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## **With Map and Compass on Narrow Paths and through Shallow Waters: Discovering the Substance of EU Democracy Promotion**

ANNE WETZEL\* & JAN ORBIE\*\*

**Abstract.** This article presents the conclusions that we have drawn from the contributions to the special issue on the substance of EU democracy promotion. The main findings of the articles are summarized in a table that includes values for the components of the embedded democracy framework across the various countries and regions that were examined. Although some variation can be discerned within the embedded democracy framework and across the different countries and regions, the EU's policies remain firmly entrenched within the notion of embedded liberal democracy. In addition, three common observations on the substance of EU democracy promotion can be discerned: (1) the focus on elections has been more limited than expected, (2) the EU has largely focused on the external context conditions, and (3) the links between the latter and the partial regimes of democracy are under-specified. Thus, while the EU's democracy promotion policies suggest that one model suits all, it is not assumed that one size should fit all. More generally, it appears that EU democracy promotion sits uneasily between a 'narrow' and 'shallow' agenda, which can be explained by different factors. At the same time, it reflects the internal democratic condition of the EU.

### **I Introduction**

'Democracy Revisited. Which Notion of Democracy for the EU's External Relations?' – This is the title of a policy paper published by the European Parliament's Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy.<sup>1</sup> It is a contribution to an ongoing discussion about whether the EU should formally and officially adopt a definition of democracy on which to base its democracy promotion efforts in the world. This question was originally raised in 2006, when the Policy Unit of the Council General Secretariat recommended in a discussion paper on democracy promotion to elaborate on key concepts regarding

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<sup>1</sup> M. Meyer-Resende & J. Wisniewska, *Democracy Revisited. Which Notion of Democracy for the EU's External Relations?* (Brussels: Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy, 2009).

democracy support and work on a broad consensus on them.<sup>2</sup> In fact, this seems justified since '[p]olicy documents contain different concepts of democracy, including good governance, pluralist democracy, democratic governance, democratization, democracy promotion and democracy building'.<sup>3</sup> Lately, the term 'deep democracy' was added to the list in view of the events in the southern Mediterranean countries.<sup>4</sup> While the need for a 'European Consensus on Democracy' is widely acknowledged, the substance of it is difficult to delineate since there seems to be a lack of a 'clear strategy in terms of the definition of democracy'.<sup>5</sup> Although the underlying principles of the EU's definition of democracy promotion have been identified in an informal document of the European External Action Service, most Member States have so far prevented a formal adoption of a 'European Consensus on Democracy' in the Council.<sup>6</sup>

This special issue relates to the debate about the content of EU democracy promotion but takes a slightly different road to the topic. Instead of asking what *should* be the notion of democracy for EU democracy promotion, it asks what *is* being promoted. In order to 'map' the substance of EU democracy and discover potentially different substances, we adopted an analytical framework that is based on the notion of 'embedded liberal democracy'.<sup>7</sup> This notion distinguishes five partial regimes that a liberal democracy consists of: elections, political rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and elected representatives' effective power to govern. These partial regimes are externally embedded into an environment whose characteristics are important for their functioning. Here, we look in particular at stateness, civil society, and socio-economic prerequisites.

The articles assembled in this special issue all explore the research question on the substance of EU democracy promotion as outlined in the introductory article: What is the democratic substance that the EU furthers in third countries? While the contributions employ the same analytical framework, they were not intended as case studies. Thus, the countries and regions were not selected by application of strict criteria of research design. Furthermore, they do not follow a common case study protocol but stress different aspects and have taken their own approaches towards the topic. Nevertheless, they offer the possibility to gain

<sup>2</sup> K. Prunerova & M. Walecki, 'Report from the Conference Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy Support' (Prague, 9–10 Mar. 2009), 9.

<sup>3</sup> IDEA, *Democracy in Development: Global Consultations on the EU's Role in Democracy Building* (Stockholm, 2009), 16.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission & High Representative, A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood, COM (2011) 303, 3.

<sup>5</sup> S. Herrero, 'A Decade of Democracy Promotion through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights', *The EPD Working Papers Series on Democracy Support*, no. 1 (2009): 42.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, European External Action Service, 12 May 2011.

<sup>7</sup> W. Merkel, 'Embedded and Defective Democracies', *Democratization* 11, no. 5 (2004): 33–58.

some more general insights into the substance of EU democracy promotion. In this article, we take the contributions of this special issue as the basis to ‘map’ the substance of EU democracy promotion and compare the different elements as well as different countries and regions. Table 1, which was compiled with the help of all contributors, shows that, on the one hand, there is variation between the different countries and regions. On the other hand, there seem to be some general trends that cut across the countries and regions. In what follows, we will interpret the main findings, relate them to the existing literature, and offer some explanations. In particular, the latter could serve as starting points for further research on the substance of EU but also other actors’ democracy promotion.

The article is structured as follows. We start with a mapping exercise of the main findings of the special issue in a summarizing table. Then, we discuss the EU’s democracy promotion policies over the eight components of the embedded democracy framework and look at the substance of EU democracy promotion across different target countries and regions. This allows us to answer the research question of this special issue. Despite variation in the content of the EU democracy promotion policies, we found that the EU’s agenda can be located mainly between the ‘narrow’ and the ‘shallow’ pole, with a tendency towards a broad agenda in sub-Saharan Africa, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. To be sure, ‘mainly between’ does not so much mean that we can locate our examples on different points of this spectrum. We rather want to express that the link between partial regimes and external conditions in EU democracy promotion is not always strong and sometimes the two seem to be even decoupled. As will become obvious below, this made categorization sometimes difficult. We indicated this finding with the wavy line in Table 1. From the results, we also conclude that with regard to the substance of democracy promotion, for the EU, one model suits all but that there is no one size that fits everybody.

## II The Components of Embedded Liberal Democracy

In this section, we run through the different components of the embedded democracy framework that emerged from the country- and region-specific articles of the special issue but more or less cut across them. We place our findings in the existing literature and offer explanations for them.

