



The European Union's Electoral Assistance: Perceptions of African Democracy Building

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) is an important player in promoting democracy in African countries. Its global capacity can be detected in the wide variety of policies and instruments that fall under its competences. One of these is electoral support, which is governed by the EU Treaty and related provisions on development cooperation. According to the EU, the rationale for the support it provides to elections in Africa emanates from the view that elections are the hallmark of representative democracy, and that electoral support consolidates democratization in the region. The institutional policy guidelines underpinning its electoral assistance to African countries are just one part of the picture. The others are how it projects its self-image and how its electoral assistance is perceived. Since the EU seeks to be a major player in the area of democracy building on the African continent, it is pertinent to review its approach to supporting election processes and, more critically, to recognize the perceptions of recipient countries of the impact of its assistance. The EU needs to know whether its electoral assistance is perceived on the ground to be contributing to democracy building efforts, and to identify the gaps between policy articulation and implementation. In attempting to identify images and perceptions of EU electoral assistance, some questions emerge: Does the EU's image have any peculiar features among the African public? Do the EU's actions relating to electoral assistance raise its profile as a critical player in democracy building? Does the EU's image have a major bearing on how electoral assistance is perceived and endorsed by the public? Identifying prevailing perceptions of the EU's work will form the basis for determining whether EU policy and activity in the area of electoral assistance can be adjusted or improved. In this context, this study reviews the EU's policies in African countries relating to democracy building generally and electoral support in particular. It reviews existing African public discourse, primarily that of the general public. In the light of the diverse nature of Africa's countries and the EU's engagement, the study aims to ascertain the general perception of the EU's work in electoral support and, at the same time, discuss ways in which specific challenges and opportunities for the EU's electoral assistance in African countries can be addressed.

Summary of Recommendations

In order for European Union (EU) electoral assistance to be perceived as fostering democracy building in recipient countries on the African continent, the EU should:

- *Increase support to national and regional civil society groups and other electoral stakeholders.* Electoral assistance funding must be designed in such a way that it reaches and supports civil society groups, including those at the grass roots levels – especially after the electoral event. The assistance should empower these groups to be part of the democratization process and enhance their ability to implement necessary reforms.
- *Implement electoral support strategies for long term sustainability.* Strategies must be established to implement the electoral cycle approach in the EU's electoral assistance activities, ensuring continued synergies between electoral assistance activities and those in the area of democratic governance. It is crucial to develop strategic interventions and provide ongoing support between elections.
- *Seek new ways to harmonize support* between what the EU is doing as an entity in terms of electoral assistance and the objectives which individual EU countries are pursuing in African countries.
- *Deepen cooperation and engagement between the EU, regional bodies and the African Union (AU) in the electoral fields.* This should include collaboration on electoral support in African countries in order to entrench the understanding that EU support is complementary to African democracy building efforts.
- *Develop opinion surveys on perceptions of EU electoral assistance in African countries.* There is a need for more meso- and macro-level evaluations of electoral assistance and democratization, including baseline studies of how electoral assistance is perceived. This work can be included in the Needs Assessment Missions the EU undertakes in recipient countries.

1. Background

Over the years, the relationship between the European Union (EU) and Africa has evolved at both the economic and the political level. In addition to increased trade, political dialogue and peacekeeping cooperation, the EU has emerged as one of the leading international actors in electoral assistance to African countries. The European Commission began funding electoral support missions in Africa in 1994, and its activities have become firmly established in the larger domain of democracy promotion, as set out in article 6 of the Treaty on European Union.

In the period 2000–2009 the EU provided EUR 560 million for electoral assistance projects in over 50 countries, including post-conflict states in Africa such as Chad, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, and countries such as Madagascar and Mozambique (European Union, 2008: 42). The success of its Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs) has been noted by these countries, contributing to the mitigation of conflict and to deterring electoral fraud. Although the important role of international observer missions and electoral assistance cannot be denied, there are differing sentiments about the intentions and utility of international electoral assistance

in recipient countries. As a highly visible player in the field of electoral assistance, the European Commission has not allayed these fears and perceptions.

The EU professes its intention to contribute to democracy building through its electoral assistance agenda, but recipient countries do not necessarily recognize this description. Various stakeholders have raised questions about the intended purpose of such assistance, and whether the assistance framework is supporting and contributing to democracy building. There has also been a growing willingness by the European Commission to take these perceptions seriously, and to improve the efficiency of its activities in this area.

