term democracy building.* Bringing in the delivery aspects of democracy means considering ways to link support to democracy building with development of e.g. education, health care and infrastructure. A major challenge to the building of sustainable democracy

identified in the consultations with the various regions is the need to fix inadequate or underdeveloped education systems. This makes it clear that support for democracy building should include support for the development of education systems.

## **Stand by long-term commitments**

*Credibility and legitimacy are prerequisites for maintaining support for democracy building. The EU should signal its commitments and its limitations in a clear and transparent dialogue*



*with partners, in order to confirm long-term objectives and to manage partners' expectations. The EU should align its policies beyond foreign and security policy and development cooperation, recognizing and considering the effects of policies such as trade and migration on the sustainability of democracy in partner regions. The EU should use the advantage of being 27 different member states to strengthen the common agenda, while discouraging discrepancies between the EU member states' actions and the agreed EU agenda in cases where these affect democracy building adversely.*

Among the more negative perceptions by the EU's partners, and perhaps one of the more sensitive to address, is the accusation of double standards and hidden agendas. While the partners appreciate that foreign policy implies the making of hard choices and that total consistency is not always achievable, perceptions of hidden agendas and applying double standards affects EU credibility and leverage. Within the highly politicized area of democracy building it is especially important to maintain credibility.

*The EU should signal its commitments and its limitations to its partners in a clear and transparent way to confirm the long-term objectives and to manage partners' expectations.* The partners recommend that the EU should communicate its purposes and objectives clearly as the means of coping with competing objectives without losing trust and credibility. On occasions where democracy or human rights give way to other objectives, partners would like this to be expressed up front. The EU should also be *seen to deliver* on the priorities set and the actions promised because partners will assess the EU's credibility based on actual experience. The EU should signal its commitment to the values and norms not only in policy preambles but also in its actions. This means standing up for democracy also when short-term security objectives seem to make exceptions acceptable. A policy dealing with how to react to "unwanted" outcomes of democratic elections should be developed to avoid a repetition of the response to the elections in Palestine in 2006. Finally, the EU should also be transparent about the institutional complexity and competing agendas that sometimes prevent a coherent approach.

The EU should align its policies beyond foreign and security policy and development cooperation, recognizing and considering the effects of policies such as trade and migration on democracy building in other regions. There is a strong insistence by partners, as well as recognition by the EU itself, that issues such as migration, trade and security are important to democracy building. Still, the partners observe that this recognition is not mirrored by action. The EU should conduct a thorough review of opportunities for mainstreaming democracy into migration, neighbourhood, trade and security policy. A broad understanding of democracy should be applied to each stage of policy development: from setting objectives, to designing programmes, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and when assessing proposals for financial contributions.

The EU should use the advantage of being 27 different member states to strengthen the common agenda, while discouraging discrepancies between the EU member states actions and the agreed EU agenda in cases where these affect democracy building

**"We need you to show that you are really willing to support our work on a long-term basis. By all means, five years for many of the Southeast countries only means one cycle of the government, and one election. EU's commitment to democracy building should really go beyond five years."**

**Dr Hana Satrijo,  
Director for Gender and Women's Participation,  
Indonesia, The Asia Foundation**

adversely. The experiences of the 27 member states can be an asset because they provide multiple sources of information. However, on occasion, the agendas run by individual member states can contradict the EU's jointly agreed position.

While there are many situations in which a division of labour between the member states can be a useful approach, member states should also be mindful not to let their individual priorities overtake the agreed EU agenda. Peer pressure could be exercised to discourage behaviour that adversely affects the commonly agreed approach to democracy building.

**“EU should be playing the role of a catalyst, not the role of a teacher.”**

**Ambassador Hesham Youssef,  
Chef de Cabinet for Amre Moussa,  
Secretary-General of the League of Arab States**

## **Move towards genuine partnerships**

*Peer dialogue is a core element of partnerships. The EU should undertake a review of its policies, procedures and practices in order to strengthen its dialogue mechanisms. It should ensure that dialogue with partners is incorporated from an early stage and throughout every programme cycle. Genuine partnerships should be pursued at several levels and with a broad range of actors. Dialogue should always be kept open, not least in cases*

*where the EU and its partners disagree on fundamentals. The EU should seek mutual benefits for all partners and continue to develop inter-regional partnerships where appropriate and feasible. People-to-people exchange programmes should be promoted. These could be for parliamentarians, civil servants, civil society actors and students.*

**“EU needs the humility to learn, to listen, to engage – even if it might be extremely difficult to engage as equals and to engage in the spirit of partnership.”**

**Professor Adebayo Olukoshi,  
Executive Director, Council for the Development  
of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and  
member of the International IDEA Board of Advisers**

*The EU should undertake a review of its policies and procedures to strengthen its dialogue mechanisms. The EU is perceived sometimes to project its own priorities on its partners with little willingness to listen. However, the EU's external actions will only be successful and sustainable by taking into account the needs and perspectives of neighbours and partners. For this reason democracy building should be largely designed in consultation with partners.*

The EU should change the one-sided language often used in its policies and strategies, shifting from *democracy promotion* to dialogue-based support for democracy building. A starting point for such dialogue is already found in the Cotonou Agreement,<sup>43</sup> which could be used as an inspiration for other agreements and which needs to be further implemented and applied in the interaction with the ACP countries. “Dialogue” as a concept does not preclude addressing difficult issues in a frank way but presupposes an exchange between two equal partners and is therefore more likely to create openness to critical reflection and change. The dialogue approach should entail more two-way exchanges, including discussions on different models and experiences of democracy. Preaching and promotion practices should be weeded out of policies, procedures and internal management culture.

*The EU should ensure that dialogue with partners is incorporated from an early stage and at each stage of the programme cycle. For this to occur, increased emphasis should be placed*

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<sup>43</sup> Cotonou Agreement, Article 8

on engaging partners in all relevant work processes. The partners should be an integral part of the full process, involving them at the early stages of designing programmes and activities right through to evaluation and dialogue on lessons learnt for future cooperation. By engaging the partners early, programmes and strategies can more easily be adapted to the context-specific needs.

*Genuine partnerships should be pursued at several levels and with a broad range of actors.* While reinforcing dialogue with the executive branches of government on the one hand and including civil society on the other, the critical role of the political establishment – political parties, movements, legislatures – needs considerably more attention in EU democracy building efforts.

*Dialogue should always be kept open, not least in cases where the EU and its partners disagree on fundamentals.* In some countries, partnership and a direct exchange about democracy might not be possible. In such situations, the regional organizations provide a platform to discuss difficult issues. A space for dialogue should always be kept open, if at all possible. Democracy should be kept on the long-term agenda and pushed with different fervour at different times, complemented with indirect support for democracy building. Engaging in discussions on the partner's main priorities gives the EU leverage and an entry point for pushing its own priorities.

*The EU should find avenues for partnerships where there are mutual benefits for all partners and it should continue to develop inter-regional partnerships where appropriate and feasible.* The EU needs to actively look for entry points and “home grown” avenues for deeper cooperation on democracy building. There will be different entry points and windows of opportunity in each region.

In the case of Africa, the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership provides a promising avenue for enhanced partnership between Africa and the EU, based on reciprocity, predictability, equality, and mutual respect. The EU, however, needs to fully recognize and take into consideration the challenges that Africa is facing in formulating, coordinating, and implementing policies. Also, the EU should recognize the important role the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) can play as the building blocks for democracy building and continental integration in Africa and support them accordingly.

In the case of the Arab world, the EU can only be an effective partner when cooperation is undertaken with mutual respect and shared responsibility. Engagement between the EU and the Arab world should be based on a genuine long-term partnership, encompassing multiple stakeholders. To this end, the League of Arab States (LAS) and its work on reform present an avenue for engagement. Inter-regional dialogue and cooperation under the auspices of the LAS are often welcome and useful to individual Arab states.

**“The history between Africa and EU has been one of unequal exchanges. We cannot talk about partnerships if there is no equity.”**

**Professor Sheila Bunwaree,  
Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities,  
University of Mauritius**

**“The process of reform in the Arab world started already, the movement towards reform might be slow and the scope might not be enough, but people do recognize that the reform process has started. The march towards democracy is also moving in the right direction. Yet, we do admit that the road ahead is still long, and the issue is not democracy to suit certain inclinations or to serve specific purposes, but rather a true democracy that contributes in reforming societies and assisting them in the transition to a new phase towards full democracy.”**

**Mr Amre Moussa,  
Secretary-General of the League of Arab States**

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the EU should recognize that a renewed partnership must be based on equality and include and build on coherence between all policy areas, from development cooperation to trade, migration, and security. In this regard, the EU could consider developing, together with Latin America and the Caribbean, the framework for continued substantive political dialogue. Also, the EU should consider scaling up diplomatic efforts with Cuba as part of the regional approach to integration and democracy building.

**“The Caribbean needs to engineer a new partnership with the European Union. Partnership here means a kind of international cooperation where a group of countries identifies common interest, objectives, solutions and then each partner country will undertake responsibilities according to its own economic and political capacities to generate shared benefits.”<sup>44</sup>**

**Dame Billie Miller,  
former Deputy Prime Minister and  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and  
International Business, Barbados**

**“The EU leadership should communicate with South Asian leaders its continued interest in holding dialogue on democratic growth and human rights improvements in South Asia. It should express its desire to promote exchanges of views between European and South Asian policymakers on good practices in these fields and to build a partnership between the EU and South Asia on democracy in development.”**

**Dr Kant K. Bhargava,  
former Secretary-General of SAARC and Fellow at the  
Centre for the Study of Democracy,  
Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada**

In the case of South Asia, EU engagement with SAARC may need to be re-examined in light of the limited progress so far. Specific programmes for strengthening democracy could make EU-SAARC cooperation more meaningful. In particular, the SAARC Social Charter provides such a regional avenue. The EU could also share experiences on the development of a bill of rights/obligations for democracies in South Asia or through a South Asian Democratic Charter.

In the case of Southeast Asia, the EU needs to engage ASEAN member states as well as ASEAN, particularly given the intention enshrined in its Charter “to ensure democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law”. Any relationship in Southeast Asia should take into account differences in each country. The EU may find feasible avenues for engagement with ASEAN to include the blueprints of the ASEAN Political Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, as well as the ASEAN human rights body, which will be established in 2009.

*People-to-people exchange programmes should be promoted. These could be for parliamentarians, civil servants, civil society actors and students. The EU should develop more opportunities for people-to-people exchange: for example through study trips for members of parliament and civil servants; exchange programmes between educational institutions; and cultural exchanges. Mechanisms to facilitate mobility, such as reviewing visa requirements, could be addressed in this regard.*

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<sup>44</sup> Dame Billie Miller quotes from Brookings Institution, *Re-Thinking U.S.-Latin American Relations: A Hemispheric Partnership for a Turbulent World*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2008, p. 7

# A final word

The purpose of this report has been to provide policy recommendations to the European Union. The project is supported by wide and systematic consultations in five different regions in order to elucidate the perceptions of the EU and its role in democracy building world-wide. This purpose has been achieved through the tabling of constructive advice and innovative ideas, brought forward by partners from all these regions. The project not only revealed region-specific challenges and how to deal with them, but also generated common conclusions which can be shared and applied across the globe.

Beyond the basic purpose, the consultation process has also provided the momentum for stronger inter-regional cooperation, aiming at strengthening a shared global agenda for democracy building. The process developed into a peer-review in which difficult matters were discussed and regional challenges and potential solutions were shared. The quality of the proceedings and the level of trust between participants were enhanced by the open-ended nature of questions and an atmosphere of active listening. There was a search for solutions rather than problems, commonalities rather than differences.

This process has the potential to mobilize dialogue on democracy building at the inter-regional level. Dialogue is the key word: a shared global agenda for democracy-building must be built on genuine partnership and trust. It must operate in a transparent manner, inviting others to share their ideas and experiences rather than prescribing solutions. The opportunity for developing such an agenda should not be lost. There are common values to be shared, common goals to be achieved, though the means and methods may be adapted to the specific conditions of each region.

This report is a marked contribution to the dialogue on democracy-building. Its intention is to challenge the EU to look deeper into and draw on its own experiences, as it engages in the global quest for development, security and freedom. The report points to actions which can make the EU a stronger and more efficient partner to support democracy building. By pursuing a true partnership approach, the EU can take leadership with other regional organizations in addressing issues relating to the sharing of power between and among citizens.

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# Part IV

## Regional perceptions and recommendations

# The European Union and challenges to democracy building in Africa

Andrew Bradley

## Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in Africa, and how the present role of the European Union (EU) is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations are presented which aim to address the gap between the EU's intentions and African perceptions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in Africa conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

The evolving relationship between Africa and the EU has reflected changes in the geopolitical environment, the rise of independence movements and the subsequent process of decolonization as well as the end of the Cold War. Since 1990, a renewed purpose and a drive to succeed in democracy building have been evident in Africa and African leaders have understood the link between developing democracy and the local context on which it must be based if it is to be sustainable.

The main challenges to democracy building in Africa must be seen in the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism. These produced administrative and institutional structures that were not conducive to the promotion of sustainable development and democracy building. The colonial powers left many African states with systems of authoritarian values and norms that weakened public administration and the education system – both essential for effective democracy building.

The alleviation of extreme poverty is Africa's biggest challenge. Linked with social and economic underdevelopment – in particular lack of food security, poor education and a lack of affordable and accessible health services – it contributes to the perception that democracy has not improved the livelihood of people in Africa. Democracy alone cannot address the multitude of Africa's challenges, including corruption. A holistic and multi-stakeholder approach is needed to address these challenges and support African democracy building.

The Africa-EU partnership offers considerable scope in this regard. In supporting Africa to become a real partner through the provision of capacity building and institutional infrastructure, the EU can assist with empowering the peoples of Africa, promote sustainable development and alleviate extreme poverty.

## Introduction

“During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”<sup>1</sup>

Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture and geography. From a European perspective, Africa has never been the ‘forgotten continent’ – the concept so often used in contemporary politics to describe the African continent.

The relationship between Africa and the EU has evolved over time, reflecting changes in the geopolitical environment, the rise of independence movements and the subsequent process of decolonialization, as well as the end of the Cold War. These factors had an important impact on the relationship between Africa and Europe, and coincided with the accelerating pace of European integration. Although bilateral relations between individual EU member states and African states had been pursued for many years, the 1957 Treaty of Rome introduced the first ‘formalized’ relationship between Europe and Africa, which led to a series of beneficial and privileged agreements such as the Yaoundé Conventions (1963–1975), the Lomé Conventions (1975–2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000–2020) (Bradley 2003).

**The EU has embedded democracy as one of the cornerstones of its relationship with Africa.**

In recent years, international awareness of the situation in, and the challenges facing, Africa has significantly improved, and it is now widely acknowledged that Africa is an important partner when it comes to dealing with global problems. This growing significance of Africa in international relations and European policy discourse can be related, inter alia, to the potential consequences and risks of state failure, which were exposed by the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001; increased geopolitical and economic interests in Africa; globalization; and the importance for the EU of transnational challenges such as migration and environmental concerns, including climate change (Bradley 2003). As a consequence, Africa has gained in prominence on the EU’s external relations agenda, and has also presented the EU with an opportunity to improve its own capabilities in external relations.

Initially, the Africa-EU relationship, as reflected and manifested in the EU’s relationship with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states,<sup>2</sup> was exclusively

<sup>1</sup> Mandela, Nelson R., Statement from the dock at the opening of the defence case in the Rivonia Trial, Pretoria Supreme Court, 20 April 1964, available at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/rivonia.html>

<sup>2</sup> The ACP group of states consists of 48 sub-Saharan African, 16 Caribbean and 15 Pacific states.

focused on trade. Based on the European Commission Communication of 23 May 1995,<sup>3</sup> the first formal introduction of the principle of democracy in relations with Africa was captured in the Lomé Convention IV bis (1995–2000), which provided the legal instrument for the EU's relationship with the ACP group. In expanding its relationship with the ACP group beyond trade and development cooperation, the EU included political dialogue as one of the pillars of the Cotonou Agreement.<sup>4</sup> Now, the ACP-EU political dialogue was centred on agreed essential elements (democratic principles, the rule of law and respect for human rights) as well as the fundamental principle of good governance, captured in article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. In this way, the EU embedded democracy as one of the cornerstones of its relationship with Africa.

Since 1990, remarkable changes have occurred in Africa's political landscape. This systemic shift had a gradual trajectory, and at the dawn of the 21st century most countries on the continent had met the initial demand of multi-party democracy and embraced the idea of holding free, fair and competitive elections (Priser 2009).

Africa also made advances in finding common principles and values related to democracy building. To this end, the adoption of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Durban, South Africa, in 2002, and the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance,<sup>5</sup> provided the framework for the inclusion of democratization and democracy building in policy frameworks and Declarations issued by successive EU-Africa Summits as well as EU policy and strategic orientations on Africa.

## Context

From a legal and formal perspective, the EU's relationships with Africa are governed through the Cotonou Agreement, for sub-Saharan countries; the Republic of South Africa (RSA)-EU Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA); (European Union Official Journal 1999) the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Association Agreements;<sup>6</sup> and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and ENP Action Plans, for North Africa. These agreements provide the EU with a long-term, albeit fragmented, framework for engagement, dialogue, trade and cooperation with Africa.

The first EU-Africa Summit, held in Cairo in 2000, set in motion a structured political dialogue between Africa and the EU. In 2005, the EU adopted the 'European Consensus' on development, which provided a common framework of objectives, values and principles that EU member states, the European Commission and the European

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Communication of 23 May 1995 on the Inclusion of Respect for Democratic Principles and Human Rights in Agreements between the Community and Third Countries, COM(95)0216-C4-0197/95

<sup>4</sup> European Union, ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000, ACP-EU Courier, Special Issue, Commission, Brussels, 2000

<sup>5</sup> African Union, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, Addis Ababa, 2007

<sup>6</sup> European Union, Barcelona Declaration and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, Brussels, 1995, see [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/external\\_relations/relations\\_with\\_third\\_countries/mediterranean\\_partner\\_countries/r15001\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/relations_with_third_countries/mediterranean_partner_countries/r15001_en.htm)

Parliament support and promote, projecting the EU as a global player and development partner.

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The 2005 EU Strategy for Africa was the first practical example of the implementation of the European Consensus on Development, providing a common, coordinated and coherent EU strategy for relations with the continent. The second EU-Africa Summit, which took place in Lisbon in 2007, endorsed an 'Africa-EU Strategic Partnership' and a related action plan for its implementation. For the first time, the EU had established a formalized, institutional and legal

strategic partnership based on the principles of equality, partnership and ownership, which would guide future cooperation in existing and new areas and arenas, including democratization and democracy building. This would also serve as the overarching framework to guide the EU's engagement and involvement in Africa through the various above-mentioned legal and policy instruments.

### **Challenges for democracy building in Africa**

Democracy building and development are at various stages and different levels in the African states. This makes it difficult to provide a homogeneous description and assessment of the state of democracy and democracy building in Africa.

Democracy building faces similar challenges in Africa to those faced in other regions of the world. Africa's relations with other global actors also have an impact on how democracy building is perceived in the context of the Africa-EU relationship. Africa is a diverse continent, and democracy building and development challenges are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, influenced by both factors unique to Africa and other factors.

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The main challenges to democracy building in Africa must be understood in the context of the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism, which contributed to administrative and institutional structures that were not conducive to the promotion of sustainable development and democracy building. In addition, the colonial powers left many African states with a system of authoritarian values and norms that weakened public administration and the education system – both essential for effective democracy building. Nevertheless, as some African countries have shown, this

past is not an insurmountable impediment to democracy building, and should not be used as an excuse for not moving forward.

Since 1990, a renewed purpose and a drive to succeed in democracy building have been evident in Africa, and African leaders have realized that historical explanations should be used to develop and create a home-grown framework and conducive environment that would allow for sustainable democracy building.