Regarding the core partial regime – elections – we do not find a ‘reflex of focusing on elections only’.<sup>8</sup> In all regions and countries covered, elections have never been the sole or sole main focus of the EU. This result is particularly interesting and calls for further in depth study because it seems to contradict previous findings and one of the standard criticisms of Western democracy

<sup>8</sup> Prunerova & Walecki, *supra* n. 2, 13.

Table 1 Summary — Mapping the substance of EU democracy promotion: - no or very minor attention, + some attention, ++ focused attention, +++ major attention; Freedom House Scores: F = Free, PF = Partly Free, NF = Not Free

| Country/Region                          | Freedom House Score   | Elections | Political Rights | Civil Rights | Horizontal Accountability | Effective Power | Stateness | Civil Society | Socio-economic Development |
|---|---|-----------|------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Eastern Enlargement</i>              |   | -         | +                | +            | ++                        | -               | ++        | ++            | ++                         |
| Czech Republic                          | 1993-2010: F  | -         | +                | +            | ++                        | -               | ++        | ++            | ++                         |
| Slovakia                                | 1993-2010: F;<br>1993, 1996, 1997: PF   | +         | +                | +            | ++                        | -               | ++        | ++            | ++                         |
| Ukraine                                 | 1991-2004: PF;<br>2005-2009: F;<br>2010: PF                                   | ++        | ++               | -            | ++                        | -               | ++        | ++            | ++                         |
| Russia                                  | 1991-2003: PF;<br>2004-2010: NF   | -         | +                | +            | +                         | -               | +         | +             | +                          |
| <i>Southern Mediterranean Countries</i> | Middle East/North Africa, 2000-2010: ca. 2/3 NF (61-78%); ca. 1/4 PF (17-33%) | +         | -                | ++           | ++                        | -               | ++        | +             | ++                         |
| <i>Central Asia</i>                     |   | +         | +                | ++           | ++                        | -               | ++        | ++            | ++                         |
| Kyrgyzstan                              | 2000-2004 +<br>2009: NF;<br>2005-2010 (-2009): PF                             | ++        | ++               | ++           | ++                        | -               | ++        | ++            | +++                        |
| Uzbekistan                              | 1992-2010: NF   | +         | -                | ++           | +                         | -               | +         | -             | ++                         |
| Turkmenistan                            | 1992-2010: NF   | -         | -                | -            | +                         | -               | -         | -             | -                          |
| Kazakhstan                              | 1994-2010: NF   | +         | +                | ++           | ++                        | -               | +++       | ++            | +                          |



promotion (see also the introductory article to this special issue). A recent consultation by the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance with organizations and think tanks in Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Southeast Asia on EU democracy promotion revealed that these regions ‘see a much narrower, procedural, election-focused approach than what successfully characterizes democracies in Europe’.<sup>9</sup> Representatives from these regions criticized in particular that the EU fails ‘to link procedural democracy to delivery aspects of democracy’,<sup>10</sup> that is, to social and economic development. The articles of the special issue, however, indicate that socio-economic development plays an important role in the EU relations with Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific region, and Central Asia. Sometimes it is even the main focus of cooperation (e.g., some Latin American and Central Asian countries). Nevertheless, the comparison shows that, in some cases, elections attract particular EU attention. As the article by Del Biondo on sub-Saharan Africa suggests, aid suspensions based on Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement are usually provoked by flawed elections. Moreover, improvement in the electoral process appears as the main reason for the decision to resume aid after suspension, even when other issues covered in the related consultations are not properly addressed. In addition, statements by the High Representative (and formerly by the Council Presidency) related mainly to electoral or constitutional processes in the partner countries. Thus, in these particular cases, it is justified to speak of a focus on electoral democracy. However, since cooperation between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries usually includes the promotion of a broad ‘democratic governance’ agenda that even comprises issues not directly related to democracy on the whole, one could, if at all, only speak of an ‘electoralist fallacy’ in the sense of negative measures (i.e., sanctions). In turn, in some countries and regions, the EU pays rather little attention to elections. For certain countries and regions, this can be explained by the saturation effect, that is, the lack of necessity to deal with this partial regime (e.g., Czech Republic, Pacific region). Another reason is that there are other actors that specialize in election observation, so that there is no need to replicate the efforts. This is true for Ukraine and Russia as Stewart points out<sup>11</sup> but increasingly also for Latin America as Gratius maintains. Yet another reason is that the EU is not invited to observe elections, which was the case for the southern Mediterranean. On the other hand, however, the latter region is an example of limited EU focus on elections even when accounting for the fact that was seldom asked for support.

<sup>9</sup> IDEA, *supra* n. 3, 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> See also M. Meyer-Resende, ‘Exporting Legitimacy: The Record of EU Election Observation in the Context of EU Democracy Support’, CEPS Working Document 241 (Brussels, 2006), 4–5, for the same point with regard to the OSCE region.



While the EU followed elections in the southern Mediterranean countries, this was at least until recently not regarded as meaningful since flawed elections have rarely provoked serious consequences. Another observation from the articles is that the EU recognizes elections that take place in an increasingly authoritarian context as Gratius illustrates with the example of Venezuela. This adds to a list of examples where the EU did not negatively respond to flawed elections but, in some cases, even rewarded the respective countries, which includes Ethiopia (parliamentary elections in 2010), Rwanda, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, the presidential elections in Kenya in 2007, and elections in Azerbaijan in 2005 and Armenia in 2008. In the latter cases, for example, the EU even offered neighbourhood agreements and increased aid.<sup>12</sup> Another interesting observation is given by Maurizio Carbone who showed how in the case of the 2001 elections in Fiji DG Development was not willing to use development funds on this issue. He also writes that with regard to the decision to lift sanctions in this case ‘respect of the Constitution, including the separation of power, was considered more important than general elections’ by the EU. All this evidence does not point to a particular EU obsession with free and fair elections; in the last case, it even seemed to overlook them. In line with this finding, Youngs recently concluded that today ‘if anything, policy has shifted to the other extreme: the importance of elections is rather under-estimated’.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the perceived narrow focus of EU democracy promotion should be studied in more detail.

