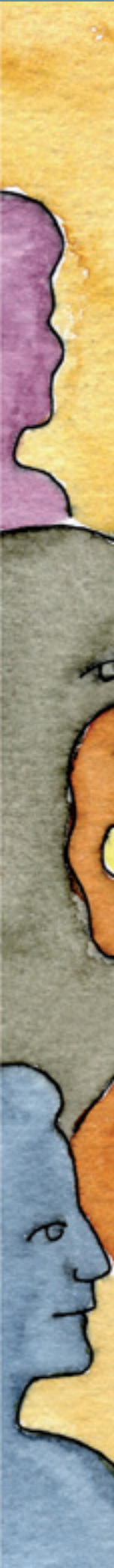# Developing Democracy: Shared Experiences and EU Intentions

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Developing Democracy: Shared Experiences and EU Intentions

Abstract

This article discusses the impact of the European Union's own history and experiences on its commitment to democracy support as part of its foreign policy. The EU's story is an asset it could use as part of its soft power approach for exchanges with partners in other regions. The EU member states have a specific shared feature in their approach to social welfare systems combined with capitalism, with a broader view of democracy encompassing also aspects of social and economic rights in addition to the political rights. Many lessons can be learned from these developments, internally and externally.

The EU foreign policy has increasingly turned to 'value-based' issues with a clear commitment to democracy as a fundamental value for all its policies and actions. These value commitments have been important starting points for EU's external partnerships. It is also something the EU holds in common with a majority of the rest of the world. Democracy commitments in terms of charters, instruments etc take root across the globe.

The EU can therefore both play a role in support of democracy building beyond its own borders, and itself gain from a mutual exchange looking into experiences of its partners. It should make an effort of more actively benefitting from its own history and fully explore the potential of its unique features.

1. Introduction

The European Union represents an unprecedented experiment in linking a common set of historical experiences, shaping and taming competing interests through the establishment of governmental institutions, and developing a set of substantive ideals that cut across politics and economics in ways that have created a strong union of welfare capitalist democracies from which many lessons can be learned. As the EU developed from an organisation primarily based on economic motivations to one that combines economic and

political objectives, its foreign policy has increasingly turned to 'value-based' issues such as democracy, good governance and human rights. Its logic of enlargement has moved well beyond the establishment and maintenance of a common market to one that includes significant criteria for membership, most notably articulated through the Copenhagen criteria.

But this internal logic to EU enlargement has also influenced its external relations, such that it fully recognises that as an '[a]s an economic and political player with global and diplomatic reach, and with a substantial budget for external assistance, [it] has both influence and leverage, which it can deploy on behalf of democratization and human rights'. In this way, the EU can combine its value commitments with its fiscal capacity to engage in a different kind of foreign relations with its partner countries that are less based on material capabilities, military power, and the underlying tenets of realism (or *realpolitik*) and more based on the notion of 'soft power' through sharing experiences, engaging in political dialogue, and developing democracy through significant foreign assistance.

In the post World War II period, member states of the EU have against significant odds built democratic institutions at the domestic level and then slowly constructed a supranational organisation that has increasingly turned its attention to developing democracy, writ large. The impulse for the creation of supra-national authority, some have argued, came from young democracies that were fearful of a return to dictatorship, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism and wanted to 'lock in' future generations of leaders to a set of institutions and normative commitments that could be broadly grouped under an appeal to democracy and rights (Moravcsik 2000). Many of the lessons from this experience are not isolated to Europe, but have been shared by other countries in the world that have sought to achieve similar goals concerning the establishment and maintenance of democratic institutions. The means through which these goals have been achieved are much different than those in the European experience, but the goals themselves are the same. Indeed, there are regional developments outside of Europe that have the aim of developing democracy and providing the institutional means for stable governance, such as the Organisation of American States 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

The world is now comprised of more democracies than non-democracies, as more and more societies turn to democratic institutions as a means to solve their problems of governance and oversee processes of economic development. The inherent appeal of democracy is growing as its values become diffused from abroad and infused at home in ways that have expanded the 'democratic universe' (Foweraker, Landman, and Harvey 2003) to all corners of the globe. Indeed, both the Community of Democracies and the United Nations International Conferences on New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD-1 through ICNRD-6) show that global processes of consultation, elaboration, and cooperation

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Many of the lessons from the European democracy building experience have been shared by other countries in the world that have sought to achieve similar goals concerning the establishment and maintenance of democratic institutions.

around democracy are taking root, while past experiences with democratization provide valuable lessons for those trying to construct democratic institutions today.