In the four years from 2005 to 2009 there were more than 50 democratic elections in Africa. The rise of democracy in Africa is not solely due to external influences, such as pressure from multilateral institutions and development partners. Africa cannot be

insulated from trends shaping the world, but its democracy movement was not imported from outside – it has its roots in African history. African nations are multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multicultural and multi-religious (Odinga 2008). Democracy cannot have a uniform format in all the 53 African states – it must take different forms in different countries to reflect national variations and other local circumstances. Nonetheless, genuine democracy in Africa should be judged by a number of essential universal characteristics. It is possible to identify a number of endogenous and exogenous factors that influence the success of democracy building in African states.

### **Factors unique to Africa**

A number of factors unique to Africa contribute to the challenges of democracy building on the continent. For example, the population is increasing in most African nations, which contributes to a greater number of jobseekers, some with poor education, entering limited labour markets. Urbanization is taking place at an alarming rate, and is exacerbated by the perceived urban/rural divide which favours urban areas in the utilization of development resources. The lack of sustainable management of the various demographic imperatives, including the non-provision of opportunities for young people and the rural population and limited action to address the socio-economic realities of underdevelopment, lie at the heart of the challenges of supporting democracy building, poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa.

The alleviation of extreme poverty is Africa's biggest challenge. Social and economic underdevelopment, in particular food security, poor education and lack of affordable and accessible health services, contributes to the perception that democracy has not improved the livelihood of people in Africa. The provision and supply of basic needs are still the uppermost preoccupations of many African governments and their people, despite the obvious advantages that democracy building could bring to the promotion of sustainable development. Democracy alone cannot address the multitude of Africa's challenges, most notably corruption. Holistic and multi-stakeholder approaches are not always pursued to address the development challenges of the continent.

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Through the African Union (AU), Africa is in the process of empowering an institutional body that can represent the continent, and articulate its needs, views and positions on important issues with a 'single voice'. Furthermore, the African Union Commission has made advances and could play a similar role for African states to that played by the European Commission in the EU. However, democracy in Africa is still young, and integration on the continent is still in its infancy compared with the EU. In addition to low capacity and institutional deficits, these processes are slow due to the unwillingness of states to cede aspects of national sovereignty to the AU, and a perceived lack of political will to allow for enhanced continental integration, increased coherence in policy formulation, and empowerment of continental and regional organizations and institutions as well as the subsequent exercise of supranational powers. The existence of many overlapping regional integration organizations does not contribute to the establishment of a 'unified and single voice' for Africa, or to enhanced continental integration.

**Democracy building is an inclusive and holistic process that requires the active involvement of all actors, including non-state actors, the diaspora and women.**

Democracy building is an inclusive and holistic process that requires the active involvement of all actors, including non-state actors,<sup>7</sup> the diaspora and women, but in too many African countries the complementary role that they could play in promoting sustainable development and alleviating poverty is either marginalized or not adequately recognized.

Non-state actors, the diaspora and women are indirect vectors for sustainable development and democracy building. Too often, they are seen as opponents to the policies and strategies of the government, and excluded from development processes, including democracy building. This situation impedes effective, inclusive and sustained democracy building, and also prevents the mainstreaming of democratization and democracy building in development policies and strategies (Mohamoud 2009).

Democratization and democracy building are still too often seen in many African states as just elections and electoral processes. A deepened understanding of democratization and democracy building by the people of Africa is not being promoted through education, and this prevents an acceleration of democracy building and sustainable development in many African states.

Education offers the potential to develop in the citizens of African countries a better understanding of democratization and democracy building and the likely impact on poverty alleviation and the promotion of sustainable development.

**People need to know that they have the right and duty to hold their governments accountable in order to contribute towards the establishment of effective democracies in Africa.**

People need to know that they have the right and duty to hold their governments accountable in order to contribute to the establishment of effective democracies in Africa. A deficit of people's power to hold leaders accountable, weak and fractured opposition parties and effective one-party states in some African states impede democracy building.

### ***Other factors***

In addition, a number of other factors contribute to the challenges of democracy building in Africa. Recent global crises in the financial system, food security and the energy sectors pose potential threats to democracy and democracy building. These events could lead to discontent and political instability in African states, even though it is commonly understood that African states are victims rather than perpetrators of these crises. These crises have significant implications for democracy and the democracy building efforts of the EU and other actors, given the likely future resource constraints. African states are, and will continue to be, challenged to manage economies in distress, and many will face new risks to democracy and the stability of fragile states (Lewis 2009).

The economic and financial crises will inevitably lead to a reduction in development assistance from the developed world, but the global nature of the crises makes it imperative to maintain support for political reform in and the democratic development of African states. Furthermore, in the present unstable global economic and financial

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<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, non-state actors are understood, in line with the Cotonou Agreement, to include the private sector, economic and social partners, including trade union organizations, and civil society.



climate, elections might also become a vehicle for competition over resources and conflict among groups and factions, which could further impede democratic gains and support for democracy building.

As noted above, the dialogue on democratization and democracy building between Africa and the EU is governed, inter alia, by the Cotonou Agreement, NEPAD and the APRM, the RSA-EU TDCA, the EMP Partnership and Association Agreements, the ENP and ENP Action Plans, and the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and its related Action Plan. A number of international instruments, other bilateral agreements and conventions related to democratization and democracy building are also adhered to by African states. Africa has limited capacities and also institutional deficits for promoting democracy building in accordance with the principles, objectives and requirements of these agreements. Global actors need to understand this and promote coherence in agreements to avoid 'agreement overload'.

In the development of a continental strategy for Africa, the EU has to be conscious that a 'one-size fits all' approach to democratization and democracy building will not produce the expected results. Africa is diverse, and democracy building should be seen in the context of the continent's history and culture. The absence of a broadly and jointly defined definition of democracy, taking into account the context of country and regional distinctiveness, and the social and economic realities, does not support the expected diversified and appropriate approach, built on respect and true and real partnerships. There is a lack of flexibility and adaptation by the EU – key elements of a balanced and appropriate attitude that would allow for the joint development of strategies, policies and actions. The challenge is to find the right balance between the principles of democratization and democracy building that the EU subscribes to and those which are supported by African states.

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The EU should not see itself as the only partner to promote democracy building in Africa, but instead seek coordination and coherence with other actors. Africa has numerous global partners and the lack of established alliances with the EU as well as the promotion of cooperation with other global partners and actors could impede democracy building. Although it is the biggest donor of development assistance in the world, the EU's approach to democratization and democracy building in its relationship with Africa does not give due consideration to the approaches of others. The role of China in Africa must also be analysed and understood in the framework of Africa's evolution towards democracy in the past two or three decades.

**The EU should not see itself as the only partner to promote democracy building in Africa, but instead seek coordination and coherence with other actors. Africa has numerous global partners and the EU could, through the establishment of alliances and the promotion of cooperation with other global partners and actors, further support democracy building in a coordinated and collaborative manner.**

## Perceptions of the EU's role in Africa

The EU is one of Africa's most important development partners. The role and prominence of the EU in Africa, and its commitment to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa and the alleviation of poverty, cannot be questioned. EU development

cooperation, including support for democratization and democracy building, has evolved and progressed substantially. This continuous progression and evolution, in conjunction with the true application of partnership principles, has led to a generally positive perception of the role of the EU in Africa.

**When the role of the EU is assessed it should be done from the perspective of ‘what Africa can do for itself with the support of the EU’ rather than ‘what the EU can do for Africa’.**

It is generally accepted that ‘Africa needs Europe and Europe needs Africa’. The EU has a role to play in democracy building in Africa, but when the role of the EU is assessed it should be done from the perspective of ‘what Africa can do for itself with the support of the EU’ rather than ‘what the EU can do for Africa’. In Africa and Europe there are negative and positive perceptions of the role of the EU in

Africa, despite the advances made in the past decade to subscribe to the principles of real and substantive partnership. This section focuses on African perceptions.

The EU’s intentions are perceived in a range from neo-imperialist, paternalistic and self-centred to equality, preferred partner or friend (Kotsopoulos and Sidiropoulos 2007). Through its actions, including the application of conditionality based on Eurocentric human rights and democracy perspectives, the EU is perceived as promoting its own agenda without taking into consideration the development needs of Africa. Some EU actions, and the manner in which the EU positions itself towards Africa, are perceived as bordering on interference, interventionism, the application of double standards in formalized dialogue on democracy and human rights, and the perpetuation of dependency. Furthermore, EU rhetoric and intentions are sometimes far removed from reality and practice.

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Democracy building is a long-term, continuous process, and a committed and long-term EU engagement is necessary to embed and stabilize democracy in African states. Development aid conditionality, the perceived unilateral application of the article 96 provisions of the Cotonou Agreement related to so-called appropriate measures – for which read ‘sanctions’ – lead to a questioning of the EU’s intentions, actions and

long-term commitment in Africa, including of the type of partnership it supports. It is felt that aid conditionality is confusing and ineffective, reduces development assistance flows, and is contrary to the partnership principle. Conditionality is not an end in itself, and should be applied according to the wider context and key objectives of the relationship. Incentives for good performance, when appropriate, should be jointly developed based on benchmarking exercises which are jointly conducted. African non-state actors have expressed their reservations about conditionality measures linked to democracy building, especially when they are predetermined by the EU and perceived to be applied inconsistently (Fioramonti 2009).

**Development aid conditionality and perceived unilateral action lead to a questioning of the EU’s intentions, actions and long-term commitment in Africa, including of the type of partnership it supports.**

The EU lacks coordination, coherence and consistency in its relations with Africa. This situation is perpetuated by the complex institutional framework of the EU, including the relationship between EU member states and the European Commission. Africa acknowledges that the EU has the ability to become a prominent global actor, but perceives that the political commitment and the political

will be still lacking. Within this paradigm, the EU is seen as a fragmented entity, without clear leadership and direction. The EU is seen as competing with other global actors and trying to emulate in a retroactive manner the commendable efforts of so-called competing actors.

Through the African Peace Facility (APF), the EU supports capacity building for the African peace architecture and AU peacekeeping efforts in a number of African states. For the EU, security cannot be excluded from development, and its support for the APF is conceptualized as part of the EU's development assistance to Africa (Makinda 2009). The EU is perceived as focusing excessively on conflict management in Africa to attain quick, highly visible but short-term successes, but not focusing on sustainable conflict prevention and its long-term advantages in relation to democracy building and sustainable development.

In Africa, there is a perception that Europe does not speak with a single and unified voice. EU institutions and member states are perceived as sometimes competing for relevance in African states; and the policy orientations and actions of EU institutions are not coordinated with those of EU member states, which results in policies that are not harmonized. (Leroy 2009)

The procedures, rules and bureaucracy of the EU are often seen as counterproductive to the objectives of development assistance, and as impeding the disbursement of development aid and the implementation of programmes and projects. Furthermore, they are seen as designed to benefit EU consultants and development operators, which in itself limits capacity building of African citizens and institutions (ACP Secretariat 2003).

A genuine question exists whether the Africa-EU partnership can be a real and equal partnership when one partner has superior resources, infrastructure and institutions. In positioning the AU and its institutional framework as representing the wishes and aspirations of the African continent, the EU has shown its commitment to support its partner, the AU and its institutional framework, in taking its rightful place. The EU, however, must be careful not to impose structures, institutional frameworks and working methodologies on the AU and its institutions that are impractical and not suited to the African context.

In the context of the Cotonou Agreement, there is the perception that the current negotiations on regional Economic Partnership Agreements are not being handled in the context and spirit of the partnership principle. The inequality of the partnership was exposed in the 'harsh manner' in which the negotiations took place, without taking into consideration the views and perspectives of the developing partners – the ACP regions, including the four African ACP regions. Furthermore, no consideration was given to supporting existing regional integration processes in Africa, and different regional structures for trade are being promoted through EPAs. This might have a long-term impact on political and trade relationships between Africa and the EU, which in turn could affect the EU's

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standing and capacity to promote democracy and democracy building (Fioramonti 2009).

Given the apparent capacity and institutional deficits in Africa, ownership of development initiatives and the partnership principle are both intangible and mutually reinforcing. There is a perception that the EU's rhetoric on African ownership and inclusive approaches does not always translate into practice. A real partnership is about two-way information and experience sharing. In Africa it is understood that adopting the EU model of combining economic advances, democratic governance and social stability can foster enhanced cooperation and partnership, including democracy building.

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A one-dimensional approach to democratization and democracy building is ineffective and counterproductive. The EU is perceived as not taking a holistic and inclusive approach in relation to development objectives and strategies, and in its relationship with partners. The mutually reinforcing nature of democracy and development is at times neglected in pursuit of EU interests, and to demonstrate the EU's adherence to principles established and commitments made at the global level which are in some cases not conducive to sustainable development or in the interests of African states. Development and democracy are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and the perceived impatience of the EU and its unwillingness to listen to African views and perspectives do not enhance the partnership. An inclusive and multiple-track approach to development and democracy building, including conflict prevention measures, provides the best chance for success.

### **Policy recommendations and proposals for a changed EU approach**

It is well understood that Africa needs to fulfil its promise, which would allow the continent to take a rightful place in its partnership with the EU. Africa needs to take full advantage of the EU's goodwill and declared commitment to enter into a partnership with the continent. From an EU perspective, it is clear that the usefulness of the ACP group in the context of the Cotonou Agreement is declining, and pronouncements made by senior European Commission representatives indicate that the group has served its purpose for the EU. Geopolitical changes, changes in the EU and the evolution of development assistance have pushed the EU to look at other options for promoting its external relations with Africa, and the 2010 statutory review of the Cotonou Agreement will be used to look at a new 2020 aid architecture in a post-Cotonou era (Manservigi 2009). The preferred arrangement for administering and channelling EU development assistance to Africa is through the AU, and now is the time for the continent to realize this. Africa is on the move. It is a 'work in progress' and the promise of prosperity will be attained when partners can build on home-grown practices and policies that are in the interests of African states and, indeed, the whole continent.

The policy recommendations and proposals below seek to address the challenges for democracy building in Africa, and to redress negative perceptions of the role of the EU.

First, the EU should – in consultation with Africa, and taking into consideration Africa's

diversity, history and culture as well as socio-economic realities – develop a broad understanding of democracy that will provide parameters and benchmarks for continued and future dialogue. Democracy building is a holistic concept, and the EU should go beyond the focus on elections and elections monitoring. In partnership with African states, the EU should investigate, inter alia, strengthening the pillars of democracy building, such as parliaments, local government authorities and the press, and focus on educating young people in the principles of democracy. It must recognize that democracy is a means to an end – the empowerment of people and improvement of their livelihoods; and that democracy building is continuous – there are no quick solutions. A long-term commitment to development, and the provision of predictable and consistent development cooperation, would allow African states to work in tandem with the EU to promote the jointly defined principles of democracy. The EU should not sacrifice the potential long-term benefits of its development cooperation for short-term economic gains and higher visibility.

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Second, the EU should focus more on conflict prevention through the APF, and on conflict prevention and support for effective early warning mechanisms in Africa. Presently, the focus of the APF is on conflict *management* and peacekeeping, rather than the *prevention* of conflict which should be the key objective. A shift of focus would contribute to sustainable development and a democratic culture, and in particular to democratic governance in the context of conflict prevention (Mpyisi 2009).

Third, the EU should be clear and transparent about its policy objectives, jointly develop implementation modalities with Africa (including review mechanisms) and allow for pragmatic ownership. Home grown initiatives should be allowed to shape democracy building, and assistance programmes must be designed that respect jointly agreed benchmarks for democracy derived from internationally accepted indicators. The EU should improve the coherence, complementarity, coordination (internally and externally) and consistency of its policy through the exchange of information between institutions, EU member states, third country partners and other global actors to address local needs in a structured and organized manner. The EU should establish partnerships with other external actors, which would allow for the pooling of resources to maximize the potential benefits of democracy building in Africa.

An improved EU Common Foreign and Security Policy architecture and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty would provide an overarching guide for an improved Africa-EU partnership, while also enhancing policy coherence. This will have a positive impact on democracy building in Africa, since it will signal a clear break with a past of personalized and historical ties, and signal a set of reforms that will reflect the ideological and pragmatic principles on democracy building shared across the EU (Kippin 2009).

Fourth, the EU's stated intention to change from a traditional donor-recipient relationship with Africa sets the stage for structured and effective dialogue among equal partners in the future (Herman and Davies 2009). The EU must continue to engage with Africa to build and strengthen the partnership, which should be mutually beneficial, based on reciprocity, predictability and consistency, and founded on mutual respect. It should provide the means for capacity building and institutional support

that will allow for the development of a credible, preferred and respected partner. A change in attitude in dealing with developing partners is needed – one that takes into consideration the needs and expectations of the partner. EU officials should be trained to have a better understanding of African cultures and of the critical needs of the African continent. It is vital to understand and address ‘informal African politics’, its structures and how these relate to strengthening democracy and development. More African thinking, perspectives and opinions need to be heard on the key challenges for democracy building and development in Africa, and to be taken into account by the EU.

**The EU’s stated intention to change from a traditional donor-recipient relationship with Africa sets the stage for structured and effective dialogue among equal partners in the future. A real partnership based on reciprocity, predictability and consistency, and founded on mutual respect will be better positioned to advocate and support democracy building.**

A real partnership based on the above-mentioned principles, and with the application of tact, respect and modesty, will be better positioned to advocate and support democracy building.

Fifth, democratization and democracy building should be supported through inclusive dialogue, and the participation of all stakeholders should be encouraged. This means at the country, regional and continental levels. The EU should ensure that the necessary provisions are in place to enable the complementary role played by non-state actors and the

diaspora in supporting democracy building, and continue to jointly define programmes and initiatives with Africa to further empower the role of women in democracy building. The advantages of the involvement of non-state actors and the diaspora are numerous: they can contribute to the promotion of a culture of dialogue between political and societal institutions; transplant knowledge, expertise and experience on democratic processes obtained in host countries to African states; and engage in lobbying, campaigning and advocacy activities (Mohamoud 2009). However, the EU should take care not to promote or support its preferred non-state actor partners and collaborators, but instead agree jointly with African governments on preferred non-state actor partners in African states.

The involvement of non-governmental actors in democracy building in Africa is important, and to this end the creation of a joint Africa-EU ‘eminent persons group’ could be contemplated.

In supporting the AU as its counterpart in Africa, the EU should not neglect the important role played in democracy building by regional integration organizations. Strong regional entities are necessary for the development of a continental institution that can promote democracy building as a continental imperative. Supporting democracy building in Africa means enhancing ownership, empowerment and ‘bottom-up’ development (Kippin 2009).

Sixth, as a global actor the EU must demonstrate proactive and decisive leadership, built on the EU’s competitive advantage. The EU should become the preferred partner of the developing world based on the principles of partnership, and not as a result of the amount of development assistance provided and/or the rate of disbursement of funds. The current global environment calls for alliances, cooperation

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and collaboration for democracy building, and the EU should take advantage of this favourable climate to pool resources for improved results in development and democracy building. The EU's visibility and presence are not ends in themselves, and it should remain focused on the bigger picture through improved, expanded and harmonized external relations.

There is a possibility that the Africa-China relationship might erode the trade advantage that the EU has in Africa, which in turn could minimize the EU's influence in Africa, given the fact that China attaches fewer conditions to its development assistance to African states (Fioramonti 2009). For the EU to further increase its prominence as a serious actor on the global stage, including in Africa, it should take the lead and convene a high-level meeting between African leaders and all the major actors in Africa (the USA, China, etc.) to jointly discuss sustainable development, including democracy building. The EU's focus should be on building partnerships for Africa that would allow coordinated policies, reducing the level of competition between other global actors and less focused on self-interest (Herman and Davies 2009).