Staying with the partial regimes of democracy, the articles suggest that the EU puts more emphasis on civil rights and horizontal accountability than on political rights. Civil rights are promoted in almost all countries that are covered in the articles. The exceptions are countries where the situation is not seen to be problematic (Ukraine prior to 2010) or where the country does not allow any promotion of these rights on its territory (Turkmenistan). The diverging EU focus between political rights and civil rights is puzzling, particularly in the southern Mediterranean region where the EU’s agenda setting power has led to an increasing cooperation on democracy promotion.<sup>14</sup> There are several possible explanations for this pattern. In EU policy documents, democratization and human rights (which we included under civil rights) are often mentioned in the same breath: ‘[t]he emphasis on the link between human rights and democracy sometimes go so far as to equate human rights activities with support for democracy building’.<sup>15</sup> Thus, there might be a bias already at the conceptual level. A second reason is related to the domestic context of third countries. As Bicchi showed for funding

<sup>12</sup> R. Youngs, *The EU’s Role in World Politics. A Retreat from Liberal Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 64; R. Youngs, ‘Misunderstanding the Maladies of Liberal Democracy Promotion’, FRIDE Working Paper 106 (Madrid, 2011), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Youngs, 2011, *supra* n. 12.

<sup>14</sup> V. van Hüllen, ‘EU Democracy Promotion in the Mediterranean. Cooperation against All Odds?’, KFG Working Paper 9 (Berlin, 2009), 12.

<sup>15</sup> IDEA, *supra* n. 3, 17.

under the European Initiative (and later Instrument) for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in the southern Mediterranean countries, the disbalance between projects dealing with democracy promotion and projects dealing with human rights, which was confirmed by Reynaert's and Gratius' contributions, stems 'from applications, not from selection'.<sup>16</sup> Dealing with overtly political issues is more risky for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and it is more difficult to integrate democratization projects to the sociopolitical environment. However, she also showed that the Delegations in the countries sometimes 'downsized the scope of the initiative'.<sup>17</sup> More particularly, Herrero states that 'the democracy promotion strategy of the Instrument has not been adequately translated by Delegations in the guidelines of the Country-Based Support Schemes Calls for proposals, which have tended to focus on human rights related priorities'.<sup>18</sup>

Another reason for the gap may be methodological. The EU's human rights promotion activities span a huge variety of issues – some of them relate to the rights outlined in the framework, while others are almost completely unrelated to the political process. Human rights activities as mentioned in the EIDHR calls comprise, among others, the fight against impunity, torture and death penalty, the provision of judicial support, the protection of immigrants, labour rights, the integration of mentally handicapped people into the workplace, and reproductive rights.<sup>19</sup> Bicchi concludes that 'human rights promoted through the EIDHR micro-projects tend to be relatively uncontroversial and less relevant in terms of democracy promotion'.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the focus on civil rights (that are only a part of human rights as understood by the EU) may be overrated in the articles. Further research should thus pay particular attention to disaggregating EU human rights activities.

Horizontal accountability also figures prominently among the partial regimes that receive quite some EU attention. However, similar to the issue of human rights, further research should disaggregate the substance that is subsumed under the label of judicial reform and filter those activities that are indeed increasing the independence of the judiciary and thus the system of checks and balances. As Youngs points out with regard to neighbouring countries, 'the Commission's rule of law aid programmes are guided by measures of success related to case-load management and speeding up court systems to deal with the serious backlog of cases [...], rather than with judicial independence'.<sup>21</sup> This may even be detrimental to strengthening accountability. In Central Asia, an analysis of the EU's regional Rule of Law Initiative reveals the latter's focus on 'commercial

<sup>16</sup> F. Bicchi, 'Democracy Assistance in the Mediterranean: An Overview', *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 1 (2009): 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Herrero, *supra* n. 5, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Bicchi, *supra* n. 16, 71.

<sup>21</sup> R. Youngs, 'Democracy Promotion as External Governance?', *Journal of European Public Policy* 16, no. 6 (2009): 902.

and trade law reform and building a transparent legal framework for the development of a market economy', which led the analyst to demand a greater focus on issues such as 'greater independence and transparency of courts' if the EU wanted to live up to its self-image as normative actor.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Reynaert showed in her article that in the southern Mediterranean countries the main goal of the EU's support for the judiciary is often the fight against corruption and the support of business and, eventually, the working of the free market instead of genuine reinforcement of the system of 'checks and balances'. Even if these reforms are intended to support democratization in the long run, Carothers points out that the idea according to which the introduction of rule of law principles in the economic domain would 'bleed over into parts of the legal sector more germane to political reform' is 'based more on hope than experience'.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the effective power to govern, it becomes clear that among the countries and regions covered in this special issue, the EU supports this partial regime only in the ACP region, with an increasing tendency in sub-Saharan Africa, where some Security Sector Reform projects are conducted, but also elsewhere. This is a surprising result insofar as there are other countries and regions where elected representatives are restricted to govern effectively. One example would be Morocco, where 'the parliament is toothless vis-à-vis the makhzen' and the king controls all three branches of power.<sup>24</sup> Still, the 'heart of power' has rarely been addressed by democracy promoters.<sup>25</sup> One explanation for this abstinence could be the sensitivity of the topic. An example where the EU even backed developments that are detrimental to the effective power to govern for elected representatives is given by Reynaert. In Jordan, the EU supported the establishment of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone, which is governed by the Aqaba Special Zone Authority. The latter is not democratically elected and does not allow for influence from democratically elected representatives. With regard to cases beyond the special issue, it should be noted that the EU has put special emphasis on this component in Turkey, where it demands civilian control of the military.