This article provides a review and analysis on how electoral assistance by the European Commission is perceived as part of democracy building efforts. The findings of the study are based on critical reflection as opposed to primary empirical research. In particular, through a general survey of the data available at the level of public opinion and civil society, this paper assesses how the EU's electoral assistance is perceived in countries in Africa. Rather than looking at individual country case studies, the study synthesises general opinions and views.

2. EU Policies on Democracy Building and Electoral Assistance

The legal basis for the EU's joint commitment to democracy is found in the Treaty on European Union, which defines democracy as one of the principles underpinning the EU's external action. Since the first Lomé agreement in 1975, Europe has gradually incorporated the language of democracy building in Africa into its policy documents. Thus, Europe has adopted common positions establishing support for human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance in Africa. These have since been underwritten by development aid for democratization and electoral assistance, a renewed vigour in political dialogue and attempts to engage with the development of African regional and continental bodies. Following the Lomé Agreements, EU relations with Africa were guided by the Cotonou Agreement, which aimed to promote development in these countries. The Cotonou Agreement also aimed to promote 'a stable and democratic political environment'. Since the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement, African countries have been negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which will constitute the new basis for EU relations with African regional economic arrangements.

A point of contention is raised in Henry Kippin's research on EU integration and democracy building in Africa (Kippin, 2009). Referring to the work of Gordon Crawford (2005), Kippin interrogates the type of democracy being promoted by the EU. The view has generally been that the EU is seeking to impose good governance as a form of conditionality, through soft compulsion in the form of democracy building packages. Thus, good practices would be rewarded with increased financial support through the democracy building assistance. Although good governance is a desirable end, rewarding good practice does not consequentially result in democracy building,

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and may in fact encourage and institutionalize undemocratic regimes (Kippin, 2009:8). Therefore, the question arises whether the implementation of electoral assistance can legitimately be categorized as democracy assistance, or instead represents a disingenuous re-labelling of initiatives that are not distinct from traditional donor work. There is a perception that: (a) ‘democracy promotion policies of the EU may fulfil more covert agendas’ (Crawford, 2004: 30); (b) democracy building has become rhetoric to pursue economic interests, and policies are no longer driven by universal values and a benign trade-off between complementary interests but rather by more narrow national security, energy or economic interests (Transatlantic Policy Forum, 2009:10); (c) inconsistencies in policy implementation (particularly when the actions of individual member states in African countries are not aligned to the policies of the Commission) highlight the failure to prioritize normative principles and values, such as democracy and human rights, over EU external interests in a transparent and just fashion (Le Pere, 2001:4); and (d) there is too much ambiguity in the area of democracy promotion, regarding the nature of the interventions (Transatlantic Policy Forum, 2009:6).

The EU has addressed some of its policy shortcomings on democracy building and electoral assistance by the adoption of the EU Agenda for action on Democracy Support in EU external relations (Council of the European Union, 2009). The agenda applies to existing EU policies and instruments for democracy support in third countries within the framework of EU development policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The agenda considers the policy ambiguities in democracy building and the multidimensional, complex and long term nature of democracy building processes.

The EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support gives primacy to planning, programming, implementation and evaluation of EU support based on:

- Country context;
- Dialogue and partnership with recipient countries and regions;
- Increased coherence, complementarity between programming instruments and guidelines. This is for both thematic and broad agendas on democracy at country and regional levels ;
- Mainstreaming of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic governance and the rule of law to all policy sectors; and

- International cooperation, including support to regional organizations.

In terms of this agenda, financial and technical co-operation programmes to support democracy building take two forms: 1. A top-down approach to democratic institution building, for instance, capacity building for electoral commissions and parliaments, support to elections, electoral observation, reform and training of the judiciary, local government support, anti-corruption measures; and 2. A bottom-up approach to supporting civil society programmes to bring pressure to secure political change or to monitor the action of public institutions (Council of the European Union, 2009).

Although the EU Agenda for Action goes a long way towards defining the approach to democracy building, more visibility is still required for democracy issues, for instance in EU annual reports on development cooperation and human rights. This should include explicit sections on democracy support to African countries and linkages to electoral assistance.