Seventh, in many African states democratic institutions and processes might face renewed challenges in times of economic downturn. The EU's response to the economic and financial crises should be to maintain and even scale-up development assistance in the area of democracy building, in particular its support for elections, electoral processes and legislative development. A sustained focus by actors, including the EU, on democratic governance in Africa could contribute to mitigating the effects of the crises, and sustained democratic governance in African states could play a role in addressing the potential consequences of the crises (Lewis 2009).

Finally, there is a need to improve the communication of the European narrative, and to communicate the importance of democracy building to European and African citizens. This is needed to allow African citizens to build capacity and understand democracy building and its advantages, as well as to ensure that EU citizens are positively disposed towards continued funding for activities and initiatives related to democracy building in Africa.

## Conclusions

There is a window of opportunity for the realization of Africa's potential to become fully integrated into the world economy, to enable it to exercise more political weight and purpose in the global arena, and to address its many deficits related to poverty and lack of sustainable development and democracy. Africa has so much to offer. It is the continent of opportunity but the extent of global challenges necessitates collective approaches from the developed and developing world. The transformation of the African Union Commission into the African Union Authority at the 13th African Union Summit in Sirte, Libya, in July 2009 is further proof of the desire of African leaders to establish a 'single voice' for Africa in the geopolitical arena.

The Africa-EU partnership has potential and promise. In supporting Africa to become a real partner through the provision of means to develop capacity and build the required infrastructures, the EU can assist with empowering the peoples of Africa, promote sustainable development and alleviate extreme poverty. This would be to the benefit not only of Africa, but also the world, which stands to gain from a continent that is

democratic, conscious of the fact that democracy building is a continuous process, and that it is making progress in its own development.

The EU has a commitment to Africa. It is a commitment derived not only from its long-standing relationship with the continent, but also from its pursuit of a global role, respected by the developing world, and in accordance with its stated objectives and purpose. It is in the EU's interest to build a real partnership with Africa that supports democratization and democracy building and promotes sustainable development.

Recent undemocratic practices in Mauritania and Madagascar have been fiercely condemned by the AU and African leaders, and these examples bode well for democracy building in Africa. Africa is key to the development of global democracy – a goal that should be pursued collectively. The Africa-EU partnership can contribute to this global ideal.

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# The European Union and challenges to democracy building in the Arab world

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## Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in the Arab world and how the role of the European Union (EU) is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations for consideration by the EU are presented with a view to addressing the gap between the EU's policy intentions and Arab perceptions of the EU's ambitions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in the Arab world conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

The Arab world is politically, socially and economically diverse. The region's political diversity is related to levels of democratic development and political stability. Although all Arab countries suffer from substantial democracy deficits, there are different degrees of authoritarianism or liberalism across the region. Distinctions exist between traditional Arab societies, in which archaic social structures and values still dominate, and relatively modernized societies. Finally, some Arab countries, such as Iraq and Somalia, suffer from dangerous instability due to persistent conflicts.

Although the region is diverse, there are also common challenges. There is a lack of real choice in the political system. Opposition and democratic institutions are weak or even non-existent in most Arab countries. There are specific problems with the role and independence of parliaments, the judiciary and governance structures, including the capacity of municipal and state authorities to deliver services to their citizens. The exclusion of Islamist movements, among the most important political actors, is another relevant point. The exclusion of women from political participation and gender discrimination that curbs women's rights are another important issue.

Links between democracy and social and economic development are of central importance to democracy building in the Arab world. Outside the high-income Gulf region, large parts of the Arab world grapple with poverty, social underdevelopment and

insufficient access to basic welfare systems. Insufficient or underdeveloped education systems are especially significant in this regard. The Arab world also faces exceptional demographic change coupled with high unemployment rates. This could be either an opportunity for or a challenge to democracy building, depending on how the new generation of young people is nurtured.

Foreign intervention in the region has increased since the 19th century. The Arab world has been especially troubled by the effects of the US-led 'war on terror', which increased instability in the region and contributed to increases in violations of human rights behind the façade of security policy.

Opinions of the EU's democracy promotion efforts differ throughout the region. Undoubtedly, there are positive perceptions, but there are also objections to them and criticisms. The EU is generally perceived as an interesting partner but with a credibility gap which it needs to take seriously. The EU is not thought to be responding to the need for a partnership to address the socio-economic challenges in the region. Instead, it is seen as focusing on trade and the promotion of human rights.

In order to improve its policy and action and contribute to supporting democracy building in the Arab world, the EU must shift its focus towards a long-term commitment to democracy issues, including finding strategies for an inclusive approach and a broader understanding of democracy and its linkages to socio-economic development in the region.

## **Introduction**

The EU and the Arab world belong to the same neighbourhood: they are neighbours with economic, cultural and political ties that bring their peoples together. Migration flows and shared concerns linked to instability and insecurity in parts of the Arab world create common agendas.

There are, however, challenges to cooperation and partnership, such as a communication gap and a lack of trust and credibility on both sides. The discourse tends to focus on the differences between rather than the similarities in the two regions – focusing on the divide between Christianity and Islam even though both regions represent both religions, and emphasizing a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996: 22–49) in spite of the shared culture and history. Recent developments connected to Europe's reaction to the rise of political Islam, Europe's perceived relations with Israel and the so-called war on terror have exacerbated the differences between the two regions.

This chapter discusses the main challenges to democracy building in the Arab world, putting in perspective the perceptions of the EU's role in the region. The chapter provides a set of policy options for the EU which can serve as an input for a changed partnership between the two regions.

## **The main challenges for building democracy in the Arab world today**

The Arab world is politically, socially and economically diverse, which is also reflected in the perceptions of the EU's support for democracy building in the region.

First, in terms of geography the ‘Arab world’ is a difficult concept, including countries from the Gulf region, North Africa and West Asia/the Middle East. Sub-Saharan African states such as the Comoros, Djibouti and Somalia are members of the League of Arab States and could also be included in the definition. The countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Gulf states have different points of departure for their relations with the EU.

The region’s political diversity is related to levels of democratic development and political stability. Countries range from modern to traditional. Although all Arab countries suffer from substantial democracy deficits, degrees of authoritarianism or liberalism vary within the region. Distinctions should also be made between traditional Arab societies, in which archaic social structures and values still dominate, and relatively modernized societies. Finally, some Arab countries, such as Iraq and Somalia, suffer from dangerous instability due to persistent conflicts.

**All Arab countries suffer from substantial democracy deficits, degrees of authoritarianism or liberalism vary within the region. Paradoxically, the low-income economies that suffer from major social problems are, generally, governed by relatively open regimes.**

In economic terms, Arab states can be divided into four categories: the low-income economies (Comoros, Mauritania, Somalia and Yemen), the low to middle-income economies (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and the West Bank and Gaza strip), upper middle-income economies (Lebanon and Libya) and high-income economies (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates).

Combining these classifications would contribute to a better understanding of the Arab world. In the high-income economies of the Gulf states, which are traditional societies governed by authoritarian regimes, prosperity is linked to oil revenues which represent more than 80 per cent of GDP. The lower middle-income economies are relatively modern societies ruled by either authoritarian or relatively open regimes. Paradoxically, the low-income economies that suffer from major social problems are generally, though not in all cases, governed by relatively open regimes.

Although the region is diverse, there are also common challenges. The absence of democracy in the region is common to all Arab states. There are both factors specific to the region and more general challenges to democracy building, but the distinction is in many ways artificial – in reality the two are closely interlinked.

### ***Region-specific challenges***

A number of problems peculiar to the region contribute towards the democracy deficits in the Arab world. These relate mainly to the persistence of authoritarianism and of economic and social underdevelopment.

Arab regimes and other key players seem to lack the will to commit to democratic objectives. Arab regimes resist change. According to one interviewee ‘there is a big gap between the rhetoric of agreeing on democracy and the belief in democracy, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, accepting each other and to share power’ (Pace 2009). There is also a lack of real choice in the political system. Opposition is weak in most Arab countries, and in others it is simply not allowed to exist (Saudi Arabia, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Syria and the United Arab Emirates, UAE). Even where the right to vote

exists, the electorate does not necessarily have real alternatives to vote for, and elections only serve to confirm the same rulers in their positions. Democratic institutions are weak or non-existent. There are specific problems with the role and independence of parliaments, the judiciary and governance structures, including the capacity of municipal and state authorities to deliver services to their citizens.

The exclusion of Islamist movements, potentially the most important political actors, is another relevant point. Apart from a few cases, such as Algeria, Bahrain and Morocco, in which a distinction is made between moderate and radical movements, the majority of Arab regimes have banned Islamist movements, either de jure or de facto, thereby depriving a stratum of Arab societies of political participation. Exclusion of these movements has its roots in the authoritarian characteristics of the Arab regimes and cannot be explained by any repudiation of Islamism per se. Opposition parties are constrained regardless of their political ideology, and democratic parties of the left and right suffer from the same blinkered treatment.

The exclusion of women from political participation and gender discrimination that curbs women's rights are also important issues. Gihan Abouzeid concludes that women are discriminated against in the political sphere across the Arab world (Abouzeid 2009). Tribal traditions and a strong patriarchal culture are highlighted as the roots of this problem, which is a major challenge for democracy building in the region. The Arab world is unique in that women are not usually allowed to vote or to be a candidate. This is the case in the majority of the Gulf states. Even in the countries where women theoretically have political rights, the gap between the law and reality demonstrates the systematic marginalization of women.

Links between democracy and social and economic development are of central importance to democracy building in the Arab world. Outside the high-income Gulf region, large parts of the Arab world grapple with poverty, social underdevelopment and insufficient access to basic welfare systems. Insufficient or underdeveloped education systems are especially significant in this regard. Weak educational institutions do not provide opportunities to strengthen the democratic culture or citizenship. Democracy needs to be practised and schools can be one platform for doing so. A 2003 United Nations Development Programme Report on knowledge in the Arab world showed that Arab educational systems are not able to provide people with a positive civic education and the opportunity to practise democracy (UNDP and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development 2004:52).

The Arab world also faces exceptional demographic change and extremely high population growth coupled with high and rising unemployment rates. This could be either an opportunity for or a challenge to democracy building, depending on how the new generation of young people is nurtured.

Lack of employment opportunities and a lack of opportunities

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for men and women to improve their standard of living create tensions that in turn affect democracy and governance in the region. Social and economic underdevelopment leads to frustration and a sense of hopelessness for many young people. This situation is the origin of large-scale migration, both legal and illegal, mainly from the North African states to Europe. Moreover, it can provide fertile ground for increased radicalism and political extremism. The rise of radical Islamism has received widespread media coverage and affects the Arab world's relations with other regions in different ways.

### ***Wider challenges to democracy building***

Foreign intervention in the region has increased since the 19th century. The 20th century was particularly challenging – mainly because of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab world has been especially troubled by the effects of the US-led 'war on terror', which has increased instability in the region and contributed to increases in violations of human rights behind the façade of security policy. According to Ziadeh, all Arab countries in the Arab region are 'actively engaged in counter-terrorism activities that to some extent violate human rights such as the right to a fair trial and the ban on torture' (Ziadeh 2009). The post-11 September 2001 world focused on security issues at the expense of, for example, the democracy building agenda.

The policy pursued in the region by global powers such as the USA has been to provide generous support to allied regimes in spite of their undemocratic nature. The objective of regional stability is used as a pretext for setting up military bases, such as the French military base established in May 2009 in Abu Dhabi, UAE, and offering military aid. Egypt, for example, receives USD 1.3 billion annually in US military financing (Sharp 2009: 28–29; United States Government Accountability Office 2006). This policy of supporting authoritarian rulers and corrupt officials undermines democracy building efforts in the region.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a permanent cause of tension in the region since 1948. There have been six wars during this period, the most recent in Gaza in December 2008. Although the region has been a theatre for several cruel conflicts, this is the most important conflict that the Arab world has ever seen. It is still a major factor in instability in the Middle East and beyond. The Council of the European Union considers the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be a condition sine qua non for dealing with issues such as democratization and reform in the region (Council of the European Union 2003).

The conflict generates a general feeling of unfairness and scepticism towards external actors such as the USA and the EU, which are accused of partiality and unconditional support for Israel. Many Arab intellectuals consider that the EU's policy of democracy promotion is doomed to failure as long as European countries continue unconditionally to favour Israel.

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The Arab-Israeli conflict has also encouraged the establishment of military regimes and reinforced the popularity of radical movements. The struggle for liberation is considered to be the top priority, and one that is more important than democracy building. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been used as an alibi to maintain authoritarian regimes and provide them with false popular legitimacy (Boubakri 2009).

## Perceptions of the EU in the Arab world

The EU has different policies and mechanisms to facilitate its cooperation with different subregions and for use on a case-by-case basis with individual countries. The main platform for cooperation with the Mediterranean is the Barcelona or Euro-Med Process, which was initiated in 1995 and evolved in 2008 into the Union for the Mediterranean. The structure for cooperation is set out in the EU Regional Strategy Paper (2007–2013) and its Regional Indicative Programme (Commission of the European Union 2007). Political dialogue and reform issues are, at least on paper, elements of such cooperation.

The Mediterranean countries also cooperate with the EU in the European Neighbourhood Policy. Action plans and Association Agreements are laid down for each country, and these include clauses on democracy issues.

The European Commission is present in the region through its Delegation Offices and channels financial aid to both civil society and national authorities. Although the democracy portfolio represents only a small part of these aid allocations, its support for elections and human rights protection is seen as useful.

Democracy clauses are also included in trade agreements. Free Trade Agreements are being negotiated with the Mediterranean countries and the Gulf states, as well as bilateral agreements between individual EU member states and individual Arab states. This is especially the case in the Gulf, where relations between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are weak. Negotiations were launched with the Iraqi Government on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in November 2006. Eight rounds of negotiations have been held to date.

The EU's policy of promoting democracy in the Arab world is seen differently across the region. Undoubtedly, there are positive perceptions, but there are also objections to and criticisms of the EU's policy and actions.

### *Positive perceptions of the EU's policy*

In the Arab world, the EU is generally perceived to have implemented a successful model of regional integration based on democracy and economic and technological development. Furthermore, the EU is seen as having made real efforts to support democracy building: 'The incentives offered by the EU have been a real catalyst for attaining reform and democratic transition' (Khaled el-Molla 2009). The EU is often described as a credible partner with a good reputation, (Abouzeid 2009, Boubakri 2009, Fakhro 2009) and this explains the demand for Europe to play a role and be a partner in the region (Yassine 2009).

More often than not, the EU is discussed in comparison to the USA. The comparison is often favourable, but there is also a perception that 'the EU is often a hesitant spectator as events unfold, waiting for the USA to give its green light' and that 'the EU often appears powerless, as a hand-wringing bystander' (Pace 2009). Some argue that 'The EU has preferred to leave the political arena to the USA and take a back seat', leading to the assumption that 'it is a payer not a player' (Saif and Hujer 2009).

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## **Objections to EU policy**

The EU's policy of promoting democratic governance is the subject of obvious objections from a number of actors. Some Arab governments are suspicious of EU policy and refuse to allow the EU to become involved in issues related to governance in their respective countries. EU policy is regarded as interference in the internal affairs of the country. This is most obviously the case in the Gulf states, where negotiations on a partnership agreement have been interrupted on many occasions linked to contradictory standpoints related to democracy and human rights issues. The Gulf states prefer to limit their cooperation with the EU to the economic sphere and to exclude political issues from agreements between the two parties. The communiqué of the 19th EU-GCC joint council and ministerial meeting, held in Muscat in April 2009, demonstrates the EU's apparent acceptance of this attitude, and that it prefers not to risk the material interests of its member states.

The EU's policy of democracy building in the Arab world is also opposed by several political movements, mainly Islamic fundamentalists. This attitude is essentially ideological and political. In reality, the refusal to interact is mutual. Analysts such as Amel Boubekeur argue that the EU's attitude to working with Islamist parties is out of date and should be reconsidered on the basis of recent evolutions in such organizations (Boubekeur 2009).

**Criticism of EU policy is mainly a reaction to the EU's perceived tolerance of authoritarian regimes in the region. The criticisms are mainly connected to issues of credibility and the lack of a real partnership.**

## **Criticisms of EU policy**

Criticisms of EU policy on the Arab world come mainly from civil society and opposition movements. It is mainly a reaction to the EU's perceived tolerance of authoritarian regimes in the region. The criticisms are mainly connected to issues of credibility and the lack of a real partnership.

In contrast to those who object to the existence of such a policy, these actors believe that the EU can play a positive role in democracy building in the Arab world. Human rights activists consider that the EU has a moral obligation to assume such a role alongside its economic role in the region. However, the EU's real commitment to democracy is questioned because of the gap between policy and action. The EU is perceived as supporting, or at least refraining from criticizing, authoritarian regimes and as not prepared to jeopardize its relations with governments for the sake of democratic principles (Abouzeid 2009). In the eyes of these actors, the EU protects the status quo and incumbent governments for short-term economic and security gains, and to maintain stability (Ziadeh 2009). Saif and Hujer argue that 'democracy does not seem to be a top priority for the EU' (Saif and Hujer 2009), while Khatib believes that European long-term interests in democracy 'come second to short-term preferences for security and regime stability' (Khatib 2009).

The situation is complicated by the lack of a coherent EU voice. The discrepancies in the messages from different EU institutions, as well as in those coming from the EU level and those from individual EU member states are especially discussed (see e.g. Khatib 2009, Fakhro 2009). The perceived competition between EU institutions in the EU's cooperation with the Arab world reduces the effectiveness of EU policies and actions (Khaled el-Molla 2009).



The EU is also believed to ‘fear the costs of democratic transformation’ (Khaled el-Molla 2009), that is, to be unwilling to push for elections where Islamists could win power. This is a serious accusation that the EU needs to face up to and respond to in order to remain a partner in democracy building in the region. The EU is perceived as having too narrow an understanding of Islamism, and is believed to marginalize Islamist actors (Boubekeur 2009). Contacts and dialogue between Europe and Islam are too limited, in spite of the fact that there is now a significant number of Muslims in the EU who would be able to play a positive role and to act as bridge builders. The unwillingness of the EU to recognize the results of the 2006 election in the Palestinian territories was a big mistake and must be reconsidered if the EU wants to be seen as a credible actor in other democracy building discussions.

**The situation is complicated by the lack of a coherent EU voice. Many contributors to this volume highlighted the discrepancies in the messages from different EU institutions, as well as in those coming from the EU level and those from individual EU member states. The perceived competition between EU institutions in the EU’s cooperation with the Arab world reduces the effectiveness of EU policies and actions.**

The European Commission is the largest financial assistance donor to Palestine. Despite the support provided to Palestinians in humanitarian and development aid, the EU’s policy on the conflict and its attitude to the parties has been severely criticized. As a member of the ‘Quartet on the Middle East’, the EU has never been considered an impartial mediator. Its inertia over the serious crimes committed by the Israeli army contrasts with its vigorous reaction to Palestinians, in spite of the balance of power between these two parties. This policy continues to create tensions between the EU and the Arab world, to impede regional cooperation and create serious problems for the EU’s credibility in the region.

The EU’s credibility as a partner is also tarnished by the violations perpetrated by European countries in their struggle against illegal migration and in the so-called war on terror. Migration issues are particularly sensitive because of the large migration flows from the Arab world to Europe.

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## **Policy recommendations for a changed EU approach**

The Arab world is a diverse region, consisting of countries with different economic situations, different political conditions and different relationships with the EU. Challenges to democracy building in the region relate to the lack of stable and democratic institutions, insufficient socio-economic development coupled with an unbalanced demographic ‘pyramid’, and the intervention of external actors in a manner that does not support democracy building. The EU is generally perceived as an interesting partner but with a credibility gap which it needs to take seriously. The EU is believed to apply double standards, particularly to its relations with Israel, on the one hand, and the Arab countries, on the other. The EU is not thought to be responding to the need for a partnership to address the socio-economic challenges in the region. Instead, it is seen as focusing on trade and human rights. Communication and interaction with Islamist actors need further development. Based on this analysis, this section presents a set of recommendations for the future development of EU policies and actions. The key themes of these improvements are credibility, inclusive partnerships, and linking democracy building to socio-economic development.