In addition, the accumulation of quantitative comparative research on democracy demonstrates that there are significant tangible benefits to democracy that reach far beyond its inherent idealistic and normative qualities. These benefits include better and more equitable economic development, a base for long-term intra-state and inter-state peace, the promotion and protection of human rights, and a greater guarantee for human security. And this research shows that many of these benefits accrue in the short to medium term after the moment of democratic transition has passed. In some regions of the world, however, such as Latin America, persistent problems with poverty and social exclusion in the new democratic era have led to disenchantment and disillusionment with democracy; however, it has not yet undermined a fundamental commitment to democracy (see below). It thus appears that across these different areas of research democracy features as both an *end* in itself, as well as a *means* to achieving other related outcomes that can benefit humanity.

In light of these trends and development, this paper argues that the EU has a crucial role to play in local, regional, and global processes in developing democracy through an appeal to its own history as a region, experiences in building democratic institutions, and processes of enlargement that have become increasingly dependent on substantive conditions being met from aspirant member states relating directly to democracy. Rather than seeing this role as a 'top down' process of demonstration, command, and control, the paper shows that the EU can draw on its shared experiences with other regions to help build democracy in partnership with those countries with whom it is developing and/or maintaining relations.

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This proposal for a new conception of developing democracy for the EU draws on an analysis of EU policy documents themselves in which a commitment to a broad understanding of democracy has been articulated for Europe, its immediate 'neighbourhood', the Euro-Med region, as well as in Asia, the Arab states, Africa, and Latin America, while at the same time realising the different challenges each of these regions face. The paper develops the proposal in four main ways. First, it outlines a conception of democracy that moves beyond narrow attention to regular elections to include broader sets of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Second, it outlines two parallel processes in the grand narrative of European democratization, which show that Europe has much in common with the rest of the world as it emerged from long periods of economic hardship, violent conflict, and authoritarianism to the more recent period of economic success, peace, and democracy. Third, it analyses the EU's commitment to democracy through reference to some of its more notable policy documents to show how a general democratic theme transcends traditionally separate policy areas of trade, security, and development. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for the future.

2. Defining Democracy

Modern conceptions of democracy are based on the fundamental ideas of *popular sovereignty* and *collective decision making* in which rulers are in some way held to account by those over whom they rule. And to these two basic principles of democracy are added a series of other dimensions that provide increasingly broad and holistic conceptions of democracy that fit with the lived experiences in various regions in the world. For example, with its liberal tradition, the vision of democracy in the United States is generally one that could be described as *procedural* and *institutional*, where the focus is much more on competitive elections, democratic institutions, and basic rights protections (as found in the Bill of Rights). The Founders themselves constructed a set of institutions that were meant to limit government and to allow as much individual freedom as possible, a commitment that has in many ways limited the ability of the political system to generate a welfare state comparable to that found in most parts of Europe.

The history of democracy in Europe is thus one that is much broader, where beyond its procedural and institutional features the conception also includes the 'substance' of democracy in terms of substantive and social outcomes for individuals. In addition to emphasis on equality of opportunity, the European conception of democracy also concerns equality of outcome. Such a conception thus comprises a wider of set of civil and political rights and through the emphasis on welfarism makes explicit reference to the protection of social and economic rights. But the European story also includes reference to minority rights and as the European Union expands, it has had to address significant questions of cultural rights as new groups migrate and settle throughout the region. Member states of the EU have thus aspired to guarantee a much wider array of protections for citizens than those included under liberal conceptions of democracy as found in the United States.

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Defining democracy matters is not something that should be relegated to the 'ivory tower' of academia. Rather, the conception of democracy as an *end* in itself or as a *means* to other ends (e.g. as based on strong normative commitments to a set of values or as providing political stability, security, and improvement in human well being), matters for the formulation of foreign policy. The European Union, like other significant governmental and inter-governmental actors, requires a working conception of democracy in its efforts to mainstream democracy into its policies. And as the next section of this paper demonstrates, the European experience with democracy is one that has emphasised a broad and holistic conception of democracy that can be shared with partner countries across the globe.