When turning to the external supporting conditions, the articles show that the EU has, in general, put a lot of emphasis on them. The papers found a strong focus on 'stateness', which takes the medium position between socio-economic development and civil society. However, one methodological point must be kept in mind. By comprising issues of state building, anti-corruption measures, good governance, and administrative reform, this category is very broad. It may, thus, suggest a focus on one issue when in fact the EU addresses rather different

<sup>22</sup> R. Isaacs, 'The EU's Rule of Law Initiative in Central Asia', *EUCAM Policy Brief* 9 (2009): 4–5; Youngs, 2010, *supra* n. 12, 74.

<sup>23</sup> T. Carothers, 'Democracy Assistance: Political vs. Developmental?', *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 1 (2009): 11.

<sup>24</sup> A. Khakee, 'Assessing Democracy Assistance: Morocco. Project Report' (Madrid: FRIDE, 2010): 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

things. Furthermore, this may lead to distortions regarding the emphasis. In future research, this category should, therefore, be disaggregated further. In general, the articles of the special issue underline the importance of ‘governance’ promotion. This resonates with previous findings.<sup>26</sup> One of the reasons for the comparatively wide and – when compared to political rights and elections – privileged promotion of governance may be that, in many countries, this area remains an issue. This is particularly relevant for the (former) candidate countries, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia in this special issue, and some neighbourhood countries, in particular Ukraine (see also in this special issue). Here, EU support for governance reforms is mainly aimed at the adoption of EU rules and standards by these countries.<sup>27</sup> Apart from these cases, however, a note of caution is in order. While for analytical purposes we included the support of the external enabling conditions in our study of the substance of EU democracy promotion, it must be remembered that they do not, by themselves, form part of democracy (see introductory article). Thus, the prioritization of governance over the partial regimes of ‘political rights’ and ‘elections’ (for whatever reason) is potentially worrying in regions where the situation of the partial regimes is problematic, which is often the case in Central Asia, the southern Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan Africa. This is even more relevant when EU policymakers do not seem to have a clear view on how governance promotion relates to democratization. As Youngs found for the Middle East, ‘[t]he relationship between Europe’s extensive range of governance work and broader political reform has been worryingly under-conceptualized. [...] Many EU governance projects appear in this sense simply to have strengthened the policy-making capacity of ruling elites and helped shore-up incumbent regimes’.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while the governance agenda may have the advantage that it allows to raise sensitive political issues under a more technical banner,<sup>29</sup> there is a risk that it pushes the EU’s policies in a more technocratic direction. Several studies have noted that the EU’s notion of governance corresponds more with the narrow view of the World Bank than with a broader democratic agenda.<sup>30</sup> This was even confirmed by an EU official who stressed that the EU has mainly focused on economic governance, thereby hiding behind politically sensitive issues without really addressing democracy concerns.<sup>31</sup> In line

<sup>26</sup> For example, R. Youngs, *Survey of European Democracy Promotion Policies 2000–2006* (Madrid: FRIDE, 2006), 71.

<sup>27</sup> R. Youngs, ‘Trends in Democracy Assistance. What Has Europe Been Doing?’, *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 2 (2008): 166.

<sup>28</sup> R. Youngs, ‘European Democracy Promotion in the Middle East’, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft [International Politics and Society]* 4 (2004): 117.

<sup>29</sup> T. Freyburg et al., ‘EU Promotion of Democratic Governance in the Neighbourhood’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 16, no. 6 (2009): 916–934.

<sup>30</sup> For example, W. Hout, ‘Governance and Development: Changing EU Policies’, *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2010): 1–12.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, *supra* n. 6.

with these findings, Del Biondo and Reynaert suggest that the EU's 'democratic governance' agenda has been instrumental for other objectives such as the implementation of development projects and market-based reforms rather than democracy promotion as such.

Similar observations have been made in relation to civil society promotion. This is not as pronounced as could be expected given that a decade ago, it was concluded that '[t]he EU has adopted a distinctive, bottom-up approach to democracy assistance', with a particular focus on NGOs.<sup>32</sup> Some of the limited emphasis we see can certainly be attributed to the disapproval of civil society support by third state governments, as was shown by Gratius for the case of Venezuela and Bossuyt/Kubicek for Turkmenistan. For EIDHR projects that do not need the formal consent of the third state's government, there are sometimes hurdles of registration for NGOs, as Reynaert points out. However, in some instances, the EU seems to deliberately choose a more governmental approach, as in Latin America. Gratius points to a shift away from civil society promotion in Colombia, Cuba, and Venezuela. Another remarkable aspect that was highlighted in the articles is the sometimes instrumental logic that is behind civil society promotion. Where the EU has put much emphasis on civil society in its external relations, this has often been aimed at other objectives than democracy promotion. For example, the involvement of civil society in third countries has served to facilitate other EU objectives such as development (see Del Biondo) or market-based reforms (see Reynaert),<sup>33</sup> while disregarding any direct connection with democracy promotion. Stewart finds that the EU supports NGOs that are active in fields it considers particularly relevant and that could help advance approximation to EU standards. This resembles the EU approach during the Eastern enlargement process.<sup>34</sup> Reynaert makes a similar observation in the southern Mediterranean countries where a large part of civil society promotion is not aimed at strengthening public participation per se but at fighting corruption and good governance and thus at supporting the EU's more general aim of economic reform. Such cases are questionable instances of civil society promotion when viewed from a democracy promotion perspective. Another paradox regarding EU civil society promotion can be seen in the fact that funds in fact return to Europe because Western NGOs win the contracts.<sup>35</sup> In a recent piece,

<sup>32</sup> R. Youngs, 'European Union Democracy Promotion Policies: Ten Years On', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 6, no. 3 (2001): 362.

<sup>33</sup> See also S. Hurt, 'Civil Society and European Union Development Policy', in *New Pathways in International Development. Gender and Civil Society in EU Policy*, eds M. Lister & M. Carbone (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); G. Crawford, 'The European Union and Strengthening Civil Society in Africa', in Lister & Carbone (eds), *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> L.K. Hallstrom, 'Eurocratising Enlargement? EU Elites and NGO Participation in European Environmental Policy', *Environmental Politics* 13, no. 1 (2004): 175–193.