## ***Credibility and the EU's commitment to democracy building in the Arab world***

Where objectives or priorities seem to collide, the more sustainable option of democracy building should take precedence. Policies on anti-terrorism or short-term stability which violate human rights and human dignity are counterproductive and short-sighted.

A longer term vision will be more effective at meeting both security and democracy objectives. The democracy agenda should not be allowed to be compromised.

**Policies on anti-terrorism or short-term stability which violate human rights and human dignity are counterproductive and short-sighted. A longer term vision will be more effective at meeting both security and democracy objectives. The democracy agenda should not be allowed to be compromised.**

This requires, first and foremost, the adoption of a better calibrated attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the assumption of a more positive role in the peace process, which has reached an impasse. In this respect, it is essential that the EU continues to bring financial and economic aid to Palestinians, but also that this aid should not be politically

oriented and conditioned. In addition, the EU should pay more attention to the observance of international humanitarian law by both parties in the conflict.

This also means that the EU must respect the choices made by voters in democratic elections – regardless of the ideological colour of the elected parties. The EU must establish a policy on how to respond to Islamist parties in governing positions after such elections.

Some of the EU's perceived credibility problems boil down to a lack of clear communication from the EU on its priorities, policies and objectives. It is not clear to all its partners what the EU actually stands for or does. The EU should make an effort to improve its 'public relations' and to increase transparency. The EU's Delegations in the region should play a major role in this.

**There is scope to improve efficiency by reducing inter-institutional competition and increasing the mainstreaming of democracy into the various policy areas involved. This includes closer communication between the EU's neighbourhood policy, trade policy, security policy and development policy.**

Ambiguous and confusing messages result from the lack of coherence between different EU institutions, which must also be addressed. There is scope to improve efficiency by reducing inter-institutional competition and increasing the mainstreaming of democracy into the various policy areas involved. This includes closer communication between the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, trade policy, security policy and development policy, as well as efforts to synchronize the messages from different EU member states. It should be clear to the partners that the EU prioritizes agreed EU interests ahead of the agendas of individual states.

The EU should aim to improve mutual understanding between Europe and the Arab world to settle historical misunderstandings complicated by recent events, such as the 'war' against terror and migration issues. One means of achieving this would be to elevate cultural exchange by establishing more cultural centres, more cultural programmes and more fora for cultural exchange. For example, there could be efforts to build European cultural centres and support could be given to more exchange programmes between educational institutes.

## ***Inclusion of several partners in dialogue and cooperation***

It has become clear that there is a need to include a broader set of actors – state and non-state stakeholders – in dialogue related to the EU’s democracy building policies and actions. The EU should not favour some actors to the detriment of others on ideological grounds. Impartiality is key to efficient partnerships that are respectful of the political, social and religious diversity in the Arab world. Communication channels should therefore be established by the EU beyond incumbent governments to enable dialogue and exchanges of ideas with wider civil society and Islamist parties, including the elected Hamas government in Palestine, as well as with parts of the government other than the executive branch. Active efforts should be made to ensure equal access for men and women to dialogue and consultations. In particular, cooperation with civil society should be reviewed. It is crucial that an assessment be made of which civil society actors are involved and which are not involved in dialogue efforts, and to ensure that interaction with civil society is transparent.

This inclusive approach should include increased EU support for strengthening the capacity of institutions to be open to all – providing equal access for men and women, and for minority groups as well as the majority population, citizens with physical or mental disabilities, and men and women with different backgrounds and levels of education. Actions to remove obstacles to inclusion can include anything from improving the physical environment of state institutions to assistance with translation of materials into minority languages and providing training in gender sensitivity for key officials.

EU policies must take gender concerns more into account, and should avoid viewing women as a single homogeneous category with the same needs and priorities. Women make up about half the population and should not be treated as a minority group – but the traditional marginalization of women should be recognized and special efforts should be made to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities to participate in and influence the democracy building project. Institutions that can sponsor and accept women’s participation as equals should be developed and strengthened.

**EU policies must take gender concerns more into account, and should avoid viewing women as a single homogeneous category with the same needs and priorities.**

The EU needs to acknowledge and understand that the term ‘Islamism’ encompasses many different players; and that their different ideologies and approaches are dynamic – developing over time in response to changed contexts. The EU needs to find ways to open communication channels with Islamists to improve mutual understanding. Since there are many different kinds of Islamist, the EU needs to develop a multi-pronged approach to deal and interact with Islamist parties in more diverse ways. For radical groups, de-radicalization efforts might be considered, building on the EU’s own experience with political extremists from the left and right. Political reintegration methods and the inclusion of radicals can be more effective than unconditional exclusion. It is radicalism, not the radicals that needs to be dealt with. Importantly, democratization efforts in the Arab world should not be reduced to an ‘intercultural dialogue’. Islamist parties are political actors in the same way as other ideologies and are accepted as such by regional electorates. By accepting a discourse of Islamic cultural specificity, the EU will feed the arguments of both internal islamophobes and authoritarian regimes in the Arab world that are looking for excuses to reject democratization.

Any partnership must have mutual benefits for both sides. As US President Barack Obama recently observed in Cairo: ‘The interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart’.<sup>1</sup> This statement is partly true for the European-Arab relationship. The Arab world has much to contribute, in the form of its experience and history, which could be shared with and made use of by the EU. Similarly, the EU can do more to offer expertise to local and regional actors looking for inspiration, for example, on constitution building, judicial reform and the linkages between social cohesion and democracy building. Objectives and actions within the partnership must also be formulated in a way that captures the benefits for both sides in order to create a platform for buy-in. It is not enough to communicate that the partners should democratize because this is in the interests of the EU – there must be dialogue and communication showing that the partnership focuses on shared objectives.

**Any partnership must have mutual benefits for both sides. The Arab world has much to contribute, in the form of its experience and history, which could be shared with and made use of by the EU.**

One concrete proposal is the establishment of independent partnership commissions, comprising actors from different levels and backgrounds – such as civil society, political parties, including Islamists where relevant, parliamentarians and other stakeholders – with the task of monitoring and assessing partnership policies and their effects on regional democracy building, and making proposals for change where needed. This would create ownership and strengthen both cooperation and the credibility of policies.

### ***Link economic and social development to democracy building efforts when designing and implementing programmes***

The link between social cohesion, economic development and democracy building is not clearly present in the EU’s regional strategies for the Arab world. This linkage has been emphasized throughout International IDEA’s consultations in the region. A sustainable approach means taking this nexus into account, and building on it to provide more attractive options for cooperation with regional partners.

This means that the EU should better synchronize its development programmes on employment opportunities, education and social security systems with its technical and political democracy building activities. Literacy programmes and educational reform can form indirect parts of a broader democracy building agenda. The need for governments to deliver on promises and to be held accountable for this delivery should be emphasized.

The EU should reconsider its approach to democracy building, and not promote a specific model of liberal democracy that only secular and liberal actors in the Middle East can subscribe to. It would be more useful to focus on the broad and basic principles of democracy, leaving the details to be determined through internal dialogue and debates in which the EU can inspire by example rather than prescribe a solution. Democracy must also be seen as more than elections; and democracy building as more than electoral assistance. At the same time, the EU should not confuse democracy building with human rights work.

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, Press Office, Remarks by the President at Cairo University, 4 June 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/)

The EU's extensive trade relations with the Arab world provide scope for exercising more influence over its partners (Saif and Hujer 2009). Positive conditionality and a soft power approach will be more efficient than military power and should be used more often and more consciously. This power could be used by the EU to pressure Arab governments to recognize and protect democracy, gender equality and basic individual rights and freedoms. The EU could make more effort to provide constructive advice on how to strengthen responsible opposition, build useful institutions, discourage corruption and support the development of an independent media. This should be done in a low-key way with little media attention to enable open dialogue without necessarily causing the partner governments to lose face.

**The EU should reconsider its approach to democracy building, and not promote a specific model of liberal democracy that only secular and liberal actors in the Middle East can subscribe to. Democracy must be seen as more than elections; and democracy building as more than electoral assistance.**

Finally, the EU needs to free itself from the ubiquitous comparisons with the USA. It should be clear to the partners that the EU does not always adopt the same policy or actions as the USA; and when US actions are incompatible with objectives of the EU-Arab partnership, the EU should stand up for its own values (Boubakri 2009, Fakhro 2009).

## Conclusions

The EU can sell itself to the region as a credible and engaging partner with a great deal to offer. This is not only based on the EU's own experiences of democracy building in recent history, but also because it possesses the advantage of selling an approach which involves the use of *soft power* rather than military influence.

Good neighbourhood relations are essential between the Arab world and Europe. These can only be built on the solid ground of trust and genuine partnership. This must be addressed on both sides of the Mediterranean. We strongly urge the European Union to reconsider its approach to the Arab world, by focusing on issues of common concern instead of on the differences. We also urge the Arab world and the cooperation platforms such as the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to consider what they can do to take this partnership to the next level, including communicating their needs and demands in a clear way. Such exchanges and peer-level dialogue are the most efficient way to meet the current challenges to democracy building.

**Good neighbourhood relations are essential between the Arab world and Europe. These can only be built on the solid ground of trust and genuine partnership.**

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# Cooperation on democracy building with the European Union: the perceptions of Latin America and the Caribbean

José Thompson

## Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) states, and the manner in which the present role of the European Union (EU) is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations for consideration by the EU are presented with a view to addressing the gap between policy intentions and LAC perceptions of the EU's ambitions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in the LAC states conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

The differences between Latin America and the Caribbean go beyond the linguistic, historical and cultural aspects and extend to the system of government and the inception of democracy. Countries in the region are also divided according to their stage of development, their style of leadership and their priorities in the democratic field.

In spite of the unprecedented extension of democracy, all the LAC regional institutions exhibit some form of fragility and progress seems not unlikely to be reversed. Governments are not delivering the results expected in many areas of concern and priority for citizens, and 'personality-based' leadership overshadows the institutional veneer in many countries. Integration processes are stalled or threatened by conflicts between member states.

Latin Americans are legitimately proud of the gains made in recent years in the recovery and consolidation of representative democracy, but admit that the intrinsic shortcomings and fragilities are as real as the electoral progress and that their persistence may undermine the genuine foundations of the new systems. Disenchantment and disillusion among the citizens are linked to the inability of governments to demonstrate that democracy is resolving the economic, social and security issues that affect the vast majority of the population.

A dilemma arises: how to preserve and consolidate electoral democracy while at the

same time moving towards a better democracy in the material sense. It is a legitimate concern in the region, and it should also influence the design and implementation of the EU's cooperation on democracy building. Latin Americans perceive such cooperation as conceptually compatible with the doctrines established at the inter-American level, although more elaboration is needed to make better use of the relations between democracy, governance and human rights, particularly their translation into tools to measure and assess results in plans for democracy building. The EU's intervention is welcomed and well received, being considered relatively respectful of the region's priorities and at least partially founded on dialogue.

In assessing EU-LAC cooperation and planning for the future, there is a need to find new ideas and approaches that, while ensuring such cooperation remains important, relevant and mutually respectful, find ways to improve their sense of timing and its comprehensiveness and diversity, and provide real guidance based on consistency and geared to exchange and feedback with both recipients and other cooperation agencies.

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the contributions made in the context of the regional dialogue with the LAC states, which formed part of International IDEA's global consultations on the role of the EU in democracy building. The chapter draws on the background papers commissioned in preparation for the Consultation with the LAC states, held at the offices of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington DC in March 2009, as well as the discussions of the consultation conference.

When considering how to assess the support provided for democracy building in the LAC states, it is necessary to keep in mind that the region is far from homogeneous, and to avoid the risks of oversimplification. Even a regional approach must acknowledge differences if it is to affect the diverse realities.

First of all, Latin America and the Caribbean differ significantly, in spite of their geographical proximity. Latin America, which culturally and politically includes countries located in the Caribbean Basin such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic and, to some extent, Puerto Rico, is defined by its heritage of Iberian conquest and colonization, and the Spanish and Portuguese languages prevail even if indigenous tongues are spoken by a considerable percentage of the population. Democracy in Latin America is based on a presidential system and has a past plagued with episodes of electoral fraud and manipulation, dictatorship and authoritarian regimes – often in the hands of the armed forces. This has built a general atmosphere of mistrust and a lack of confidence. In the past 25 years, a process of democratic recovery has taken place and currently the region is almost entirely democratic, with the exception of Cuba. Ethnically, Latin America is a mix, sometimes described as a 'Creole' culture – a general expression that tends to oversimplify the diversity that exists in this part of the world.

The Caribbean, or more accurately the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), an organization of 15 states including Belize in Central America and Surinam which is geographically part of South America, was under the influence of and colonized by the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, France and the Netherlands. Its political system is predominantly parliamentary and, even though countries such as Grenada and Surinam have had their share of authoritarianism, the Caribbean remained



basically within the boundaries of democracy during the period when Latin America was dominated by dictatorships. People of African origin dominate the population, but again this hides the cultural and ethnic diversity in these countries.

The differences between Latin America and the Caribbean therefore go beyond the linguistic, historical and cultural and extend to the system of government and the inception of democracy. Countries in the region can also be divided according to their stage of development, their style of leadership and their priorities in the democratic field. In the case of Brazil, Mexico and, to a lesser extent, Chile and Argentina, even with the disparities in their democratic institutions, their size and their relative weight in determining or influencing the regional agenda put them in a category of their own, and even present a vision of their potential as world powers.

Costa Rica and Uruguay, and also Chile in this respect, have consolidated their democratic institutions and the related values among their population. This often classifies them as examples of good practice – and therefore as potential sources for cooperation in democracy building rather than as recipients of programmes designed to strengthen democracy.

There is currently an ideologically oriented alignment between Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia – with the addition of Nicaragua and Honduras in most cases – even though their national realities differ considerably. This group makes aggressive attempts to reshape the regional agenda, contesting the traditional influence of the United States over the LAC states and pushing political reconfiguration through constitutional reform and strong personal leadership. Their priorities and their redefining of basic democratic institutions pose additional challenges to planning democracy building in the region.

Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Paraguay are more often the traditional recipients of programmes aimed at strengthening democracy. All face particular national challenges and are not exempt from internal tensions that might undermine democratic stability.

Finally, three countries defy any attempt at classification, considering their current particular realities. Haiti, which is by far the poorest and most vulnerable country in the hemisphere, is in an extremely precarious position in its democratic development. Any approach from the EU with plans to support democracy must be comprehensive and based on a clear understanding of the magnitude and extent of the problems facing this nation.

Colombia, which is unique in many ways, is a contradictory country and a continuously evolving puzzle that requires individual attention, including when planning for democracy building. The presence of armed conflict and the existence of several centres of power coexist with relative normalcy in the functioning of democratic institutions. Challenges related to large numbers of displaced people and the effect of organized crime on the life of citizens distort the practice of representative democracy and eliminate the competitive nature of the electoral processes in some territories (Salamanca 2009).

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Cuba is an island in more than one way. The notable exception in the dominance of representative democracy in the region, it is currently going through a 'soft transition', and awaiting its possible reincorporation into the OAS, while still defending a political system based on an exceptional model. Issues are posed by the exercise of power in the island, which is admittedly not compatible with representative democracy. A transition is likely to take place, but only time will tell if and when democratic rule will be established in Cuba (Erikson 2009). In the meantime, democracy building plans must consider the uniqueness of the Cuban case, weighing different scenarios as reform evolves or stalls. Cuba requires more than a democracy promotion approach and therefore exceeds the framework used by the EU to promote and measure democracy building in the LAC states. The approach taken by the EU to Cuba, although less than consistent and homogeneous, has been visibly different from that taken by the USA.

Warnings have been issued about the fragility of democracy in the region, in spite of the gains offered by recent electoral history. The events that took place in Honduras in June to July 2009, and the disruption of the constitutional order, regrettably demonstrate the validity of these assertions. At the time of writing, the future road for democracy in that country remains uncertain. One can only hope that this constitutes an isolated and passing event in Latin America.

### **From concept to action: the basis for a common language**

Any consideration of the objectives and effectiveness of and the potential for democracy building in the LAC countries by the EU must start by acknowledging the challenges posed – and exploring the opportunities presented – by the conceptual and operational implications of the interrelations between democracy and human rights.

**The ambiguity of terms such as democracy and governance, and the difficulty of using them to implement and assess development policies and projects, limit their effective use.**

Landman and Larizza note that there is a well-defined platform for these interrelations in the international instruments and, at the level of the EU, in different policy resolutions and guidelines for international cooperation. However, the ambiguity of terms such as democracy and

governance, and the difficulty of using them to implement and assess development policies and projects, limit their effective use.

On the other hand, human rights has achieved more clarity as a concept and a doctrine, thanks to the definition and refinement provided by universal and regional international instruments, and the case law developed by international tribunals. Landman, among others, writes that the interdependence, integrity and indivisibility of human rights are widely recognized and underlined by the 1993 Vienna World Declaration on Human Rights. This presents an opportunity to establish a matrix that combines civil, political, economic and social components in a more coherent way, thereby providing routes for international cooperation to explore, and provide an initial approach to the understanding of, the relations with and between democracy and governance (Landman 2009).

The governance angle, no matter how undefined, is essential for observing and analysing the current state of democracy development in the region. Most problems in the region, when evaluating the health of democracy, are connected not to the legitimacy of origin,

since successive electoral processes have regularly been held in states across the region, but to the ‘legitimate exercise of power’, which is equally important and refers to the correct and effective use of power to address the most pressing issues that affect the everyday lives of citizens.

The resolutions and regulations that serve as a basis for EU support to democracy building focus on the enforcement or expansion of specific rights, starting with the category of political rights, but also including so-called good governance which democratic governments should practise. This understanding of democracy as a combination of the political/human rights and democratic governance dimensions provides a conceptual platform for assessing democracy building within the EU’s development cooperation.

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The philosophical and conceptual framework that this platform is supposed to provide, no matter how vague, is mirrored on the LAC side, as evidenced by the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, other regional instruments and declarations and especially by the Inter-American Democratic Charter, article 2 of which, in the same vein, prescribes that ‘Essential elements of representative democracy include, inter alia, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law, the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government’, which is complemented by the work of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

**At the moment, the coincidence between the guiding principles of the LAC states and the EU sets a positive tone for the initial debate and for the development of more precise common language.**

LAC experts defend the importance and relevance of such a framework when planning or rethinking plans and projects for cooperation on democracy building and when contemplating the means of dealing with the complexities and paradoxes of democracy building in the region. At the moment, the coincidence between the guiding principles of the LAC states and the EU sets a positive tone for the initial debate and for the development of more precise common language. It is widely accepted that this is a two-way street, where mutual understanding and learning can enrich all perspectives and raise awareness of potential threats along the way. Differences in context add to the diversity of possible solutions.

When it comes to this line of cooperation and comparing the intentions of the EU with perceptions on the other side of the Atlantic, it is important to take into consideration the significant differences between the two regions regarding the model and practice of democracy and its fundamental institutions. The prevalence of parliamentary regimes, the soundness of its institutions and the real connections to civil society, as well as the relevance of social investment and a progressive consensus on ‘political clauses’ as elements necessary for the integration process to advance, are all components that characterize the reality of democracy in the EU and among its member states.

**There is a basic understanding between the EU and the LAC states that democratic rule and its components, both political and social, are relevant and that their strengthening is a crucial factor to an integral approach to development. In addition to this 'common language' there are historical, cultural, economic and linguistic affinities between the EU and the LAC states that form a basis for dialogue on democracy.**

In contrast, and in spite of the unprecedented extension of democracy, all the LAC regional institutions exhibit some form of fragility and progress seems not unlikely to be reversed. Governments are not delivering the results expected in many areas of concern and priority for citizens, and 'personality-based' (*caudillista*) leadership overshadows the institutional veneer in many countries (Carrillo-Flores and Petri 2009). Integration processes are stalled or threatened by conflicts between member states.