The EU Electoral Assistance Framework

In the 1990s, EU electoral assistance projects were mainly ad hoc, and lacked any standardized or strategic approach. Since the adoption of the 2000 Communication on EU electoral assistance and observation, electoral assistance and electoral observation have been reconceptualized as complementary activities. Strategies now seek to harmonize both types of interventions, thereby increasing their utility for the recipient countries. The Commission's electoral assistance framework has evolved to include the augmentation and increased visibility of EU EOMs as well as increased multilateral and bilateral funding for varied and multiple electoral assistance operations. The types of support provided have also evolved to become much more substantive, than mere financial contributions to projects designed and managed by other international institutions and agencies.

Election observation can be defined as the purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process, and the making of informed judgements on the conduct of this process, on the basis of the information collected by persons who are not inherently authorized to intervene in the process. Election observation can be short-term observation, focusing mainly on election day, or long-term, including pre- and post-electoral aspects. Electoral assistance on the other hand, is defined as the technical or material support given to the electoral process. It can comprise a broad range of activities. The provision of advice and support to the national election authorities on the organization and management of elections is the most common. Electoral assistance can be provided in the short term, directed at a specific election event. This can take the form of material or logistical support. Although election observation is the most visible activity, the longer term impact of electoral assistance will depend on accompanying programmes embedded in a broader institution building and democracy support strategy.

Research published by the ACE Project on Effective Electoral Assistance notes the gradual evolution in electoral assistance and the shift in approach by electoral assistance providers and development agencies. This has resulted in recognition that elections are a process rather than an event, hence the importance of moving from event-driven support to process- and demand-driven support. This 'paradigm shift' has influenced the EU's electoral assistance framework. The shift has occurred in parallel with the development of an 'electoral cycle approach', which looks at the electoral process over time and aims to engage different stakeholders and entry points throughout the three main periods of an electoral cycle.¹ The electoral cycle approach is based on the idea that elections are made up of a sum of interacting elements where a wide range of legal, technical and organizational aspects have to be considered simultaneously and addressed within a rolling methodological framework. This approach sees the electoral process as an ongoing or cyclical activity rather than being event-driven at distinct

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¹ The cyclical approach was conceived by the European Commission and International IDEA, initially for training purposes. It was further developed and formalized in publications such as the *European Commission Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance* (2006), the *International IDEA Handbook on Electoral Management Design* (2006) and the *UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide* (2007).

points in time. However, there have been limitations to the practical implementation of this approach in African countries, as interventions have been short term, instead of those promoting longer term capacity development.

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Despite the complementary and the mutually reinforcing objectives of electoral assistance and observation activities, these are funded through separate financial instruments. The centrally managed European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), funds observation missions while, in most cases, geographical funds² are directed at electoral assistance. As a consequence, the process for funding decisions also differs. National authorities are often involved, to an important extent, in decision making of funding priorities and in the implementation of electoral assistance.³ For example, in a given country the national authorities, in conjunction with an EU delegation are responsible for the identification, formulation and implementation of assistance programmes and projects.

It is important to note that election observation and assistance are always clearly distinguished and managed by different services, in order to guarantee that there is no conflict of interest between electoral assistance projects and the work of the EU EOMs in assessing the electoral process. Furthermore, it is significant that EU electoral assistance is mostly, but not exclusively, provided through or with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The EU and the United Nations have increasingly been working together on the conceptualization and implementation of electoral assistance.⁴ Programmatic cooperation has been facilitated by the Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA), established in 2003, which provides for a single shared legal, financial and administrative framework for all programme cooperation between the EU and the UN. Since its entry into force, the FAFA has contributed to more efficient collaboration, ensuring faster start-up of activities and administrative consistency across operations. The UNDP and the European Commission entered into a Strategic Partnership Agreement in June 2004 to facilitate policy dialogue and specific cooperation at the global, regional and country levels – most notably in the areas of governance, including support to electoral processes, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

Despite the fact that the cooperation appears substantive on paper, many challenges remain. The EU-UNDP partnership has relied on cooperation between services at headquarters level, through a Joint Task Force established to liaise with UNDP country offices. The intention was to encourage inter-service cooperation, consolidate operational

² Funding is available under three geographic financing instruments: the European Neighbourhoods and Partnership Instrument, the European Development Fund and the Development Cooperation Instrument, and also under non-geographic instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the Instrument for Stability.

³ Author interview with Dr Francesco Torcoli, EU Delegation to Ghana, 13 January 2010.