<sup>35</sup> C. Barrios, 'Assessing Democracy Assistance: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Project Report' (Madrid: FRIDE, 2010), 11–12.

Youngs points to a series of deficiencies regarding EU civil society promotion and quotes a Kenyan civil society activist with the words that the EU tries ‘to promote reform without reformers’.<sup>36</sup>

As already indicated above, the last partial regime, socio-economic prerequisites, turned out to be the most and most evenly emphasized external condition. As the contributions of Bossuyt and Kubicek as well as Gratius show, on paper, the EU is, in some cases, aware of the link between the socio-economic situation and democracy. Furthermore, in countries such as Cuba where overt democracy promotion is rejected, it is seen as an indirect way of EU democracy promotion. However, as was already discussed above, at least in some instances, the promotion of socio-economic conditions and the promotion of the partial regimes of democracy seem to be rather loosely connected. In others, and counter to the argument of democracy promotion as determined by the ‘electoralist fallacy’, concerns about the socio-economic development seem to override concern for the partial regimes. In Latin America, EU democracy promotion takes place under a development label, which subordinates the shape of the substance to a development rationale. The perhaps most explicit example of the difficult relationship was given by Carbone who reported DG Development denying development funds for election support. Both the recognition of interconnectedness and the practical challenges correspond to more general trends.<sup>37</sup>

### III The Target Countries and Regions

Whereas the previous section showed that some components of liberal democracy are generally more promoted than others, this section will show that the type of EU democracy promotion varies between countries. When looking at the country and regional level, that is, the rows in Table 1, it becomes clear that there is considerable variation across countries and regions and even within most regions. Different components of the embedded democracy framework have been promoted to different degrees. This section attempts to map similarities and variation. We furthermore try to account for the patterns that emerged on the basis of the articles in this special issue. How and to what extent do EU democracy promotion policies vary (or not vary) and how can we explain divergences (or similarities) in geographic approaches? We will start with the substance of EU democracy promotion towards sub-Saharan Africa, because this is apparently the region where the EU comes closest to the ‘broad liberal democracy promotion’ agenda (see Figure 1 in the introductory article), and use this as a reference point for comparisons with other countries and regions.

Indeed, the EU’s approach towards sub-Saharan Africa and (to a lesser extent) the Pacific corresponds with the broad liberal democracy promotion agenda.

<sup>36</sup> Youngs, 2010, *supra* n. 12, 75.

<sup>37</sup> T. Carothers, ‘The Elusive Synthesis’, *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 4 (2010): 12–26.

Contrary to expectations from the literature (see above), EU policies do not remain limited to the promotion of the core electoral regime but extend to the other partial regimes as well as the external conditions. As Del Biondo's article makes clear, elections are a 'key' aspect of the EU's approach, but they are far from the only dimension of the EU's democracy agenda towards sub-Saharan Africa. How can we account for the ambitious content of the EU's policies, compared with other countries and regions? A first explanation concerns the significant degree of asymmetric interdependence between both regions, which gives the EU a bargaining advantage.<sup>38</sup> It goes without saying that sub-Saharan African countries, which are often the former colonies of EU Member States, are still relatively weak in relation to the EU. Although the emergence of new actors such as China may have increased the bargaining power of some sub-Saharan African countries *vis-à-vis* Europe,<sup>39</sup> the latter continue to be in a weak position. Thus, the EU has a considerable margin of manoeuvre to advance the whole spectrum of its democracy promotion agenda. From this perspective, it may not be surprising that the EU's democracy promotion policies towards this region largely represent the official, broad view on the substance of EU democracy promotion as outlined in several Commission Communications and in the EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement. Conversely, when countries are less dependent, for example, when the EU has substantial interests in the country and needs cooperation of this country in order to meet its interests, we could expect that the EU's definition of democracy will be more narrow or shallow. For example, this may be true in the case of Ethiopia, where the EU has considerable geostrategic interests.<sup>40</sup>

However, asymmetric interdependence as such cannot sufficiently account for the broadness of the EU's liberal democracy agenda, since the EU's democracy promotion policies towards the Central and Eastern European candidate countries have been much more limited. Although the EU disposed of a considerably more powerful mechanism for its democracy agenda – conditionality with the 'carrot' of membership – the article by De Ridder and Kochenov shows that the substance promoted through enlargement conditionality has been more narrow or shallow than in relation to sub-Saharan Africa. Obviously, this difference between both regions points to the importance of the existing democratic situation as a context condition for the EU's policies: Freedom House Scores presented in Table 1 leave no doubt that the Czech Republic and Slovakia belong to the most democratic countries that are included in the sample (note that De Ridder and

<sup>38</sup> R.O. Keohane & J.S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd edn (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), Ch. 1.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., A. Fraser & L. Whitfield, 'Understanding Contemporary Aid Relationships', in *The Politics of Aid. African Strategies for Dealing with Donors*, ed. L. Whitfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74–107.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. S. Brüne, 'Testfall Äthiopien: Die neue Afrikastrategie der Europäischen Union', in *European External Democracy Promotion*, eds M. Knodt & A. Jünemann (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2007), 53–70.

Kochenov's article concerns the period from 1997 onwards), while countries in the sub-Saharan African region are mainly 'not free' or 'partly free'. As Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier point out with regard to democratic conditionality during EU Eastern enlargement 'in the democratic frontrunners, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, EU governance was unnecessary for democratization and democratic consolidation'.<sup>41</sup> This corresponds with a 'saturation effect', that is, that the partner countries have reached such a level of democratization that an EU policy of democracy promotion is no longer deemed necessary. It also explains why the EU's policies towards the Pacific region, which together with sub-Saharan Africa belongs to the ACP group, have focused less on the 'core' electoral regime. Despite the problematic cases of Fiji and the Solomon Islands that Carbone studied in his article, free and fair elections are held regularly in most countries of the Pacific region.