Nonetheless, there is a basic understanding between the EU and the LAC states that democratic rule and its components, both political and social, are relevant and that their strengthening is a crucial factor to an integral approach to development. In addition to this 'common language' there are historical, cultural, economic and linguistic affinities between the EU and the LAC states that form a basis and open the field for dialogue to take place on democracy and other related matters (Diez and Garcia 2009).

### **Challenges for democracy building in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Latin Americans are legitimately proud of the gains made in recent years in the recovery and consolidation of representative democracy, but admit that the intrinsic shortcomings and fragilities are as real as the electoral progress and that their persistence may undermine the genuine foundations of the new systems. Disenchantment and disillusion among the citizens are linked to the inability of governments to demonstrate that democracy is resolving the economic, social and security issues that affect the vast majority of the population. While the field for strengthening democracy remains open and valid efforts are being made aimed at improving electoral aspects and institution building, (Avila and Orozco-Henriquez 2009) the major threats to democratic stability seem to stem from the failure of democratically elected governments to deal with issues of economic performance, citizen security and the reduction of inequality and exclusion. Latin America is by far the most unequal region in the world, and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. The failure of governments to translate economic growth into an increase in the living standards of the majority of the population is certainly more than a shortcoming. There is a connection between this underperformance and the extension of social exclusion, which exists in most rural areas and affects the majority of the indigenous populations and a significant percentage of the African Americans in the region.

**While the field for strengthening democracy remains open, and valid efforts are being made aimed at improving electoral aspects and institution building, the major threats to democratic stability seem to stem from the failure of democratically elected governments to deal with issues of economic performance, citizen security and the reduction of inequality and exclusion.**

Even the most enthusiastic supporters of democracy as it is evolving have to admit that not all the conditions traditionally required for a regime to qualify as a democracy are present when observing the current political and institutional scenarios in the region. Nonetheless, dozens of electoral processes are regularly conducted, national or political crises are in general dealt with within the democratic framework and no one is calling for the armed forces to remedy political

disputes or to directly control the exercise of power. This is a genuine success story compared to the picture in the region just 25 years ago, when dictatorships flourished and multiplied.

However, questions are raised by incumbents seeking second, or even three or more, terms of office and by the use of public resources to affect the equity of electoral campaigns. The use of ‘street democracy’ – or the mobilization of supporters and social organizations to pressure for or against an initiative – also raises questions, as do pushing ahead with constitutional reforms, extreme concentration of power in the hands of the executive, particularly in the case of new *caudillo* leaders, as well as the obscure connections between organized crime and high-level politicians and the endemic weakness of control mechanisms, the extended notion that majority rule means suppressing or at best minimizing the rights of minorities, and the emphasis on ‘participatory democracy’ as opposed to representative democracy. These are all worrying features that, although the situation varies from country to country,<sup>1</sup> reveal a democracy that has been consolidated more in the realm of the electoral rites and in the construction of a general institutional machinery than in the sense of a system for peaceful coexistence with special mechanisms for collective decision-making.

The call for a ‘strong hand’ on crime or to improve decision-making is frequently heard in the region and is in line with a tradition of white or ‘Creole’, male, metropolitan, Catholic-supporting values that gave shape to a representative democracy with the armed forces more ready to control internal disruption than to ensure external security. More than two decades of democracy have gone by, but the remnants of this mentality are very much alive, to the point that, according to surveys, many would easily sacrifice democracy in the region in exchange for a solution to their economic problems and their security concerns.

There is also an extremely low level of confidence across the region and the traumas left by the regular and widespread electoral fraud and abuses of power of several decades ago have not healed entirely. This explains the lack of credibility that citizens give to political parties and public institutions and the easy resurrection of the ghost of electoral fraud every time there is a close election.

These factors combine to erode the legitimacy of democracy in most countries, especially when linked with a sense of injustice that is intrinsic to the system. The low quality of and limited access to the administration of justice as well as widespread corruption and de facto impunity for those involved means, among other things, that political representation seldom mirrors the diversity of the population.

An important conclusion derived from the International IDEA consultation process held in the LAC region is that these material deficiencies in democratic governance in the region must become the centre of action to promote

**An important conclusion derived from the process of consultation held in the LAC region is that these material deficiencies in democratic governance in the region must become the centre of action to promote democracy building, although this does not mean abandoning support to the improvement of electoral democracy.**

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<sup>1</sup> Many of these aspects apply only partially to the Caribbean and their incidence depends on the level of democratic institutionalization which, as is described above, is far from even across the region.

democracy building, although this does not mean abandoning support to the improvement of electoral democracy.

Even within the restrictions on the electoral aspects of democracy, it is important to understand that an emerging agenda is being consolidated across the region, making maximum use of the existence and nature of electoral management bodies (EMBs) in the Latin American model, that is, a permanent, specialized, relatively autonomous body dealing with electoral issues (Avila and Orozco-Henriquez, and Thompson 2009). More and more functions are being assigned to EMBs, including new fields such as:

- Control of political financing
- The structure of and internal democracy within political parties
- Specific mechanisms for representation and inclusion, such as quotas or reserved seats for women and indigenous populations, among others
- Regulation of electoral publicity and of how the media covers the campaign
- E-voting and other technological applications
- The standards of equity to be preserved during the campaign

**Thus, a dilemma arises: how to preserve and consolidate electoral democracy while at the same time moving towards a better democracy in the material sense. It is a legitimate concern in the region, and it should also influence the design and implementation of the EU's cooperation on democracy building.**

This combination of topics poses significant challenges to future planning of inter-national cooperation on democracy, calling for new tools and new approaches.

Thus, a dilemma arises: how to preserve and consolidate electoral democracy while at the same time moving towards a better democracy in the material sense. It is a legitimate concern in the region, and it should also influence the design and implementation of the EU's cooperation on democracy building.

## **Perceptions of the European Union in Latin America and the Caribbean**

In all the background papers and the individual interventions during the consultation process, the EU's cooperation on democracy building worldwide and particularly in the LAC states is recognized as important and significant. There were no voices asking for a reduction in or an end to such activity. The EU remains the largest donor when it comes to promoting democracy, even if the LAC region has not been its first priority when designing its plans for cooperation (Landman and Larizza 2009). The variety of potential threats to democracy in the region – from the low level of legitimacy of many

regimes to the increasing effects of the global crisis on LAC states, particularly in those countries sensitive to changes in the flow of remittances – and the general impression, among Latin Americans, that democracy remains fragile in the region mean that cooperation on democracy building is still highly relevant.

**Throughout the consultation process, the EU's cooperation on democracy building worldwide and particularly in the LAC states is recognized as important and significant.**

This is especially true because LAC states see cooperation with the EU as different from cooperation with other sources, especially the USA. Cooperation with the EU is perceived as based more on shared values and dialogue than on political unilateralism, even if their agendas, the priorities and the intervention mechanisms often coincide and sometimes overlap. The region's geographic proximity to and commercial dependence on the USA make it all the more important to have an alternative view of democratic structures and functioning, and this is provided by the EU and, to a lesser extent, Canada.

**Cooperation with the EU is perceived as based more on shared values and dialogue than on political unilateralism.**

### ***A tendency for oversimplification***

There is a perception among the LAC states that most democracy building cooperation programmes – not only those of the EU – tend to disregard or minimize the differences between countries, which, in turn, negatively affects their long-term impact. Moreover, most lines of cooperation are criticized for forgetting that changing values, attitudes and behaviour often takes a generation or more. Many regional experts perceive that the contradictory picture offered by the current state of democracy in the region is not clearly understood in Europe, and that the situation tends to be simplified, ignoring differences, when planning and assessing cooperation on democracy building.

### ***An incomplete approach to partnership***

There is a dominant perception that the EU has prioritized working with the civil society organizations (CSOs). This bottom-up strategy has been a characteristic of the EU's model of cooperation on democracy building. If the intention is to empower civil society and provide it with a voice in their respective countries, the results have been rather limited. In addition, there has been little space for interaction between the state and CSOs or debate on how to deal with the issues that matter in democracy development (Murillo 2009). A weak state, to a tragic extent in cases such as Guatemala, unable to control its own territory, incapable of investing adequately in infrastructure and social development and dependent on scarce resources due to fiscal policies that are soft on big capital constitutes an additional crack in democracy in the region.

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### ***A lack of consistency***

The current negotiations between the EU and several blocs in the region, with the obvious intention of including more than just the trade pillar, offer an opportunity to explore more integral approaches to promoting development in the region, including a major role for democracy building. The perception is often that when trade issues are on the table, considerations in other areas are minimized. This gives the impression that the EU uses different language depending on the interests at stake. This should be avoided if the EU seeks coherence in the form and substance of its dialogue with the region.

**The perception is often that when trade issues are on the table, considerations in other areas are minimized. This gives the impression that the EU uses different language depending on the interests at stake.**

This is more than just a matter of style. LAC audiences recognize the efforts on the part of the EU to include in its definition of its plans for cooperation on democracy spaces

for participatory research and for consultation with potential partners and experts, taking the relationship well beyond the traditional donor-recipient nexus. Even if the dialogue were to include more opportunities for exchange, conceptual and practical difficulties remain as obstacles to assessing democracy building, its methodology and its relative success. LAC experts and institutions admit this cooperation is more respectful of locally defined priorities, although it is still far from being a collective construction process. Progress in that direction is encouraged, even if it is expensive and time-consuming.

Fluent dialogue and potential agreements between the EU and the LAC states become more difficult when dealing with particular issues – migration, trade and the use of subsidies in agriculture being the most salient ones. Political pressures from within make it harder for the EU to reach internal consensus and moreover to engage in free dialogue when sitting at the table with its counterparts from the LAC region, for which internal pressures work mostly in the opposite direction. Evading the issues, however, is not an option since they transcend their specific areas and have an effect on any space in which the EU and the LAC states meet.

### ***The absence of an integrated approach***

Often mentioned as a key element in planning and designing projects to promote development in any area, effective utilization of the conclusions from previous interventions and the respective determination of lessons learned are extremely important in the case of democracy building in the region. In the eyes of many people from the region, valuable experiences and lessons learned from the past are hardly used when planning most democracy building projects, and the EU is no exception (Thompson 2009).

In particular, a more integral assessment of how the different lines of cooperation have worked on previous occasions is missing, which in turn squanders part of the potential offered by expensive activities and programmes. This is most notable when reading the evaluations of technical assistance projects or the findings of the observation missions' reports, both of which are valuable resources for determining institutional and structural weaknesses and identifying grounds for political or electoral reform.

The same applies when taking into consideration informed opinions, evaluation processes and lessons learned by recipient institutions and organizations as well as other sources of international cooperation active in democracy building in the region. Important findings can be reinforced when compared with other relevant initiatives. Again, the use of mechanisms such as consultations is of particular interest to Latin America and is valued as an indicator of commitment to dialogue by the EU.

### ***Form and substance***

There is a general perception across the LAC states that cooperation on development and in particular on democracy building with the EU is the product of lengthy, complicated and sometimes redundant procedures, which is a problem in itself given the energy and resources consumed in completing all the requirements. This system also affects the timeliness of the cooperation and the compatibility between the expected results as originally planned and those realized at the conclusion of the projects and activities.



The LAC region is undergoing political changes that can take place at a rapid pace, and some trends develop – and sometimes collapse – in a matter of months, which is much less time than it takes for a specific initiative to go through all the steps, approvals and modifications necessary in the internal procedures prescribed by the EU.

### ***Beyond the electoral aspect of democracy***

Poverty and exclusion are crucial when considering the state of democracy in the region. The EU has recently moved to make social cohesion a fundamental goal, the achievement of which will require conceptual, economic and practical efforts consciously oriented in that direction (Regional Programme 2007–2013). Poverty reduction and the genuine incorporation of those traditionally excluded become a matter of legitimacy and the sustainability of the system, and also a path to the construction of a sense of belonging and real citizenship. This also touches on integral issues of human rights and is linked to the search for an effective rights-based approach to development, which is often talked about but seldom implemented by most cooperation agencies.

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At least from a Latin American perspective, when the EU's cooperation policies are put into practice, there is disequilibrium between their components. Electoral observation missions are most prominent, followed by technical assistance and institution building in the context of a specific electoral process, and only then are there other initiatives and projects aimed at democracy building (Thompson 2009).

### **Policy proposals for a renewed approach by the European Union**

The EU invests considerable resources in research to update its lines and modalities of cooperation so that, in general, the agenda remains relevant. In the case of democracy in the LAC states, however, there seems to be significant room for expanding knowledge and undertaking research to better understand the current state and perceptions of democracy, using the analytical talents that exist in the region.

Although privileging CSOs as partners is a valid choice, there is a relatively wide consensus that more effort could and should be made to implement work with national and local institutional structures and to make better use of regional, subregional and even national institutions. A cursory look at the diversity of regional, subregional and integration-prone institutions reveals quite a complex picture – one that could seem overwhelming to those planning support for democracy building from the other side of the Atlantic (Emmerich 2009). However, the EU should explore more ways of channelling initiatives through the Inter-American system and other organizations with a similar scope.

Working with parliaments and political parties, however difficult and potentially frustrating (Carrillo-Flores and Petri 2009), is important if functional democracy is to emerge as the guiding principle in the region. Mutual trust is fundamental to most attempts to measure credibility (Diez and Garcia 2009). One experience that stands out

in this respect is the substantial investment made in Central America in the 1980s to supporting an integration process from different angles that, due to its own dynamics or lack of them, has only progressed sluggishly at best. The lessons learned from this case, however, can provide useful ideas for future plans in democracy building.

Flexibility is of the essence when it comes to affecting reality in a sensitive area such as political and public institutions, especially in a region that is experiencing mutations in many aspects of its search for a democracy that is closer to the respective national identities – some of which are still under construction. More speedy processes are required as well as the availability of funding to be allocated when new or unforeseen situations and challenges arise, possibly expanding the space for autonomous decisions at the level of the EU's local missions in the region.

The EU's policy instruments clearly state that complementarity and coherence must play a key role in all plans for supporting development and are central to evaluating external relations, acknowledging that democracy is multi-faceted and cautioning against the over dimensioning of a particular line of action (EC Regulation 1889/2006, European Parliament and Council). It is not that observation missions and technical assistance are not relevant or play only a minor role in promoting democracy in the LAC region, (Avila and Orozco-Henriquez 2009) especially in adding to the legitimacy of electoral processes which is often required by sceptical societies. However, a balance has yet to be found in terms of resource allocation and the relative weight given to the different lines of action. The coherence requirement must be examined closely and in-depth and a real diversity of modes of intervention achieved, somehow equivalent to the complexity of democracy itself, particularly at its current stage of development in the region.

It is important to recall that the extent and complexity of the contradictions and paradoxes of democracy in the LAC region, especially in Latin America, require a more integrated approach to democratic theory and practice when assessing democracy building in the cooperation policies of the EU. This is not to disregard its electoral facet, but to include its material aspect, in which the shortcomings are most evident in the region and are potentially capable of endangering the legitimacy and stability of the system.

**Strengthening democracy in the LAC states means more than investing in its institutional structure and functioning, and must include society and its values.**

Strengthening democracy in the LAC states means more than investing in its institutional structure and functioning, and must include society and its values. One important task is to explore more in-depth approaches to the interrelations

among human rights, democracy and governance, in a search for tools that could be more instrumental in helping to design and evaluate development plans.

## Conclusions

The EU's contribution to the development of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean is undoubtedly important. The region has somehow become a 'success story' in more ways than one when it comes to restoring and institutionalizing democracy. In general, this cooperation, in the current perception of Latin Americans, is relevant, in that it addresses the issues that matter, and increases the basis for and extent of a common language between the region and the EU, which is important in itself but especially in view of current negotiations between the EU and the LAC states.

Latin Americans perceive such cooperation as conceptually compatible with the doctrines established at the inter-American level, although more elaboration is needed to make better use of the relations between democracy, governance and human rights, particularly their translation into tools to measure and assess results in plans for democracy building. It is a contributory factor to the legitimacy of basic democratic institutions, especially relevant in the region given prevailing values, in particular the low rate of inter-individual confidence which extends to a lack of faith in public institutions and politics in general. The EU's intervention is welcomed and well received, being considered relatively respectful of the region's priorities and at least partially founded on dialogue.

To a much lesser extent is the EU's support to democracy building seen as timely, since situations and political and institutional issues change very rapidly in Latin America and there is little flexibility for the EU to react outside of the formal, structured procedures in place to determine lines of cooperation. It often takes a viewpoint that isolates democratic institutions from their context, especially on exclusion, insecurity and corruption, which affect citizens' faith in the system. The EU's support is also seen as diverse, by attempting to find, although not always achieving, a balance between public and non-governmental actors as partners, although in practice it has prioritized work with civil society organizations and should consider the use of institutions, most of which are fragile in generally weak states, to channel new initiatives.

Cooperation is less consistent and coherent today than should be the case. This problem is exacerbated by the minimal use made of valuable information and lessons learned. For example, the bridge between observation missions and their conclusions, and technical assistance or institutional building initiatives is lost when planning new projects, giving the impression that each is conceived as a world of its own. Compatible information is not effectively shared with other international cooperation actors that are also active in promoting democracy in the region. A productive exchange is often missing, in spite of the successful experiences achieved in Colombia in 2005–2006 and Paraguay in 2008 as a result of observation missions.

In assessing EU-LAC cooperation and planning for the future, there is a need to find new ideas and approaches that, while ensuring such cooperation remains important, relevant and mutually respectful, find ways to improve its sense of timing and its comprehensiveness and diversity, and provide real guidance based on consistency and geared to exchange and feedback with both recipients and other cooperation agencies. Of course, the difficulty with such an approach is to point out not only the 'whats' but also the 'hows' in order to optimize cooperation on democracy with the EU in the region. In so doing, it is necessary to keep in mind that democracy cannot exist without the electoral facet, its procedural aspects, but that it also includes a more integral, material aspect, without which democratic systems and elections become nothing but a rite.

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**Democracy cannot exist without the electoral facet and its procedural aspects, but it also includes a more integral, material aspect, without which democratic systems and elections become nothing but a rite.**

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# The European Union's support for democracy building in South Asia: an overview

Sridhar K. Khatri

## Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in South Asia, and how the European Union's (EU) role is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations for consideration by the EU are presented with a view to addressing the gap between policy intentions and South Asian perceptions of the EU's ambitions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in South Asia conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

Despite the difficulties in democracy building faced by countries in South Asia, the region has done comparatively well (see e.g. the 2009 Freedom House Annual Report). In addition to the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh and Nepal, three other countries have also moved in a positive direction.

The role of the international community in bringing political change to South Asia has been largely limited to the smaller countries of the region. The EU evokes mixed feelings in South Asia. Some ask whether it speaks with a collective voice, or only reflects the cacophony of its 27 member states. Even if it does in fact have a collective voice, others ask if it has the capacity to intervene in a meaningful way to contribute to the sustainability of democratic institutions. Observers in the region note that the EU is not usually consistent in supporting democratic countries and that it frequently backs countries that lack democratic institutions for reasons related to its own convenience.

The EU has preferred to take a 'bottom-up' approach to promoting democracy and human rights in South Asia by dealing with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are the main recipients of assistance from the European Commission. Although the role of civil society is increasing in the region, there is an ongoing debate among scholars and policymakers about the kind of role it can play.

The recommendations from this process in South Asia strongly endorse the Development

in Democracy model, the main premise being to empower the people of the region and make political leaders and institutions more accountable to the people. The recommendations are grouped in three categories: those common to all the countries of the region; those that are country-specific; and those steps that may be taken by the EU to strengthen democracy building through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process. It has also been suggested that, while building on the seminal work based on the SAARC Social Charter, all these activities should happen in parallel with a comprehensive programme to develop a Bill of Rights and Obligations for democracies in South Asia, preferably through a South Asian Democratic Charter. The EU could play a significant role in this effort by bringing together experts and stakeholders in the region to chalk out a programme on how the Bill might be drafted and eventually adopted.