⁴ Since 1995, the European Commission/UNDP partnership has intensified, most notably with the implementation of action in support of electoral processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo which culminated in a constitutional referendum in December 2005 and presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections in July and October 2006. Based on the lessons learned from this partnership, 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Electoral Assistance Programmes and Projects' were agreed, reviewed and updated in December 2008.

experience into best practices and develop training and supporting material for electoral assistance on the ground. However, in some African countries, UNDP country offices are small and lack capacity. Concerns have also been raised about the bureaucracy involved for civil society organisations to obtain part of the electoral support. Although the UNDP remains the main partner of the EU in the field of electoral assistance, the Commission has also been working with regional and subregional organizations, for instance, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Electoral Commission Forum, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union. It is anticipated that regional programmes will also enhance support to civil society in electoral processes.⁵

The EU's involvement in electoral assistance is demand driven. On the 'demand side' are states that seek varying degrees of support or electoral assistance. On the 'supply side' is the EU, which provides electoral assistance, with a view to supporting democratic transition and consolidation. Before the 2000 Communication on EU Election Assistance and Observation, decisions to provide electoral assistance were solely based on the perceived importance of a specific electoral event in terms of EU foreign policy and strategic interests in a given country. The 2000 Communication however, has defined a number of basic intervention criteria in line with EU principles on democracy building activities. These criteria are: a request from the host government for Community electoral assistance; the general agreement of the main political parties and other stakeholders to a programme of EU electoral assistance; the existence of previous political monitoring or EU development programmes in the host country; an adequate time frame for preparation; and freedom of movement, access to information and the safety of the technical assistance team. Ultimately, the national authorities in a given country and the EU delegation are responsible for the identification, formulation and implementation of assistance programmes and projects. However, it should be noted that EOMs are a political complement to electoral assistance and, although conducted with the consent of the national authorities concerned, they operate and report independently.

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⁵ Also in the area of election observation, in October 2008 cooperation between the African Union Commission and the European Commission led to EU financial support for AU Election Observation capacity development through the Instrument for Stability, increased cooperation between EU and AU EOMs, and training for election experts from AU countries in Brussels in June 2009 against the backdrop of elections to the European Parliament.

Criteria for EU Involvement in Electoral Assistance Operations in African Countries: Demand and Supply

- a) *Complementarity*: EU assistance should only be provided as a complement to state funding, with the exception of post-conflict or failed state scenarios.
- b) *Impact orientation*: There must be better definition of intended results – assistance must respect its ultimate objective, which is an improvement in the expression of the popular will through the electoral process. Assistance provided in a volatile environment should be assessed for its impact as a conflict prevention tool.
- c) *Feasibility*: There should be a thorough assessment of whether a particular form of assistance is politically advisable and feasible.

Source: Commission Working Paper on the Implementation of the 2000 Communication

3. The African Union's Stance on International Coordination and Partnerships in Electoral Assistance

The *Report of the Panel of the Wise on Strengthening the Role of the African Union in the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Election-related Disputes and Violent Conflicts in Africa* (African Union, 2009) provides recommendations on effective donor-partner electoral assistance models. The report notes, inter alia, that in countries that are prone to electoral violence, higher levels of coordination are imperative among international partners and between them and continental, regional and local actors. This should be done in order to avoid confused aims, motives and expectations during competitive electoral processes. The report cautions that coordination problems may pose a major challenge to the integrity of an electoral process when multiple actors compete to influence different outcomes. Recommendations from the 13th Africa-EU ministerial Troika meeting in October 2009 further reiterate that much more must be done to ensure that the EU's electoral assistance has the intended results. The report highlights the need for the EU to strengthen its support, inter alia, for preventive and early warning mechanisms, electoral governance and administration, coordination of electoral assistance and post-election conflict transformation mechanisms. Against this backdrop, the AU has made the following recommendations to donors to increase the effectiveness of electoral assistance in African countries. These are relevant to all international partners, including the EU:

- Increase involvement at all levels of the electoral cycle through funding and technical assistance, and deepen involvement in the pre-election and confidence-building phases to strengthen the preventive mechanisms that minimize conflicts;
- Minimize competitive engagements in electoral processes through better coordination and cooperation;
- Mitigate coordination problems through joint planning of electoral assistance programmes, information sharing and regular consultation across the electoral cycle;
- Devote more resources, especially on strengthening the capacity of local bodies to manage and oversee elections, instead of funding large election observation teams; and

- Provide technical support to the institutionalization of the Panel of the Wise mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of electoral disputes.