Differences in terms of democratic saturation might also explain why the EU has mainly promoted the 'effective power to govern' partial regime in the ACP region, namely because in several sub-Saharan African countries the elected representatives have not been able to govern the country because of effective control by the military in some areas. On the other hand, as explained above, there are several non-ACP countries where the government's effective power is also questionable but where the EU's democracy promotion activities have not focused on this issue (e.g., power of the military in Brazil and the monarchy in Morocco).

While it is plausible to expect a narrower or shallower democracy promotion strategy towards more democratized countries, several articles show that the opposite cannot be said. A closer look at some other countries suggests again the importance of interdependence for explaining variation in the substance the EU's democracy promotion.<sup>42</sup> It seems that a more narrow or shallow type is being promoted towards countries that are important for the EU's economic, geopolitical, and security interests such as Russia (energy), Colombia (fight against drugs and against terrorism), and Turkmenistan (energy interests). In the case of the southern Mediterranean countries, the EU's policy was until recently shaped by a conflict of interest between stability and democratization.<sup>43</sup> Even if the track record of these countries in terms of liberal democracy remains doubtful – the Freedom House would score them as 'non-free' or 'partly

<sup>41</sup> F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier, 'Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 669.

<sup>42</sup> See also M. Knodt & A. Jünemann, 'Introduction. Theorizing EU External Democracy Promotion', in Knodt & Jünemann (eds), *supra* n. 40, 20–21.

<sup>43</sup> A. Jünemann, 'Externe Demokratieförderung im südlichen Mittelmeerraum: Ein rollentheoretischer Erklärungsansatz für die Kluft zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit in den EU-Außenbeziehungen', in *Der Nahe Osten im Umbruch. Zwischen Transformation und Autoritarismus*, eds M. Beck, C. Harders, A. Jünemann & S. Stetter (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2009), 151–174.



free' – the democratic substance promoted by the EU towards these countries has been much more narrow or shallow compared with the ACP group.

However, the type of EU democracy promotion has equally been limited towards countries that are only of limited economic, geopolitical, or security interest to the EU, such as Cuba and Venezuela. This points to the relevance of a third explanation, namely the cooperativeness of the target countries. For example, the Castro regime and the Chávez government have explicitly rejected the western-style liberal democratic model. These countries simply do not accept external democracy promotion initiatives on their territory. Similarly, the article on Central Asia made clear that Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are very reluctant to cooperate on democracy-related issues. As Reynaert points out, even projects under the EIDHR, which do not need the third-country governments' consent, face potential hurdles such as the necessity of prior official registration of NGOs.

In this context, it should be noted that some countries have come up with alternative models under a label of democracy, for example, the Russian concept of 'sovereign democracy' (see Stewart), which has also been used by some Central Asian governments, and the participative or direct democracy discourses in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, or Venezuela (see Gratius). Whether or not these challenges to liberal notions of democracy serve to justify authoritarian practices, it is interesting to note that the EU does not seem to be able or willing to take up this development. The articles in the special issue show that there are differences in the extent to which the components (partial regimes and external conditions) of *liberal* democracy are promoted, but there are no indications of whether and how the EU engages with such conceptual challenges. Further research should clarify how exactly the EU's democracy promotion activities deal conceptually with non-liberal democratic systems. One related and particularly timely question would be whether and how the EU engages with the Arab countries at a conceptual level. In reaction to the revolutions, the EU is indeed thinking about changes in the substance of its policy, for example, by putting more emphasis on support for political parties and political society.<sup>44</sup> However, it would be interesting to see how inclusive this process is with regard to the partner countries' ideas of designing democratic institutions.

Until now, we have used the EU's broad approach towards the ACP as a reference point in relation to other regions. However, some qualifications about the ostensibly ambitious approach towards the ACP group should be made. First, the EU's activities towards the South Pacific are less ambitious than it seems at first sight: Although EU policies tick all the boxes of the liberal democracy framework, they rather look like a 'light' version of the EU's approach towards

<sup>44</sup> Representatives from the Commission and European Parliament at the Round Table on 'Efficiency of European Democracy Promotion', organized by the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung (Brussels, 29 Mar. 2011).

sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, Carbone's study makes clear that the EU has effectively delegated important decisions to other major powers in the Pacific. Thus, although both the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa are subsumed under the same institutional framework of the EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement, and although both regions fall under the responsibility of the DG Development within the Commission, there have been different approaches to the defining of the substance of EU democracy promotion that cannot only be explained by differences in the existing level of democracy. Only recently has there been a realization in Brussels that the EU may have complied too blindly with the advice from Australia and New Zealand. Second, even in sub-Saharan Africa, which has traditionally been much closer to the EU's sphere of influence than the Pacific, the ostensibly broad approach to democracy promotion should be put into perspective. Del Biondo's research shows that by repackaging the EU's democracy promotion objectives into the new and broad governance agenda, officially labelled the 'democratic governance' agenda, the importance of democratization as an end in itself has been reduced, 'to the benefit of aid efficiency and even the promotion of EU interests'. Partly in line with Reynaert's article on the Mediterranean, she argues that the EU's good governance agenda has served to advance objectives such as economic liberalization rather than democracy per se. In addition, Del Biondo points out that while a broad democratic governance approach is promoted through various activities such as the Governance Incentive Tranche, the application of sanctions by the EU has aimed to promote a narrower, electoral form of democracy. This suggests that there might be a correlation between the EU's strategy (soft or hard approach) and its substance (respectively, broad or narrow) in promoting democracy towards developing countries. Whereas incentive-based democracy promotion strategies aim at a broad type, sanctioning strategies follow a rather narrow interpretation of democracy promotion.