## Introduction

This chapter identifies the key issues which have emerged from studies prepared for International IDEA by experts in South Asia, as well as the consultation conference on the role of the European Union (EU) in democracy building in South Asia held in Kathmandu in February 2009.

This chapter also examines the main challenges for democracy building in South Asia. Three country studies, on Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, were prepared for this project. There is a section on how the EU is perceived in South Asia, based on its activities in some of the countries of the region. It also looks at the difficulties faced by these countries in establishing a stable democratic political order and how these could be overcome. The chapter tackles the complex question of how the EU and SAARC

can work together on democracy building in South Asia. Finally, there are recommendations on how the EU can continue to play a major role in such democracy building, distinguishing between regional issues common to all the countries and specific activities which the EU might wish to consider that are relevant to supporting and building democracy in individual countries. The section also makes specific recommendations on how the EU and SAARC could collaborate to promote democracy at the regional level.

**There is a common consensus in South Asia that political systems have failed to bring about changes to the practice of governance in the region. Democracy and, equally important, democratic culture, have yet to put down firm roots in the region.**

## The main challenges for democracy building in South Asia

There is a consensus in South Asia that political systems have failed to bring about changes to the practice of governance in the region. Although the region provided the first women head of state in the world and has produced more women heads of state or government than any other region, only 8 per cent of its leading policymakers are women. The rule of law in South Asia is widely disregarded and undermined in terms of both economic rights and equality under the law. Nor are there any 'clear-cut visions and directives for the development of minorities and marginalized groups', while strong feudal and traditional values and patriarchal cultural practices are common characteristics across the region. Democracy and, equally important, democratic culture, have yet to put down firm roots in the region. This deficit often leads to troubled relations, mutual mistrust, tension and hostility among political parties. A number of factors are believed to contribute to this situation:

‘decay of political parties and democratic institutions; venality of the ruling elite and their indifference to the common will; resistance to devolution of powers to the people; unimaginative dealing with minorities; electoral processes that fall far short of producing a liberal democratic order; and the nexus between criminals and corrupt bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen’.

The difficulties faced by Bangladesh and Nepal illustrate how nations in South Asia have had to cope with these problems. Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has functioned largely as an ‘illiberal’ and ‘fragmented’ democracy. Two prime ministers were assassinated in its first decade of independence, and this was followed by a military takeover of power. The bureaucracy that the democratic government inherited in 1991 had been compromised by military rule. Despite successful elections, the democratic process has failed in the aftermath. Three weak and largely non-functioning parliaments operated largely as a rubber stamp for endorsing the actions and laws of the government of the day. The Speaker continued to play a partisan role, denying the opposition parties the opportunity to raise issues that challenged the government. Politicization of the key institutions in the country, including the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the Public Service Commission, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the National Board of Revenue and even the security services, in particular the police, led to a loss of faith in democratic government among the public.

As Farooq Sobhan has noted, ‘the biggest bane for democracy in Bangladesh has probably been the cripplingly fractious nature of party politics’ where a ‘political war of attrition’ between the two major parties undermined development and the development of a democratic culture in the country (Sobhan 2009). This has led to political disturbances in the country and a boycott of parliament, and also set back development projects since those sanctioned by one government have been put on the ‘back burner’ under another. Even Bangladesh’s ‘sole contribution to democratic innovation’, establishing a caretaker government to conduct elections under a retired former Chief Justice, which worked reasonably well during the elections in 1991, 1996 and 2001, collapsed in 2006 when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led government with its two-thirds majority in parliament through constitutional amendments placed partisan individuals on the Election Commission to ensure its victory. This led the army to step in to declare a state of emergency. The elections in 2008 mean that Bangladesh is now attempting a ‘rehabilitation of democracy’ (Hachhethu 2009).

Attempts to establish democracy in Nepal since the early 1950s have been equally difficult. In 1960, King Mahendra stifled the first attempt at a royal coup, which was followed by the introduction of the partyless Panchayat system under his absolute rule. Nepal’s second attempt, the people’s movement in 1990, led to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, which functioned largely as an ‘electoral democracy’ rather than a ‘liberal democracy’ because of its many dysfunctional characteristics. In the 15-year period from 1990 to 2005 there were 15 changes of government, which led to an erosion of the image and credentials of political parties and their leaders as well as the obfuscation of parliamentary democracy. The weakness in the system was challenged by two opposing forces: Maoists, who aimed to dismantle the monarchy and parliamentary democracy by launching an insurgency in 1996; and the monarchy, led by the new King, Gyanendra, who took executive power by dismissing the elected government in October 2002 and staged another royal coup in February 2005. Democracy in Nepal was restored for the third time in 2006 after the major political parties, which had been

**South Asia has done comparatively well despite the difficulties in democracy building faced by countries in the region.**

sidelined by the King, joined with the Maoists to overthrow the 240-year old monarchy. The election of a Constituent Assembly (CA) in 2008 transformed the balance of power in the country, increasing substantially the presence of ethnic and regional groups as well as women in the CA (Hachhethu 2009).

The 2009 Freedom House Annual Report notes that, despite the difficulties in democracy building faced by countries in South Asia, the region has done comparatively well compared, for example, to sub Saharan Africa and Central Asia (Puddington 2009). In addition to the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh and Nepal, three other countries have also moved in a positive direction. Bhutan completed the transition it began in 2004 by installing an elected legislature and representative government in 2008. In Pakistan, the military regime was forced out after a general election in September 2008, while in the Maldives, which in 2005 replaced a one-party dominated system with a multiparty system, in November 2008 Mohammad Naseem unseated President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had been in office consecutively for 30 years. Of the remaining countries in the region, Afghanistan became democratic in 2005, but the democratic credibility of the Karzai government has since been eroded. India and Sri Lanka remain democratic, but the human rights record of the government in Colombo has been increasingly questioned by the international community. As Muni notes:

**There are two drivers behind the successful transition to democracy in South Asia: people power and the role of the international community in supporting democracy in the region.**

‘Almost 1.3bn South Asian people, constituting about one-fifth of the world’s population, have chosen democratic governance – but this transition to democracy is still fragile and vulnerable’ (Muni 2009).

Muni suggests that there are two drivers behind the successful transition to democracy in South Asia: people power and the role of the international community in supporting democracy in the region. Civil society, in particular, has played ‘a crucial role in bringing major change to Pakistan and Nepal’ (Zaidi 2008). In Nepal, civil society developed a consensus among the political parties to overthrow the monarchy, and established links between the domestic struggle for democracy and the international community. In other countries the role of civil society was less critical. In Bhutan there was no role for civil society in the democratization process, while in the Maldives human rights issues were raised by the death in custody of a young boy. In Bangladesh, ‘although civil society groups and a plethora of international NGOs stood for democracy, none really opposed the caretaker government’ (International Crisis Group 2008). It was the political parties that stood their ground with the support of the students and young people.

The role of the international community in bringing political change to South Asia has been largely limited to the smaller countries of the region. In the case of Nepal, its role was highly significant. In 2002, when the king moved to curb democracy in the country, India, the United States and the EU tried to dissuade him. After he took direct power in 2005, the international response was first to attempt to persuade him to restore the democratic process, and then, when that failed, to support his opponents in overthrowing him. Other nations followed India’s lead in facilitating the bringing together of a seven-party alliance of the main political parties in Nepal along with the Maoists through a 12-point understanding in order to overthrow the King.



In Pakistan, the so-called war on terror ensured that the international community continued to support the military government for the sake of stability in Pakistan. The international community then quickly adjusted to the new civilian government. In Pakistan, Bhutan and the Maldives the international community accepted radical changes and worked with the new regimes. Some sections of the international community, most notably China and Russia, did not support the changes in Nepal and Pakistan, but quickly became reconciled to the developments taking place in these countries (Muni 2009).

## Perceptions of the European Union in South Asia

The EU evokes mixed feelings in South Asia. Some ask whether it speaks with a collective voice, or only reflects the cacophony of its 27 member states. Even if the EU does in fact have a collective voice, others question its ability to intervene in a meaningful way in the name of the EU to contribute to the sustainability of democratic institutions. Observers in the region note that the EU is not usually consistent in supporting democratic countries and frequently backs countries that lack democratic institutions for reasons related to the EU's own convenience.<sup>1</sup> The EU has a weakness for playing second fiddle to the USA, especially where security and economic policies are concerned. However, it is generally recognized that although South Asia has not been in the frontline of policy for the EU, it has 'a clean slate to begin with and can help greatly without the prejudices of history on development issues and democracy building in the region.'<sup>2</sup>

**The EU evokes mixed feelings in South Asia. Even if the EU does in fact have a collective voice, its ability to intervene in a meaningful way in the name of the EU to contribute to the sustainability of democratic institutions is questioned. The EU is not usually consistent in supporting democratic countries and frequently backs countries that lack democratic institutions for reasons related to the EU's own convenience.**

This perspective is clearly articulated in the summary of International IDEA's regional consultation conference:

The EU is seen to be well-positioned to collaborate with civil society and government in South Asia to strengthen democracy. This is predicated on the fact that the European countries after two world wars were able to transcend their respective nationalism for the greater good of their communities. The EU has rejected the use of military force as a means of resolving conflicts and does not seek to use economic power to establish hegemony over other states. For these reasons, the EU is perceived by the people of South Asia as a community that can exercise smart power to engage in a relationship with South Asian states and civil societies to consolidate democracy in the region.<sup>3</sup>

It is recognized in South Asia that the EU perceives democracy promotion as part of a 'peace strategy' with the inherent benefits of fostering socio-economic development and promoting human rights. Various treaties and documents underscore the importance that the EU attaches to consolidating democracy and establishing the rule of law in other regions of the world. The tools used by the EU to promote democracy

<sup>1</sup> Author interview with Ambassador A.N. Ram, March 2009

<sup>2</sup> Author interview with Dr. Sona Khan, Attorney, Supreme Court of India, March 2009

<sup>3</sup> International IDEA, *Summary of Proceedings: Consultations on the EU's role in democracy building in South Asia*, Stockholm/Kathmandu, International IDEA, March 2009, available at [www.idea.int/eu](http://www.idea.int/eu)

**The EU has preferred to take a ‘bottom-up’ approach to promoting democracy and human rights in South Asia by dealing with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are the main recipients of assistance from the European Commission.**

include instruments of traditional democracy, such as declarations and démarches, development cooperation and assistance programmes, and bilateral political dialogue and negotiations. So called essential element clauses also state that respect for human rights and democratic principles underpin all agreements between the EU and third parties. The EU does not, however, adopt a punitive approach to a breach of such clauses. The operational instruments at the disposal of the European Commission are primarily election

assistance/observation and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

The EU has preferred to take a ‘bottom-up’ approach to promoting democracy and human rights in South Asia by dealing with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are the main recipients of assistance from the European Commission. Although the role of civil society is increasing in the region, there is an ongoing debate among scholars and policymakers about the kind of role it can play.

On the whole, the initiatives taken by the EU in South Asia have created a positive image of the EU in the region. In Bangladesh, the European Commission identified six core areas in which it has a competitive advantage for itself, including capacity building to consolidate good governance and the rule of law. As part of the EIDHR, the European Commission provides support for electoral reform, election observation and the training of lawyers. Under an agreement signed with Bangladesh in 2001, known as the Trade and Commercial agreement, five key areas were identified for closer development cooperation. One of these was good governance and human rights, and it was under this provision that the European Union Election Observation Mission was deployed to observe the general election in October 2001.

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One of the greatest success stories of the EU’s involvement in Bangladesh has been the Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs (PERP) programme that was completed ahead of time in 2008. Over 80 million voters were registered in a scientific manner under the programme and the EU was the principal financier, contributing €15 million.

In the case of Nepal, the international community has long had a positive image in the country. During the Cold War, democracy was not the guiding principle for disbursing foreign assistance in Nepal, and Nepal received more bilateral than multilateral assistance. After the end of the Cold War, which coincided with the first people’s movement in 1990s, donors focused more on democracy building in the country. The three major areas where national stakeholders and the international community have collaborated for citizens’ actions include: democracy and human rights; empowerment of marginalized groups, such as women and dalit; and collective rights for excluded groups. These ‘software projects’, as opposed to ‘hardware projects’ related to infrastructure development, have been supported, among others, by the EU.

Since the success of the people’s movement and the restoration of democracy, the EU has revised its priorities in Nepal. Peace-building, education and the consolidation of democracy were identified as key areas for support for 2007–2013. The earlier priority

placed on poverty reduction and the integration of Nepal into the international community has been downgraded for the immediate future (Hachhethu 2009).

In the case of Pakistan, there are a number of reasons why the EU is regarded as a preferred partner for supporting the process of democracy building in the country. First, it has a 'good credit rating' through its role as an important trading partner and the role it played in supporting the Lawyers' Movement. Its support for the victims of the earthquake in Kashmir in 2005 was also perceived positively, as is its achievement of an economic union that holds together the 27 member states. In addition, unlike the USA, the EU has not taken actions that violate the territorial sovereignty of Pakistan, and is perceived as a peace-builder in the region. Finally, the EU has become part of the Friends of Pakistan Forum, which was launched in September 2008 to support the Government of Pakistan in its efforts to consolidate democracy.

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EU policy on Pakistan has focused mainly on development aid and to a lesser extent on trade and political issues. Like India, Pakistan has been attempting to establish a free trade agreement with the EU. There are indications that EU policy towards Pakistan will see a change in the near future due to the security threat posed by terrorism in the country. Under the EIDHR the EU has supported micro-projects in Pakistan, including programmes in the field of education, but a substantial proportion of the funds from this programme were reallocated to support the European Union Election Observation Monitors (EUEOM) for the February 2008 elections. The role of the EUEOM was perceived as a positive one in Pakistan, since its final verdict 'contributed to the general acceptance of the results in difficult circumstances, and resulted in increased public confidence in democracy in Pakistan' (Abbasi 2009).

India and the EU have on many occasions expressed their commitment to defending democracy and human rights, and India is viewed by the EU as a key partner in supporting these goals and in promoting stability and democracy. The Joint Action Plan of the India-EU strategic partnership stipulated that the two sides should work together on 'possible synergies and initiatives to promote human rights and democracy' in relevant international bodies, such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights or the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. These commitments have remained largely paper commitments, however, and there has been very little coordination on any of these goals.

In addition, as Jain observes, the EU's perception of democracy building is a little different to that of India. For India, it signifies the need to make the structure of global governance, through the G-8, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Security Council, more representative and legitimate. Indians see Europe as 'clearly overrepresented, but not in a hurry to reduce its overrepresentation' (Jain 2009).

## **The EU-SAARC partnership in democracy building**

The EU's relations with SAARC are among the least developed of its relations with any of the regional bodies. As Bhargava and Reed note, SAARC's relations with the EU

**The EU's relations with SAARC are among the least developed of its relations with any of the regional bodies. There has been little progress made between the EU and SAARC on democracy building.**

have developed slowly and have yet to mature, largely due to the restraint that South Asia has shown in its integration process (Bhargava and Reed 2009).

There has been little progress made between the EU and SAARC on democracy building. In 1992, a formal decision was taken by SAARC to extend its relations with regional and international bodies, including the EU. EU-SAARC political dialogues began in 1994 and the European

Commission and the SAARC secretariat signed a memorandum of understanding in 1996. This eventually led to agreements on cooperation in four trade-related areas: improved market access for SAARC products in the EU; rules of origin for SAARC products for export to the EU; technical support from the EU for the establishment of a South Asian Free Trade Agreement; and support for the harmonization of SAARC standards. The EU was admitted to SAARC as an observer in 2007, but the role assigned to observers is very limited, allowing them to present proposals for collaboration only at the invitation of competent SAARC bodies and no involvement in the decision-making process (Bhargava and Reed 2009).

**The SAARC Social Charter does not touch on the subject of promoting or stabilizing democracy in the region, but in recent years there have been many references to the region's commitment to democratic ideals. There is a common consensus that the SAARC Social Charter, in particular, provides an 'entry point' for democracy building at the regional level.**

The SAARC Social Charter does not touch on the subject of promoting or stabilizing democracy in the region, but in recent years there have been many references, either directly or tangentially, in a number of SAARC documents to the region's commitment to democratic ideals. There is a common consensus that the SAARC Social Charter, in particular, provides an 'entry point' for democracy building at the regional level.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between what a social charter means in South Asia and what one means in the developed countries of the West. In the latter case, it largely affirms and validates what has been developed and already exists. In the case of South Asia, the development of the SAARC Social Charter is about the 'progressive realization of social and economic rights' and how to make it an 'instrument that would empower and enable the peoples... to realize these goals'. Moreover, the focus in South Asia is on disadvantaged social groups that are 'relatively unorganized, voiceless and hence deprived of agency – the poor, women, children and youth', although not mentioning, for example, workers' rights. The document approved by the SAARC Summit in 2004 defines neither the rights of citizens nor the obligations of states. The final document was developed on the basis of regional consensus. The Charter plays with words in order to find a middle ground between a voluntary and a prescriptive, binding instrument, but the language gives it a binding character since the member states agree that 'the obligations under the Social Charter shall be respected, protected and fulfilled without reservation and that the enforcement therefore at the national level shall be continuously reviewed through agreed regional arrangements and mechanisms'.<sup>4</sup> The main text is a mixture of declarations and binding commitments. Some articles adopt the language of UN declarations and resolutions and are not much

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<sup>4</sup> SAARC Social Charter, Art. 1, para. 2, [www.saarc-sec.org/?id=13](http://www.saarc-sec.org/?id=13)

more than statements of good intentions and exhortations to member states. However, others contain elements of international covenants and conventions of a binding nature. The Charter stands out as the first document from the SAARC countries to recognize the principle of good governance and, by implication, the Charter calls for a legal, administrative and judicial framework that ensures its implementation. This would include the need to establish a National Coordinating Committee, formulate a national plan of action through a broadly based participatory process and involve stakeholder participation in the implementation and evaluation of the Charter (Gunatilleke 2009).

Godfrey Gunatilleke believes that the Social Charter can have a significant impact on democratic processes and institutions in South Asia, and that the Citizens' Social Charter, which was prepared by the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) in a parallel and participatory exercise, can 'provide a useful frame of reference for monitoring and implementing the SAARC Social Charter' because the Citizens' Charter develops each section with detailed targets and guidelines for a work plan (Gunatilleke 2009). In addition, Gunatilleke notes that although the SAARC Social Charter does not dwell on civil and political rights, which are the focus of the EIDHR, it provides 'the means for the enhancement and strengthening of democracy through the promotion of social, economic and cultural rights' which can be used to strengthen the 'social component' of democracy building in South Asia.

## The way ahead: some policy recommendations

The EU and South Asia can work together in partnership for democracy building in the region. In this regard, the EU should consider not only how to build democracy, but also 'how not to build democracy', based on its own past experience in the region and elsewhere. The responsibility for initiating and implementing decisions to institutionalize democracy lies with South Asia. External actors can play only a supportive role, and their capacity to bring about fundamental change in the region, except in the case of smaller countries in special circumstances, is severely limited.