4. The Role of the EU in Electoral Assistance: Perceptions and Challenges

EU policy documents articulate various concepts of democracy, including good governance, pluralist democracy, democratic governance, democratization, democracy promotion and democracy building. However, such declarations of intent and generalizations about democracy building, particularly related to the democracy building requirements of African countries, have attracted criticism for their perceived ambiguity. Critics allude to the ‘lofty goals and principles’ of policies that fall short of delivering effective mechanisms to enforce those principles, let alone taking decisive action when such values and principles are violated (Michalski, 2009: 8). The EU has also been accused of inconsistency in its overall policy direction, by pursuing policies with contradictory outcomes in recipient countries. In the areas of democracy building and democracy promotion, Michalski (2009: 7–11) attributes this inconsistency to the political, social and economic diversity of the EU member states. According to Michalski, disagreements among member states and their attempts to protect domestic interests to the detriment of declared foreign policy aims are major contributory factors in the policy variations. He notes the difficulty the EU has in forging common positions, linked to member states’ urges to pursue national interests rather than actively implement the normative foreign policy goals agreed jointly under the EU banner (Michalski 2009). This is consistent with the view that, in the minds of many in Africa, there is not necessarily a clear distinction between the EU as an entity and certain EU member states as former colonial powers. This is mirrored in Europe, where the diversity of African levels of development and African political culture are often lumped together.

According to the *European Commission Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance* (European Commission, 2006), EU electoral assistance should be guided by clear objectives and the principle of partnership between the EU and the country where elections are taking place. Therefore, the role of the EU should be to help the host government to create and sustain an independent national capacity for all processes related to elections, and to support institution building in the state for sustainable democratic consolidation. However, perceptions vary on the roles the EU assumes in electoral assistance. To some extent, the general perception of how Europe interacts with Africa informs the perceptions of the EU’s electoral assistance in African countries. These perceptions range from neo-imperialist and paternalistic to the EU as a friend or equal partner. Although electoral assistance is demand- rather than supply-driven, the following perceptions of EU electoral assistance exist:

The role of the EU should be to help the host government to create and sustain an independent national capacity for all processes related to elections, and to support institution building in the state for sustainable democratic consolidation.

In the minds of many in Africa, there is not necessarily a clear distinction between the EU as an entity and certain EU member states as former colonial powers. This is mirrored in Europe, where the diversity of African levels of development and African political culture are often lumped together.

- There is an ‘obsession’ with democracy and human rights with little regard for local conditions;
- EU electoral assistance remains small-scale and limited, undermining its credibility as a force for change;
- The assistance framework is largely driven by the EU and European experts and not by experts from the region;
- Colonial legacies still play an important role in the determination of electoral assistance to African countries;
- There is considerable commitment to the electoral event, but EU interest and engagement in further electoral processes seem to wane over time;
- The EU’s electoral assistance provides opportunities for financial gain (‘easy money’) for entities in the development industry such as non-governmental organizations and implementation agencies; and
- Electoral assistance has been focused on countries rather than supporting subregional institutions to build long-term regional mechanisms in electoral management and administration. Supporting regional entities can contribute to sustainable assistance and reduce the problem of spreading too little funding too thinly across many countries.

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The challenges for the EU’s democracy building support include:

- Limited political buy-in and commitment to support the process of establishing effective structures within government. In some countries, the electoral management body (EMB) is reluctant to work with other institutions (e.g. with interior ministries in post-conflict countries) for fear of losing its independence;
- Diminished potential for real democracy building due to ‘big man politics’ and regimes which are undemocratic in nature;
- Requests for assistance are received late, resulting in late formulation of projects. To this may be added late or erroneous drafts on technical specifications for the procurement of electoral materials and services from EMBs;
- There are weak feedback mechanisms for determining the successful implementation of electoral assistance activities. The feedback is often at personal rather than the institutional levels;
- Weak and underdeveloped EMBs, poorly follow-up EU EOM recommendations or not at all, thus assistance does not have longer term effects;
- The relative scarcity of specialized electoral assistance teams to assist with European Commission procedures and the management of large contracts at the country level;

- The limited capacity building and knowledge transfer to local institutions due to the absence of permanent institutions in some countries. This is also the case when EMBs are dissolved or EMB administrations change.
- There is no focal point at the European Commission for electoral assistance to support delegations and national authorities – from identification to evaluation. Such activities are handled by a number of different services throughout the Commission, according to the different phases of the operations cycle and the source of funds.
- The EU's input into jointly funded operations is sometimes diminished by excessive delegation of responsibilities and a lack of electoral assistance knowledge by other partners. Collaboration with the UNDP may have to be re-examined. Although the partnership with the UNDP has been effective, in some cases the resident country's UNDP office has low implementation capacity, which causes difficulties for electoral assistance.