Another interesting observation with regard to the 'democratic governance' agenda is that the substance of EU democracy promotion in sub-Saharan region is influenced by the paradigms of international development cooperation. In a similar vein, Reynaert concludes that the substance of EU democracy promotion in the southern Mediterranean region is shaped by the policy paradigm of economic liberalization. Gratius points to a 'transition paradigm' to which EU democracy promoters cling in Latin America. Furthermore, she suggests that democracy promotion in this region is informed by the 'intrinsic social democracy model'. Although none of the authors has explicitly researched the role of paradigms and templates for the definition of the substance of EU democracy promotion, the findings indicate that they are important and should receive more (critical) attention.

Finally, it appears that the EU does not have a 'one-size-fits-all' approach in the sense that the components of the embedded democracy framework are promoted in exactly the same way and 'dose' everywhere. Several articles illustrate that the substance of EU democracy promotion differs within the same

region. This might be surprising since the same institutional framework applies to these countries. Del Biondo makes this point in relation to sub-Saharan Africa: While the EU's overall substance is based on the same template, there is also differentiation based on the countries' particular needs and their degree of cooperativeness. The most obvious examples come from the Central Asian region, as shown in the article by Bossuyt and Kubicek. Despite similarities, the five Central Asian countries differ in the level of democratization (e.g., medium in Kyrgyzstan, very weak in Uzbekistan), in the energy and security interests held by the EU (e.g., strong in Kazakhstan, weaker in Tajikistan), and in the substance of EU democracy promotion (e.g., broad liberal approach in Kyrgyzstan, shallow in Uzbekistan). Analysing these variables, the authors come to the conclusion that the EU has a broader liberal democracy promotion agenda towards those countries that show some commitment to political liberalization and a more narrow or shallow type towards states that oppose any democratic openings. The level of cooperativeness appears as an important determinant for the emergence of a broader substance of EU democracy promotion. However, strategic interests also play a role. Thus, the narrow approach towards Turkmenistan may not be surprising, since the government is not receptive to political liberalization while the EU has strong energy interests in Turkmenistan. The broad liberal approach towards Kyrgyzstan corresponds with weaker interests and medium cooperativeness on democratic issues. The case of Kazakhstan shows that the EU can pursue some elements of a broad liberal democracy agenda despite strong interests in the country, provided that there is some degree of cooperativeness.

In addition to the EU's (forced) adaptability with regard to the cooperativeness of target countries, we also see a certain attempt to tailor the substance to the particular identified 'misfits'. As Stewart shows on the case of Ukraine, there have been shifts of (rhetorical) emphasis placed on certain areas after the election of a new president in February 2010. Del Biondo points to the Governance Profiles that the EU draws up for each ACP country as part of the Governance Initiative and that serve as a basis for cooperation on and financial assistance for these issues.

#### **IV One Model Suits All: But Not One Size Fits Everybody?**

Based on these observations, we can conclude that there is variation in the substance of EU democracy promotion in two ways. Some components of the embedded democracy framework are generally, that is, across the countries and regions, emphasized more than others and the EU's policies are differentiated when we compare the target countries and regions. Several explanations for the variance in the EU's agenda of democracy promotion have been put forward. For example, the previous section made clear that the degree of cooperativeness

and asymmetric interdependence are important factors. On the other hand, geographical proximity does not seem to matter. While it could be expected that the EU pursues a broader agenda towards geographically closer countries (see introductory article to this special issue), the contrast between the southern Mediterranean and sub-Saharan African regions makes clear that this expectation does not hold. Further research should elaborate these and other – including EU internal – explanations by engaging in more systematic hypothesis testing based on a larger amount of systematically chosen cases.

However, these seem to be variations on the same theme. While the EU is obviously not promoting the same components of embedded democracy to the same extent in every country and region, there are some commonalities that characterize the EU's democracy promotion policies ranging from the neighbourhood countries to the South Pacific. On a general level, it should be noted that the EU's policies remain firmly entrenched within the notion of embedded democracy as described in the introduction to this special issue. Thus, the observed variation can be seen as differences of emphasis within the same model. While the EU's democracy promotion policies suggest that one model suits all, it is not assumed that one size should fit all. In addition, there are no indications that the EU has promoted any other model than the liberal democratic model. However, since the occurrence of such other democratic models has not been the focus of this research, future studies should investigate this further. They may well discover instances of variation between (elements of) different models rather than variation within the same model, for example, at the micro-level of project implementation. When projects put considerable emphasis on the 'talk-centric' aspect of democracy,<sup>45</sup> this may indicate the promotion of a deliberative model. In any case, several articles included in the special issue (e.g., Gratius and Stewart) do make clear that the EU does not engage in a dialogue on the meaning of democracy with countries that challenge (western) conceptions of democracy such as Russia, Venezuela, and some Central Asian states. The EU does not seem to be able or willing to take up this debate on what exactly constitutes the substance of democracy promotion.

Zooming into the variation within the liberal democratic model, we can still discern three general observations that apply to all the regions and countries that have been studied in this special issue. First, the emphasis on the electoral core of the embedded democracy model has been less pronounced than could be expected on the basis of the literature. The articles in this special issue rather showed a limited EU attention for free and fair elections compared to the other components of the framework. Second, and in contrast to the first observation, the external conditions have been highlighted in the EU's democracy promotion policies. The EU seems to attach great importance to the fostering of 'stateness', 'civil

<sup>45</sup> J.S. Dryzek, 'Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building', *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 11 (2009): 1381.

society', and 'socio-economic development'. This finding corresponds with those authors who characterize the EU's policies as developmental rather than political or democracy-oriented.<sup>46</sup> However, it is unclear how exactly these external conditions have been aimed to foster the partial regimes of the framework.