**The EU and South Asia can work together in partnership for democracy building in the region. However, the responsibility for initiating and implementing decisions to institutionalize democracy lies with South Asia.**

Another issue that frequently emerges is the need for the EU to be clear about the premise on which it bases its engagement in democracy building in South Asia. Does the EU want to promote 'democracy and development'? Or is it interested in promoting 'democracy in development'? It was emphasized during the International IDEA consultations that the difference between the two is fundamental. While the first sees the problem as a public administration issue, the latter recognizes the fact that the democratization of the development process is in itself an integral element of the promotion of democracy and establishing democracy with a real link to development. Furthermore, unless you 'make the broad constituencies of people into stakeholders in the democratic process you are in fact going to face serious difficulties in the sustainability of democracy'.<sup>5</sup>

These points have not yet been clearly incorporated by the EU into its policy for democracy building in other regions. The Human Development Report, developed

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<sup>5</sup> Author interview with Ambassador Rehman Sobhan, March 2009

by Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq (UNDP 2009), tried to link these ideas and the Millennium Development Goals developed the notion further by setting targets to be achieved within specified timeframes. The Swedish perspective suggests that in democracy building ‘all decisions and measures must be taken with respect for universally accepted human rights and democratic principles’ and that the ‘interests and priorities of poor individuals themselves should be the point of departure for these decisions and measures’ (Bhargava and Reed 2009).

The recommendations coming out of the International IDEA consultations in South Asia strongly endorse the Development in Democracy model, on which the EU’s support for democracy building programmes in South Asia should be based. The main premise is to empower the people of the region and make political leaders and institutions more accountable to the people. The recommendations of this chapter are also made with an understanding that South Asia includes eight countries that are diverse and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach by the EU may not be conducive for democracy building in the region. Sri Lanka and India are at the high end of democratic evolution while many others are “nascent democracies” still struggling to establish a democratic order. There is still much scope for intra-regional sharing of experience and best practices. The EU, at best, can be supportive and a facilitator in a non-intrusive way, while South Asia has to find its own answers consistent with its genius and ethos. The recommendations are grouped in three categories: those that are common to all the countries of the region; those that are country-specific; and those steps that may be taken by the EU to strengthen democracy building through the SAARC process.

The recommendations that apply to all the countries are as follows:

1. *Democratization of political parties:* The common problem in South Asia is that even though political parties are very active in preaching democracy in their respective countries, many do not function in a democratic manner in either the selection of key leaders or their decision-making processes. The EU should consider programmes to encourage reform of the political parties in the region, preferably with the involvement of members of the European Parliament, in order to increase accountability and transparency. The EU is also in a good position to support programmes that enhance inter-party dialogue, which is sorely lacking in many countries in South Asia, in order to build consensus among different political forces.
2. *Capacity building for state institutions to establish proper checks and balances:* The patronage system in South Asia has spill-over effects for the way in which governments operate in the region, where the excesses of the executive branch often go unchecked. The EU should initiate programmes on democratic practices and procedures to ensure that the state institutions that have a crucial role in establishing good governance in the country function in a meaningful way. The major institutions in need of reform include the judiciary and the police, to name only two. To support this, training modules should be prepared by the EU in collaboration with the host countries so that officials learn operational methods from the best practices of European institutions, which allow them to stay above politics and beyond corruption. The EU should also provide technical support to upgrade logistical frameworks in key institutions, computerize public records and modernize the election commissions as well as providing support to national

human rights commissions to improve access to justice, particularly for groups that have been neglected in the past.

3. *Strengthening the legislative branch of government:* Many elected representatives in South Asian countries enter the legislative branch of government unaware of the role they are expected to play in order to meet the needs of their constituents. The EU should devise programmes that would bring them up-to-the-mark on crucial issues, such as consensus-building, forming an effective opposition, methods of working in different parliamentary committees and the standards of behaviour needed for the effective functioning of parliamentary democracy.
4. *Programmes to make civil society more effective:* Compared to the role of civil society in the EU, civil society in South Asia is only beginning to organize itself in order to contribute to a more effective and accountable democratic process. Civil society has registered successes in some countries, but has not yet been able to act in a cohesive manner to have a long-term impact on democracy building in the region. The EU should play an important role in democracy building by promoting activities that foster dialogue and knowledge-sharing among civil society groups within and between the countries in South Asia. Such a network could pursue programmes jointly to promote democracy, encourage coexistence among political parties and support institution building in South Asian countries. In addition, as some country strategy papers of the EU have acknowledged recently, there is a need for the EU to properly balance the involvement of civil society and government in its programmes, including in development programmes, so that there is a higher degree of ownership from the key stakeholders in the country.
5. *Media training:* The media in South Asia has developed significantly in recent decades and has been able to play a relatively effective role in sensitizing people on political developments and making political leaders and governments more accountable to the public. A regional network of media experts under the South Asian Media Net (SAFMA) has played a crucial role in bringing together experts in this field. The EU, in particular, should support media programmes in order to create a better understanding of concepts and issues and to strengthen the democratic process, improve reporting skills and parliamentary coverage, improve the reporting of political activities, and help to improve skills in the area of investigative reporting.
6. *Centres of excellence for the study of democracy:* The contemporary debate on democracy building in South Asia lacks a solid grounding of social and scientific research in many of the countries in the region. The EU should set up centres of excellence for the study of democracy in each of the SAARC member states. These centres could become catalysts for disseminating information on democratic practices and on how democracy functions, including how it affects the average citizen.

**There is a need for the EU to properly balance the involvement of civil society and government in its programmes, including in development programmes.**

In addition to the above recommendations, some specific measures that the EU might wish to take in individual countries are suggested.

1. *In Pakistan*, the USA and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies have prioritized military efforts and the so-called war on terror, while the social causes of extremism that feed terrorism and instability are not adequately addressed. The EU should play an important role in the fields of education, social awareness and employment generation programmes (Muni 2009). Similarly, EU aid is targeted to Pakistan's remote border areas to deal with the threat of terrorism, but such programmes should be extended to the larger cities, such as Karachi, Multan and Quetta, where similar threats also exist (Abbasi 2009).
2. *In Nepal*, the EU should focus its energy on bringing to its logical conclusion the peace process that moved a step further after the second people's movement in 2006. Democratic consolidation through state restructuring with a new constitution will be difficult until security sector reform, reconstruction and rehabilitation of the conflict-torn society have been accomplished (Muni 2009). Nepal is in the process of a radical political transformation, so the EU should take additional initiatives to 'build democracy from below'. The 2007 Nepal democracy survey noted that uneven development, which produces economic disparities and inequality among people in different groups and areas, makes people indifferent to the nature of the political system – be it democracy or dictatorship. The EU could play a lead role in getting the international community to refocus on development issues, which will benefit marginalized groups and reach out to the remote areas in order to help ensure an inclusive approach to democracy building in Nepal (Hachhethu 2009).
3. *In Bangladesh*, the EU could be a valuable partner in the process of consolidating democracy, which has oscillated dramatically in recent decades. Capacity building and the strengthening of institutions are essential if Bangladesh is to function and achieve stability. The EU should also play an important role in strengthening local governance by establishing a programme for participatory planning, and introducing efficient budgeting procedures and effective monitoring and control mechanisms for performance assessment (Sobhan 2009).

**The EU has a major role to play in strengthening the 'social component of democracy' by providing support and sharing experience in a number of areas.**

The recommendations on the complex issue of how the EU and SAARC might collaborate to promote democracy at the regional level represent a major breakthrough. The EU has a major role to play in strengthening the 'social component of democracy' by providing support and sharing experience in a number of areas, such as:

1. Providing assistance to the National Coordination Committees of SAARC member states to develop and strengthen the institutional framework for planning and monitoring the implementation of programmes under the SAARC Social Charter;
2. Supporting civil society to strengthen the participatory process and structures for implementation and monitoring of national plans of action;
3. Assisting the other local stakeholders with monitoring the national plans of action in selected areas where participatory structures for monitoring and accountability are developed and sustained;
4. Sharing the EU's own experience and assisting in the development of structures for



participatory governance and local level democracy to implement the objectives of the Social Charter; and

5. Using the social window of the South Asian Development Fund and collaborating with SAARC to select and finance activities under the Social Charter.

While building on the seminal work that has been done on the SAARC Social Charter, all these activities should happen in parallel with a comprehensive programme to develop a Bill of Rights and Obligations for democracies in South Asia, preferably through a South Asian Democratic Charter. The EU has a significant role to play in this effort by bringing together experts and stakeholders in the region to chalk out a programme on how the Bill might be drafted and eventually adopted. The best practices of the EU, the Organization of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU) and other regions could all be considered when preparing the document.

**The EU has a significant role to play in this effort by bringing together experts and stakeholders in the region to chalk out a programme on how a Bill of Rights and Obligations for democracies in South Asia might be drafted and eventually adopted.**

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# The European Union and democracy building in Southeast Asia

Rizal Sukma

## Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in Southeast Asia, and the manner in which the present role of the European Union (EU) is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations for consideration by the EU are presented with a view to addressing the gap between policy intentions and Southeast Asian perceptions of the EU's ambitions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in Southeast Asia, as initiated and conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

With the exception of Thailand, all the states in Southeast Asia are post-colonial states. Their different trajectories to independence, ranging from revolutionary wars to peaceful de-colonization, combined with a long history and diverse cultural traits give rise to a region characterized by enormous diversity. By the mid-1970s, most Southeast Asian countries had opted for some form of developmental authoritarian regime, preferring to privilege economic development and political stability at the expense of democracy. Decades of successful economic development paved the way for democracy to re-enter the region by the late 1980s. The influence of this democratic wave, however, was not even.

Economic disparity as a demonstration of the lack of economic development is often used to justify resistance to the introduction of democracy by authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes in the region. Adverse internal conditions have in turn created an atmosphere that is suspicious of external interference among states in the region. Consequently, all ASEAN states – albeit to varying degrees – jealously guard the principle of non-interference as a principal norm in inter-state relations.

The move towards democracy in Indonesia in May 1998, which followed the examples of the Philippines in 1986 and Thailand in 1992, provides regional champions and further consolidates the notion that Southeast Asia is not hostile to the idea of democracy. The improved prospects for democracy in Southeast Asia are often associated with recently

concluded agreements by ASEAN countries, especially the ASEAN Concord II, the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint. The existence of a vibrant civil society and vibrant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which work primarily to promote democracy and human rights in the region is also a positive development.

Among Southeast Asian states, there is a degree of ambivalence in their perception of the importance or significance of the EU in the region. The EU is perceived as an important actor in economic terms in global and regional theatres, including Southeast Asia. However, it is also seen as geographically, historically, militarily and politically distant. The policy suggestions generated by the International IDEA consultation process seek to narrow the gap between the EU's objectives and its implementation; and to enhance the effectiveness of the EU's role in assisting the democracy building process in the region. Despite regional perceptions that the EU has only limited political influence in the region, there is a recognition that the EU is equipped with both the capacity and the resources to play a much more active and visible role in the future. That, however, would require a willingness on the part of the EU to fully engage with Southeast Asia in a constructive manner and as an equal partner.

## Introduction

Any engagement in democracy building in Southeast Asia by the European Union (EU) requires a comprehensive understanding of the state of democracy in the region, and an awareness of the EU's position there, perceived or otherwise. The Democracy in Development project initiated by International IDEA aimed precisely at providing such understanding and awareness. This chapter reflects the regional consultations organized by International IDEA in Jakarta and provides an overview of the findings and the discussions that were part of those consultations.

With the exception of Thailand, all the states in Southeast Asia are post-colonial states and have become modern independent states since the end of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Their different trajectories to independence, ranging from revolutionary wars to peaceful de-colonization, combined with a long history and diverse cultural traits give rise to a region characterized by enormous diversity. At the same time, Southeast Asian countries are imbued with the strong sense of nationalism typical of post-colonial states, and preoccupied with the overriding concerns of state-building and regime consolidation in the face of adverse internal challenges – in both political-security and economic terms.

In the immediate post-colonial environment, democracy was not the preferred system of government for many indigenous rulers in the region. Several democratic experiments were short-lived, and those in Indonesia and Myanmar were abandoned in 1957 and in 1963, respectively. By the mid-1970s, most Southeast Asian countries had opted for some form of developmental authoritarian regime, preferring economic development and political stability at the expense of democracy. Decades of successful economic development, however, paved the way for democracy to re-enter the region by the late 1980s. The influence of this democratic wave, however, was not even. As the region

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<sup>1</sup> The Southeast Asian countries are: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, and Timor Leste. All except Timor Leste are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

entered the 21st century, Southeast Asia was still home to countries with diverse political systems, ranging from an absolute monarchy and a brutal military junta to democratic and semi-democratic states.

Democracy building in the region should therefore be understood in the context of Southeast Asia as a region with both extreme diversity and a degree of regional commonality. These two main features present challenges but also opportunities for democracy to flourish from within and for external partners, such as the EU, to support and facilitate the process through constructive partnership and sustainable engagement.

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## **Democracy building in Southeast Asia: challenges and opportunities**

Until recently, Southeast Asia was not a fertile ground for democratic ideas to flourish. By end of the 20th century, however, three countries – the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia – had embraced democracy. Even in these countries, the transition to democracy has been neither smooth nor easy. Thailand has experienced problems of democratic backsliding, and is struggling to return to democratic political life. Other countries in the region, especially Myanmar, have shown no enthusiasm for moving towards democracy any time soon. Democracy building in Southeast Asia has been problematic and beset by various challenges in the region.

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### ***The challenges to democracy building***

The most-often cited challenge to democracy building in the region is the economic disparity among and within the states (Villacorta 2009). Southeast Asia is host to one of the richest countries and also the poorest country in the world. The gap is evident between the original and the newer Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. Among its original member states, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of Brunei and Singapore, for example, is USD 35,622 and USD 38,046 respectively. Of the other four original members, Malaysia has the highest GDP (USD 7,969), followed by Thailand (USD 4,116), Indonesia (USD 2,236) and the Philippines (USD 1,843). The new ASEAN member states still fall within the category of low income countries. The per capita GDP of Myanmar is only USD 464, Cambodia USD 756, Lao PDR USD 917 and Vietnam USD 1,052. This gap is also evident with other socio-economic indicators, such as literacy rates and the incidence of poverty.

The economic disparity between the old and new ASEAN member states is also reflected in the attitude to democracy of the various regimes. While the original members, apart from Brunei, are relatively open to democratic forms of government, some of the newer members are either Leninist authoritarian states (Vietnam and Lao PDR) or a military dictatorship (Myanmar). Economic disparity as a demonstration of the lack of economic development is often used to justify resistance to the introduction

of democracy by authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes in the region. For these countries, democracy is seen as a hindrance to economic development (Petcharamesree 2009). They also argue that a government that can deliver economic prosperity matters more to its local population than the type of political system adopted by the state. From this point of view, democracy is desirable only after economic prosperity and social rights have been achieved.

The difficulty in embracing democracy is also framed within the particular cultural context of Southeast Asian states. All Southeast Asian countries are characterized by multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multicultural populations. In this context, democracy – and its emphasis on human rights – is often seen as an alien concept that does not necessarily resonate with the local and national cultures of Southeast Asian states.

Many ASEAN states have long argued that democracy and human rights cannot be imposed or transplanted from outside, but its development has to flourish from within the state concerned according to its own stages of economic development and cultural context. Indeed, many ASEAN countries still strongly subscribe to the cultural relativist view of democracy and human rights (Villacorta 2009).

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To many governments in Southeast Asia, the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious character of the state presents a significant challenge to the maintenance of political stability and internal security. Many countries in the region have had to deal with internal insurgencies, ethnic and religious violence, and secessionist challenges. Some of these problems continue to pose formidable problems for ASEAN member states such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines and even Myanmar. The fragile nature of these states means that overarching concerns over the tasks of internal consolidation, state-building and the maintenance of internal security present serious challenges to democracy building in the region. Southeast Asian regimes often argue that democracy might not be readily suitable for a society fraught with severe internal security problems. They believe that such societies require strong and centralized government, and a government capable of establishing social and political stability. It is only this type of government, it is argued, that is capable of undertaking uninterrupted economic development.

Adverse internal conditions have in turn created an atmosphere that is suspicious of external interference among states in the region. Consequently, all ASEAN states – albeit to varying degrees – jealously guard the principle of non-interference as a principal norm in inter-state relations (Krishnan 2009, Sukma 2009, Villacorta 2009). ASEAN reiterated in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Charter in December 2005 that inter-state relations should be based on the recognition of ‘the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference,

subversion or coercion and non-interference in the internal affairs of one another’. Democracy building has long been suspect and regarded as one such external interference. In other words, the democracy building agenda is constrained by the principle of non-interference, and thus democracy can only be promoted within the national boundary of a member state if that state sees fit to democratize on its own initiative. External pressure is deemed a breach of the

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principle of non-interference. Even Indonesia, which is a democratizing state, remains sensitive to any attempt by external forces to push the democratization agenda further.

Weak state institutions present another set of challenges to democracy in the region. A corrupt and incompetent bureaucracy, a partial judiciary, an ineffective or non-functioning legislature and weak security actors are all formidable potential stumbling blocks for democracy building efforts. These problems are more evident in the more democratic Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines. In these countries, moving from procedural democracy to a more substantial democracy is proving to be a difficult task. Weak state institutions could perpetuate the low quality of democracy in these countries.

The nature of democracy in some Southeast Asian states, which is still weak and in the early stages of consolidation, also presents a challenge to further efforts to promote a democracy building agenda in the region. Neither Indonesia nor the Philippines can claim to have become a fully fledged democracy. Democracy in Indonesia and the Philippines, the only remaining democracies in the region, is still fraught with problems and defects. Neither has yet acquired strong enough moral credibility to call on others to adopt democracy. Some ASEAN states have repeatedly disparaged the situation in both countries since they embraced democracy. For some developing Southeast Asian states, the democracy of Indonesia and the Philippines is not an attractive alternative to the existing political system – they have even begun to look at the developmental authoritarian types of government in China and Singapore.

Finally, the reality of geopolitics and the influence and interests of the major powers in Southeast Asia could also serve as a stumbling block for the promotion of the democracy agenda in the region. This is illustrated clearly in the case of Myanmar. Even if ASEAN decided to isolate the Myanmar Government because of the lack of progress in the democratization process, such a move would be toothless in the face of Myanmar's growing dependence on, and support from, China and India. The strategic interests of these two major powers mean that they would be more than willing to ignore the domestic problems of Myanmar in exchange for access to the energy resources – especially oil and gas – in that country. Even the democratic India is reluctant to press a democracy agenda on Myanmar for fear that such action would push Myanmar closer to China. Indonesia, the largest democracy in Southeast Asia, has also admitted that any attempt to encourage political change in Myanmar would not be possible without the active support of China and India.

### ***The opportunities for democracy building***

Despite the plethora of challenges described above, the prospects for democracy building in Southeast Asia are not altogether negative (Sukma 2009, Villacorta 2009, Krishnan 2009). Opportunities for the pursuit of a democracy building agenda have opened up due to the regional commitment by ASEAN, the presence of regional champions and a vibrant civil society, and public support for democracy.

The move towards democracy in Indonesia in May 1998, which followed the examples of the Philippines in 1986 and

**Opportunities for the pursuit of a democracy building agenda have opened up due to the regional commitment by ASEAN, the presence of regional champions and a vibrant civil society, and public support for democracy. Southeast Asia is not hostile to the idea of democracy.**

Thailand in 1992, provides regional champions and further consolidates the notion that Southeast Asia is not hostile to the idea of democracy. Indonesia and the Philippines were behind the efforts to bring the democracy agenda to ASEAN in 2003–2004. Domestically, both Indonesia and the Philippines are obliged to continue their efforts to consolidate democracy in their respective countries. Thailand, in the meantime, remains preoccupied with the tremendous challenge of restoring democracy after the acute political crisis in the country. The other original members of ASEAN are likely to react positively to a democracy agenda for ASEAN, albeit in a limited way.

The improved prospects for democracy in Southeast Asia are often associated with recently concluded agreements by ASEAN countries, especially the ASEAN Concord II, the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint. Throughout International IDEA's regional consultations in Southeast Asia it has been highlighted that these agreements, despite some inherent limitations, should be seen as an opening, and need to be used as an entry point, for the democracy building agenda in the region. While the commitment to democracy contained in these documents does not necessarily reflect a genuine collective regional will (Krishnan 2009), it nonetheless provides legitimacy for ASEAN and its individual member states to work to push the agenda.