Research indicates that perceptions of the EU's electoral assistance vary based on the following factors:

1. *Whether a country is donor dependent and amenable to donor engagements in its developmental processes:* Malawi and Mozambique generally perceive the EU to be an important partner in electoral assistance. Many observers attribute this to their dependence on donor development assistance generally.
2. *The nature of political relations with the EU and the country's history of EU electoral assistance:* During the Rwanda election in 2003, the government snubbed EU electoral assistance and called on civil society and the general population to raise money internally. In 2006, France severed its relations with Rwanda, and ceased funding for all development projects. This created a negative perception of France in the politics of Rwanda and, inevitably, of the EU's role in supporting elections, which would later be felt during the 2008 elections. In this instance, there was widespread reporting in the media that the EU EOM was overstepping its mandate and pursuing activities which went beyond election observation.
3. *Cordial relations between an EU country and its former colony:* The Mozambique Government's good relationship with its former colonial master, Portugal, has raised concerns that EU electoral assistance is biased towards the ruling party, and that EOMs and technical elements of support are not impartial but preventing a change in governance. Conversely, soured relations between Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom led the government to decline electoral assistance from the UK in 2007. The EU's approach in this case was to request accreditation from the Electoral Commission of Zimbabwe, which was denied. There were reports that the UK was pushing strongly for EU EOMs to observe the elections despite the rebuttal. The perception was that the EU's electoral assistance would enforce or support radical regime change in Zimbabwe.

Source: NGO officials, anonymous contributors, 2010

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Effective electoral assistance which contributes to democracy building primarily means long term institutional strengthening and capacity development. In its numerous policy documents, the EU clearly articulates its electoral assistance institutions in the context of democratic governance, for instance, by focusing on parliament, the media and civil society. However, observers and the general public have noted that the electoral cycle approach is not always taken, and assistance is based on the electoral event rather than sustainable and long-term. The task of ensuring continued progress and sustaining electoral processes beyond the electoral event is undoubtedly

more challenging than the transition to democracy, but the EU seems committed to such an undertaking. Nonetheless, the EU should be more pragmatic in translating declarations into actions, and be more proactive in addressing the misconceptions about its role in electoral assistance and democracy building in Africa. It is imperative that the EU takes responsibility for ensuring that the objectives of its electoral assistance programmes support the longer-term objectives of a democratization strategy in the partner countries. Equally, recipient countries should take responsibility for ensuring the alignment of these programmes with the priorities and plans articulated in national development assistance programmes. This should serve as the basis of EU-partner government electoral assistance cooperation, which is perceived as benefiting democracy building endeavours.

The recommendations set out below are intended to guide the implementation of the EU's electoral support framework in African countries and provide input into positively promoting its electoral assistance activities.

- The EC must clearly identify and more comprehensively, align the democratization policy objectives in the African recipient country with those of the electoral assistance framework.
- There is a need to develop a focal point at the European Commission for electoral assistance in support of delegations and national authorities.
- There is a need to ensure synergies with electoral assistance activities and other activities in the area of democratic governance. Although policy documents emphasize the electoral cycle approach, focus on the long term institutional strengthening and capacity development of EMBs, political parties and civil society in a sustainable manner, rather than focusing solely on training needs for procedures related to a given electoral event is required.
- More information and education are required about the EU's electoral assistance in recipient countries. It is recommended that the EU continue to take the initiative to organize national, regional and continental meetings on its election assistance operations. This could also have the effect of redressing some of the misperceptions about the EU's work in this area.
- Partnerships should continue with existing development agencies, electoral assistance providers and other stakeholders in recipient countries. The objective should be a coordinated effort to deal with current and future electoral support needs.
- More collaboration with partner country implementing agencies and institutions is still required to ensure constant support for reforms.
- The EU must deepen its cooperation with the AU in the electoral field, in particular on initiatives which strengthen the capacities of African observers, by providing appropriate training and invitations to observe elections in Europe. Cooperation with the AU's Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit should be increased.

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