This brings us to the third observation, namely that the linkages between the EU's support of the external conditions and the partial regimes of democracy have not been well-defined. For example, how do support for civil society, development programming, trade relations, and good governance relate to the advancement of democratic systems in third countries? It is unclear how exactly the external conditions might connect with the partial regimes of a democratic system. One possibility may be that the EU's promotion of the external conditions is directly and explicitly aimed to contribute to democracy promotion, as in the case of Central Asia (see Bossuyt and Kubicek). Alternatively, in relation to the Euro-Mediterranean relations, Reynaert argued that the EU's approach to the external conditions sidelined the promotion of the partial regimes of embedded democracy and, in effect, was even detrimental. Yet another possibility is that both run in parallel: The EU's promotion of the external conditions has objectives of its own (e.g., aid effectiveness and investment facilitation). This view seems to be shared by most authors in the special issue. Rather than having a thought-through strategy on how to promote a broad democratic agenda, the EU seems to suggest that 'all good things go together'.<sup>47</sup> This observation may be reinforced by the well-known compartmentalization of the EU's external relations,<sup>48</sup> which hinders coherence between, for example, external development and democracy promotion policies. The establishment of the European External Action Service might increase coherence of EU external relations, although there are still 'strong divisions' between, for example, democracy promotion people and developmentalists.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, in the absence of more detailed knowledge about the link between the partial regimes and external supporting conditions in EU democracy promotion, the overall substance sits uneasily between a narrow and a shallow agenda. A broader agenda has only been found in relation to the ACP region, in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, and even in Del Biondo's article, some serious question marks on the EU's seemingly broad agenda in sub-Saharan Africa have been formulated. Of course, it should be noted that for some countries (e.g., Czech Republic) there was simply no need to promote a broad agenda while others (Cuba and Turkmenistan) disallowed the EU to do so. All articles show that there has been much focus on the external context conditions, and in several cases,

<sup>46</sup> For example, Carothers, 2009, *supra* n. 23.

<sup>47</sup> S. Grimm, J. Leininger & T. Freyburg (eds), 'Do All Good Things Go Together? Conflicting Objectives in Democracy Promotion', *Democratization (Special Issue)* 19, no. 3 (forthcoming in June 2012).

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., O. Elgström & J. Pilegaard, 'Imposed Coherence: Negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements', *Journal of European Integration* 30, no. 3 (2008): 363–380.

<sup>49</sup> Interview, *supra* n. 6.

there has been less focus on the partial regimes. The ambiguities on the exact linkages between the external conditions and the core democratic components (Will socio-economic development, good governance, and civil society promotion eventually lead to democracy? What would be the mechanisms behind such a process?) explain why most authors are hesitating between the 'narrow' and 'shallow' agendas. It is fair to add that not only there is ambiguity in the EU's view on this issue but also the conceptual framework remains rather silent in this regard. Further research should, thus, also put more emphasis on the conceptual specification of the relationship between the partial regimes and external conditions.

On a more general level, we could conclude that the EU's general emphasis on the external conditions may, in part, reflect the nature of the beast. The EU project itself has been geared towards deepening economic integration and building multilevel governance structures. Thus, the EU has ample experience with the promotion of economic development, the involvement of non-state actors (including civil society), and the fostering of good governance and a functioning administration internally. These conclusions correspond with 'Type IV' democracy promotion as described in the introduction of the special issue and with expectations (b) and (c) on the linkage between the EU's own democratic condition and its external democracy promotion policies. In contrast, as stressed in the article by De Ridder and Kochenov, the EU's competences in the core democratic institutions such as electoral regimes or political rights are rather limited. As the articles in this special issue show, expectation (a) is not reinforced. At the same time, there is not much support for expectation (d) either: With the exception of the article on Latin America, which briefly mentions the 'intrinsic social democracy policy of the EU', there are no indications that the substance of EU democracy promotion has been closely linked to the welfare state arrangements. When considering the socio-economic conditions, most authors pointed to poverty reduction and/or economic liberalization initiatives, but social redistribution policies were not mentioned. Although this seems to be in line with existing studies,<sup>50</sup> more research would be needed to assess the social-democratic influence on the substance of EU democracy promotion. After all, social redistribution issues are still mainly a domain of the Member States.

In sum, the emphasis on the promotion of the external conditions of the embedded democracy framework corresponds with the *acquis communautaire*. This can be simply summarized by means of the following paradox: While the

<sup>50</sup> The EU's global social agenda has been more ambitious in relation to Latin America compared with other regions and that market considerations have overshadowed social objectives. See J. Orbie, 'Work in Progress: The Social Dimension of EU-Africa Relations', in *The European Union and Africa*, ed. M. Carbone (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); J. Orbie & L. Tortell, 'Exporting the European Social Model: Broadening Ambitions, Increasing Coherence?', *Journal of European Social Policy* 19, no. 2 (2009): 99–104.

external conditions of embedded democracy are central to the EU project, the partial regimes of the model are only peripheral to the mission of the EU. Although it has become clear from the above discussions that an ‘essentialist’ argument is certainly not a sufficient explanation for the substance of EU democracy promotion, we still suggest investigating further how rational and ideational factors shape the EU’s agenda. For example, it is conceivable that the reluctance of EU Member States to formalize a ‘European Consensus on Democracy’ does not only stem from rational considerations of preserving ‘wiggle room’<sup>51</sup> but may also be interpreted from a constructivist perspective, focusing on the EU’s identity.

<sup>51</sup> Interview, *supra* n. 6.





### *AIMS*

The aim of the *Review* is to consider the external posture of the European Union in its relations with the rest of the world. Therefore the *Review* will focus on the political, legal and economic aspects of the Union's external relations. The *Review* will function as an interdisciplinary medium for the understanding and analysis of foreign affairs issues which are of relevance to the European Union and its Member States on the one hand and its international partners on the other. The *Review* will aim at meeting the needs of both the academic and the practitioner. In doing so the *Review* will provide a public forum for the discussion and development of European external policy interests and strategies, addressing issues from the points of view of political science and policy-making, law or economics. These issues should be discussed by authors drawn from around the world while maintaining a European focus.

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The editors will consider for publication unsolicited manuscripts in English as well as commissioned articles. Authors should ensure that their contributions will be apparent also to readers outside their specific expertise. Articles may deal with general policy questions as well as with more specialized topics. Articles will be subjected to a review procedure, and manuscripts will be edited, if necessary, to improve the effectiveness of communication. It is intended to establish and maintain a high standard in order to attain international recognition.

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