The existence of a vibrant civil society and vibrant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which work primarily to promote democracy and human rights in the region is a positive development for democratization in Southeast Asia (Petcharamesree 2009, Gil 2009). The work of civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs in their individual countries has been instrumental in promoting human rights and democracy building efforts and there is now an emerging network of such organizations at the regional level. This network is a significant building block for democracy building in both individual member states and the region (Sukma 2009, Gil 2009). More importantly, Pinao shows that there is also growing public support for democracy, including in the non-democratic countries of Southeast Asia (Pinao 2009).

### **Southeast Asia's perceptions of the EU: limits, gaps and the potential for comprehensive engagement**

This section examines the EU's policies, instruments and objectives for democracy building in Southeast Asia, and how its agenda and image are perceived there – in terms of both policy and implementation. These questions were discussed at the International IDEA consultation process in the region.

The European Community (EC)-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement was signed in March 1980 at the second ASEAN-EC Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Both sides agreed that commercial, economic and technical cooperation would be the focus of the relationship. Any reference to political cooperation, let alone cooperation on democracy building and human rights, was conspicuously absent. In these early years, ASEAN-EC cooperation primarily focused on economic and development issues, especially trade. A greater focus on democracy and human rights began to emerge in the early 1990s.

From 2000, human rights and democracy began to occupy a central place in the EU's policy on Asia as a whole, especially with the publication of the European Commission's Strategic Framework in 2001. In the 2003 Communication from the Commission,



A New Partnership with Southeast Asia, the EU consolidated the place of human rights and the democracy promotion agenda as one of six key priorities in EU relations with Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup>

The evolution of the EU's relations with ASEAN seems to have contributed to the strong and persistent impression among Southeast Asian countries of the EU as an economic power. As an economic entity, the EU is regarded as an inspiration, but not as a model, for successful regional economic integration. While ASEAN shares the objective, the emphasis on the uniqueness of the region is construed as a reason why ASEAN has no intention of emulating the EU model of integration. It is telling that in Southeast Asia the EU suffers from a low level of recognition for its developmental and humanitarian efforts. Meanwhile, the EU sees itself and its role in these areas as that of a 'global pioneer' and as a role model (Chaban and Holland 2009).

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Among Southeast Asian states, there is a degree of ambivalence in their perception of the importance or significance of the EU in the region. The EU is perceived as an important actor in economic terms in global and regional theatres, including Southeast Asia. However, the EU is also seen as geographically, historically, militarily and politically distant from the region. Elites and the general public alike regard the EU as a distant, almost invisible, entity. In this context, the EU is construed as a 'significant Other' in Southeast Asian countries, although its importance is undervalued (Chaban and Holland 2009). In other words, the EU is recognized as an important actor but at the same time one that ASEAN countries can live without.

**The EU is perceived as an important actor in economic terms in global and regional theatres, including Southeast Asia. However, the EU is also seen as geographically, historically, militarily and politically distant from the region. The EU is recognized as an important actor but at the same time one that ASEAN countries can live without.**

Given such perceptions, it is hardly surprising that most Southeast Asian countries also see the influence of the EU as limited. In fact, individual EU member states – especially the United Kingdom, Germany and France – are seen to have exercised far greater influence than the EU as a collective entity. This is most notable with regard to the EU's role in promoting democracy and human rights in the region. In general, many in Southeast Asia argue that the limited role of the EU in this area is partly a product of the strong sense of nationalism among countries in the region which, in turn, often shapes the rigid reaction to external involvement. It could also be pointed out that for Southeast Asia, the EU is only a distant power in a region where events tend to be shaped by other, more visible major powers such as the United States, China, Japan and India (Chaban and Holland 2009). Moreover, the growing dynamism of East Asia, which serves as the key driver of regional economic and political developments, further limits the EU's influence in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> The other five priorities are: (1) supporting regional stability and the fight against terrorism; (2) mainstreaming justice and home affairs issues; (3) injecting a new dynamism into regional trade and investment relations; (4) continuing to support the development of less prosperous countries; and (5) intensifying dialogue and cooperation in specific policy areas. See Commission of the European Communities, Communication From The Commission, A New Partnership With Southeast Asia, Brussels, 9 July 2003, COM (2003) 399 final

**There is still a lack of awareness in Southeast Asia of the EU's specific policies on democracy and human rights.**

In general, the image of the EU as an advocate of democracy promotion does not register strongly in many Southeast Asian countries. However, the role of the EU in the field of human rights promotion is more visible and better recognized. In this field, views are divided between those of many governments in the region and those of civil society

groups. To governments, the EU's agenda on human rights is seen as intrusive, and often serves as a source of friction and tension in EU-ASEAN relations. Civil society organizations, however, criticize the EU for being an ineffective human rights actor. While acknowledging the importance of the work of the EU in this field, there is still a lack of awareness in Southeast Asia of the EU's specific policies on this issue. For example, it has been pointed out that there is little awareness throughout Asia of the 2004 EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. This is caused, among other things, by the lack of active promotional and implementation work carried out by EU missions abroad (Gil 2009).

The most striking assessment of the role of the EU in Southeast Asia is the identification of a gap between the EU's objectives and the implementation of policies to achieve those objectives. It has been pointed out, for example, that there is a gap between rhetoric and

action in the EU's role in promoting democracy in Southeast Asia, which results from incoherent and inconsistent EU strategies (Pinao 2009). In the human rights field, for example, a gap exists between the objectives of the Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and their implementation. It has been also asserted that the limited success of the EU in promoting democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia is due to the EU's pragmatism in the management of its relations with the region (Petcharamesree 2009). The EU has also been less effective at pursuing political conditionality in Asia (Pinao 2009).

**The most striking assessment of the role of the EU in Southeast Asia is the identification of a gap between the EU's objectives and the implementation of policies to achieve those objectives. There is a gap between rhetoric and action in the EU's role in promoting democracy in Southeast Asia, which results from incoherent and inconsistent EU strategies.**

There is a recognition, however, that the EU is equipped with both the capacity and the resources to play a much more active and visible role in the future. There is still much room for improvement in the EU's engagement with Southeast Asia. The EU's influence and position as a global power could grow in future (Chaban and Holland 2009). The willingness of the EU to engage fully with Asia is seen as a factor that strengthens the expectation that the EU would and could play a helpful, meaningful and constructive role

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as a partner in democracy building in the region.

## **Policy proposals for the EU's approach to democracy building**

A number of policy suggestions were generated by the International IDEA regional consultation process in Southeast Asia. These seek to narrow the gap between the EU's objectives and their implementation, and to enhance the effectiveness of the EU's role in assisting the democracy building process in the region. The overview below suggests that the EU needs to formulate and undertake its role in the democracy building project

in Southeast Asia taking into account the context, nature, scope, substance, modalities, and methods and structure of engagement.

If the EU wants to play an effective role in regional affairs, it needs to appreciate the context in which such a role can be carried out. The key to such an understanding would be recognition that Southeast Asia is a region characterized by prevailing political, historical, socio-economic, cultural and ideological differences among the countries of the region. It is important to recognize that such diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for democracy building in the region. While it certainly limits what can be achieved, such diversity also provides opportunities for improvement and progress. A measure of realism in the EU's engagement with Southeast Asia is therefore imperative. The democracy building agenda, despite ASEAN's stated commitment to make it a collective regional principle and objective, will invite different reactions and responses from different member states.

In the course of the regional consultation, Southeast Asians reiterated that democracy cannot be imposed from outside but is essentially home-grown. The EU can only be an effective partner when its engagement with Southeast Asia is demonstrably in the spirit of an equal partnership, mutual respect and shared responsibility. Engagement should avoid any tendency to sustain and perpetuate a donor-recipient relationship. More importantly, in order to improve impacts and outcomes, the EU's engagement should be guided by a willingness and a determination to build a sustainable and long-term partnership. Any engagement short of these qualities would certainly invite a backlash, generate resistance and be ineffective. The democracy building agenda is too valuable to be derailed by the intended and unintended consequences of a hierarchy of power among nations.

**The EU can only be an effective partner when its engagement with Southeast Asia is demonstrably in the spirit of an equal partnership, mutual respect and shared responsibility. The EU's engagement should be guided by a willingness and a determination to build a sustainable and long-term partnership.**

The EU's engagement with Southeast Asia should be guided by the principle of comprehensiveness. Democracy is not a distinct process that flourishes in a vacuum. In taking this reality into account, the EU should not focus only on fields such as trade or human rights. Its engagement should encompass a wide range of issues. Democracy and human rights should be seen as cross-cutting issues which inform and colour the EU's engagement with Southeast Asia. For example, EU assistance with economic development should be seen as strengthening the foundation of democracy in the long term. The limited scope for the democracy agenda in Southeast Asia means that this incremental and long-term approach would require the EU to confine its programmes to a number of specific agendas that are acceptable to all the ASEAN member states, especially the non-democratic members. For example, the EU could focus on less sensitive issues such as strengthening governance capacities, combating corruption, humanitarian relief, disaster management and promoting bureaucratic reform.

Even though the principle of comprehensiveness is preferable, there is also an urgent need for prioritization within specific timeframes. Capacity building, especially in the fields of education and strengthening public awareness, is seen as an agenda that would appeal to the needs of Southeast Asian countries across the region. More activities should be targeted at parliamentarians, the judiciary, civil society and similar actors. There is still an urgent need for the EU to increase its role in working with democratizing

ASEAN states on key issues such as strengthening the political party system, the role of parliaments, security sector reform (with a special focus on military reform), legal reform and the role of the media and CSOs. More comprehensive country-specific strategies and agendas need to be developed in this regard. The EU could also link itself to, and establish a framework of participation in, region-wide democracy projects inside and outside the framework of ASEAN. Such a linkage would assist local champions of democracy building and provide a platform for learning and sharing about democracy not only among the states in the region but also among non-state actors.

At the regional level, there is a wide range of entry points for the EU to deepen its engagement with ASEAN in promoting the democracy building agenda. The ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Community agreement, with its three pillars – the ASEAN Political and Security Blueprint, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Social and Cultural Community, provide a basis for ASEAN to work towards a more democratic region. The EU's engagement with ASEAN could support ASEAN and assist it to achieve its own objectives in this area by, among other things, working closely with the ASEAN secretariat. At the same time, the EU needs to intensify its support to democratizing states in ASEAN in their efforts to consolidate democracy.

The success of these countries in consolidating democracy also strengthens their credibility in pushing the democratic agenda in ASEAN as mandated by the ASEAN Political and Security Community and the ASEAN Charter. This approach requires the EU to work with the more democratic members of ASEAN on a bilateral basis.

**At the regional level, there is a wide range of entry points for the EU to deepen its engagement with ASEAN in promoting the democracy building agenda.**

The EU needs to devise multi-track engagement strategies with multiple actors and through multiple entry-points. It needs to become more visible in the eyes of the general public, which could be achieved through a reformulation and improvement of its public diplomacy activities. The EU also needs to intensify its interactions, cooperation, partnership and communication with societal elements, especially local media and grass roots organizations. Equally important, it is imperative for EU member states to speak with one voice with regard to 'difficult' or 'sensitive' issues, without abandoning the need to balance pragmatism and principle. A differentiated structure of engagement across the region needs to be formulated, taking into account the different needs and varying stages of political development in each country. It is necessary for the EU to engage ASEAN as a collective entity. However, it is equally important for the EU to engage and cooperate with subregional actors, individual countries and even sub-national actors whenever the opportunities arise. The structure of the EU's engagement with Southeast Asia must take into account the needs and roles of multiple stakeholders across the region and within individual ASEAN member states.

## Conclusions

Democracy building in Southeast Asia is a challenge: the diversity of the region, which is characterized by different levels of economic development between and within countries, heterogeneous cultural contexts, different historical trajectories towards independence and adverse internal conditions, as well as the reality of geopolitics and the influence and interests of major powers often serve as major obstacles. For many decades, authoritarian forms of governance, both soft and hard, have been the norm. Southeast

Asia remains a region where communism, monarchy, soft-authoritarianism, military juntas and democracy coexist in a web of regional cooperation aimed at preserving inter-state harmony and maintaining regional stability and peace. Consequently, the principle of non-interference and the primacy of state sovereignty are jealously guarded. In this context, any outside attempt to promote democracy becomes highly problematic.

Democracy, however, is not an impossible dream. There are now opportunities to pursue a democracy building agenda, thanks to the presence of regional champions, the regional commitment of ASEAN, and the presence of a vibrant civil society and public support for democracy. The role of the EU in assisting the process of democracy building in the region needs to be placed in the context of existing challenges and opportunities. Despite regional perceptions that the EU has only limited political influence in the region, there is a recognition that the EU is equipped with both the capacity and the resources to play a much more active and visible role in the future. That, however, would require a willingness on the part of the EU to fully engage with Asia in a constructive manner and as an equal partner.

**Democracy is not an impossible dream. There are now opportunities to pursue a democracy building agenda in Southeast Asia.**

For the EU to play an effective role in democracy building in the region, it needs to understand and appreciate the context in which such a role would be carried out. The EU can only be an effective partner when its engagement with Southeast Asia is expressed in a spirit of equal partnership, mutual respect and shared responsibility as well as a determination to build a sustainable and long-term partnership. The EU's engagement with Southeast Asia should be guided by the principle of comprehensiveness. It could use a wide range of entry points to deepen its engagement with ASEAN in promoting the democracy building agenda on the basis of the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Community agreements, and work with multiple actors to employ multi-track engagement strategies.

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# Part V

## Annexes



# Acknowledgements

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*The EU interferes in everything! Copyright: Jan Romare 2009*

# The International IDEA *Democracy in Development* project team

## **Ingrid Wetterqvist: Director**

In September 2008 Ingrid Wetterqvist assumed responsibility as Director of the project “Democracy in Development – global consultations on the EU’s role in democracy building” at International IDEA.

Ingrid Wetterqvist joined IDEA in February 2004 as Head of Planning and External Relations. She was previously at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, most recently as Director at the Department for Global Development. She was posted to Tanzania in 1992–1995, and to Zambia 1995–1997. She has been working with democracy and human rights in development, both as a practitioner and as a policy maker, for most of her career.

Ingrid Wetterqvist holds a BA in business administration from Uppsala University. She is originally from Sweden.

## **Raul L. Cordenillo: Programme Officer, Asia**

Raul Cordenillo joined International IDEA in October 2008 as Programme Officer for Asia in the “Democracy in Development” team. He has also been in charge of consultations with the Arab world.

Before joining IDEA, Raul Cordenillo held various positions at the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He was Assistant Director at the Bureau for External Relations and Coordination and Head of the ASAS (ASEAN Standing Committee, Senior Officials Meeting, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Summit) Unit, which managed the main organs of ASEAN. Prior to this, he was Assistant to the Secretary-General of ASEAN and was the ASEAN Secretariat Co-ordinator for Avian Influenza.

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Susanne Lindahl joined International IDEA in August 2008 as Assistant Programme Officer in the "Democracy in Development" team. She has been coordinator of the conceptual framework and lead writer of the project reports.

Prior to this, Susanne Lindahl worked at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). In 2006–2007 she was at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, within the department of Multilateral Development Cooperation where she worked on an international cooperation project on UN governance and management reforms. In 2007-2008 she also worked three months at International IDEA on the production of the publication *Challenges to Democracy Building*.

Susanne Lindahl holds an MA in political science and an MA in international humanitarian action. Most of her studies took place at Uppsala University, with one additional year studying South Asian politics in Heidelberg, Germany. She is originally from Sweden.

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Therese Arnewing has been part of the IDEA "Democracy in Development" team since September 2008. She is Research Assistant and has also supported the team with for example logistics and organization of major events.

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Maria-Nefeli Topouza spent August to December 2009 as an intern in the “Democracy in Development” team. She was previously an intern at the international relations service at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thessaloniki and volunteered at the EU Summit in Thessaloniki in 2003.

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Romana Zahra spent August to December 2009 as an intern in the “Democracy in Development” team. She has previously worked as a volunteer in the festival *Smaka på Stockholm* 2003.

Romana Zahra has a BA in oriental studies from Uppsala University, for which she also spent one semester in Cairo, Egypt studying Standard Arabic, Colloquial Egyptian and the Arabic Media. She now studies Swahili and master level oriental studies at Uppsala University. She is originally from Tanzania.

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# International IDEA at a glance

## Our mission

In a world where democracy cannot be taken for granted, the mission of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is:

to support sustainable democratic change through providing comparative knowledge, and assisting in democratic reform, and influencing policies and politics.

In addressing our mission we focus on the ability of democratic institutions to deliver a political system marked by public participation and inclusion, representative and accountable government, responsiveness to citizens' needs and aspirations, and the rule of law and equal rights for all citizens.

We undertake our work through **three activity areas**:

- providing comparative knowledge and experience derived from practical experience on democracy building processes from diverse contexts around the world;
- assisting political actors in reforming democratic institutions and processes, and engaging in political processes when invited to do so; and
- influencing democracy building policies through the provision of our comparative knowledge resources and assistance to political actors.

Our work encapsulates two **key principles**:

- We are exponents of democratic change. The very nature of democracy is about evolving and adapting governance systems to address the needs of an ever changing society.
- We are supporters of change. The drivers of change must come from within societies themselves.

## Our programme

Democracy cannot be imported or exported, but it can be supported. And because democratic actors can be inspired by what others are doing elsewhere around the world, International IDEA plays an instrumental role in supporting their initiatives by:

**Providing comparative knowledge and experience in:**

- elections and referendums
- constitutions
- political parties
- gender in democracy and women's political empowerment

- democracy self-assessments
- democracy and development

### **Assisting political actors in national reform processes:**

As democratic change ultimately happens among citizens at the national and local levels we support, upon request and within our programme areas, national reform processes in countries located in:

- Latin America
- Africa and the Middle East
- Asia and the Pacific

### **Influencing democracy building policies:**

A fundamental feature of strengthening democracy building processes is the exchange of knowledge and experience among political actors. We support such exchange through:

- dialogues
- seminars and conferences
- capacity building

### **Seeking to develop and mainstream understanding of key issues:**

Since democratic institutions and processes operate in national and international political contexts we are developing and mainstreaming the understanding of how democracy interplays with:

- development
- conflict and security
- gender
- diversity

## **Our approach**

Democracy grows from within societies and is a dynamic and constantly evolving process; it never reaches a state of final consolidation. This is reflected in our work: in supporting our partners' efforts to make continuous advances in democratic processes we work step by step with them with a long-term perspective.

We develop synergies with those involved in driving democratic processes – regional political entities (the European Union (EU), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the African Union (AU) for example), policy makers, politicians, political parties, electoral management bodies, civil society organizations – and strategic partnerships with the key regional, international and multi/bilateral agencies supporting democratic change and different United Nations bodies.

Quintessentially, we bring experience and options to the table but do not prescribe solutions – true to the principle that the decision-makers in a democracy are the citizens and their chosen representatives.



International IDEA is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. International IDEA's member states are all democracies and provide both political and financial support to the work of the Institute. The member states include Australia, Barbados, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ghana, India, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay. Japan has observer status.



# The International IDEA project *Democracy in Development* – global consultations on the EU's role in democracy building

- The project was initiated in 2008 and is supported by Sweden
- The basic project methodology involves comparing EU intentions with partner perceptions of the EU's policies and actions in democracy building
- A gap analysis provided space for change and for a set of policy options
- Consultations were held with EU partners in Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and Southeast Asia
- These consultations were complemented with bilateral meetings, interviews and smaller workshops
- Over 65 background articles were commissioned
- More than 250 policy makers, academics, and representatives from think tanks and civil society were consulted during the process
- Eight international consultation conferences were organized between September 2008 and May 2009, five of which were from outside Europe
- A report was handed over to the Government of Sweden on 3 July 2009
- The report together with five regional chapters constitute this publication, launched at the European Development Days in October 2009