3. The European Democratic Narrative

Political developments in Europe have contributed to all four 'waves' of democratization. Whether or not one agrees with Huntington's (1991) typology (and there are those who do not), the waves of democracy offer useful periods in which to group democratic

developments in Europe and beyond. The first wave (1828–1926) and second wave (1943–1962) occurred in Western Europe, the third wave (1974–1989) in Southern Europe, and the fourth wave (1990 onwards) in Eastern Europe (see Huntington 1991; Doorenspleet 2000). But these processes were not isolated to Europe. Rather, they have been shared around the world either through processes of geographic 'contagion' as Laurence Whitehead (1996) suggests, or through processes of 'democratic diffusion', where the ideals of democracy have transcended the boundaries of the traditional nation state and inspired thousands of people to construct their own democratic institutions and develop their own democratic culture.

Indeed, initial periods of democratization in Argentina (1912–1930) and Uruguay (1919–1933) took place during the first wave; the second wave included Costa Rica (1948), Colombia (1958) and Venezuela (1958) and India (1950); the third wave included Peru (1978), Ecuador (1979), Argentina (1983), Uruguay (1984), Brazil (1985) and Guatemala (1985); and the fourth wave has been shared with countries in Latin America (e.g. Chile, Nicaragua and Panama in 1990 and Mexico in 2000), Africa (e.g. Benin in 1991, Mali in 1992, Lesotho and Niger in 1993, South Africa and Malawi in 1994), and Asia (Taiwan in 1991, Mongolia 1993, and Sri Lanka in 1994). The first wave democratic experiences in Europe and North America have been described as unlikely to be repeated or even available to other countries (see de Schweinitz 1964), but the argument does not preclude alternative routes to democratization, and it is clear that the countries listed above both in Europe and elsewhere have been able to find their way to democratic forms of rule.

Moreover, these shared histories of democratization are important for a foreign policy that incorporates democracy across its programmes. There are common lines of communication and challenges in forging democratic institutions. Democratization in post war Europe influenced processes of elite settlement in the Latin American cases, while independence in India was shortly followed by the installation of parliamentary democracy that has continued for over sixty years (albeit with some aberrations). The relatively rapid democratic transitions in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1970s had resonance in Latin America as generals returned to their barracks and political accommodation was sought between and among key actors during the many moments of transition outlined above. But this influence does not flow in one direction. For example, the creation of truth commissions in Latin America in the 1980s as a means to move politics forward found appeal among the post-communist democracies of Eastern Europe, which have devised their own processes of lustration and work on official memory projects. Moreover, the truth commission models developed in Latin America also had a tremendous influence on other truth processes in countries such as South Africa, Chad, Uganda, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and East Timor.

Beyond the moment of transition and any associated processes of dealing with the past, the shared experience with democracy has contributed to the choice of democratic institutions among new democracies in the world. Latin America combined Madisonian models of separation of powers with European style systems of proportional representation, while new democracies in Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia have chosen mixed systems with presidents and prime ministers, and a variety of different electoral systems. These choices matter as institutional arrangements provide different sets of incentives for political actors and different sets of constraints for formulating and implementing public policies. They also matter for the stability of democracy itself, as

comparative research has shown that presidential democracies are more unstable and less able to deliver substantively than parliamentary democracies (e.g. Stepan and Skach 1994; Lijphart 1999). These and other lessons on 'governability' under democratic rule continue to be shared as all democracies confront new challenges during the new millennium.

At a deeper level, however, the European political experience includes two parallel processes that contain important lessons for development and democracy in the world today. First, European political history is one of a series of transitions from feudal states to nation states and empires, to wars and democratization, to economic and political union, and to enlargement. The 'ever closer union' was born of conflict, struggle and then compromise and cooperation in ways that are similar to the unity achieved across the United States of America as it broke from feudalism, conquered new lands, and enlarged the number of its states. Second, like many other countries in the world, Europe underwent a transition from agrarian-based production through industrial revolution, post-industrial expansion and welfare capitalism, and economic integration. These parallel political and economic processes suggests that there is a certain logic of ever larger political conglomeration that is meant to bind together human communities in ways that prevent conflict, guarantee security, and deliver prosperity to greater numbers of people. Indeed, for Europe, the story is one of mass parties, closing down of cleavages that potentially split society, and taming the worst aspects of capitalism through social welfare policies. Now that the EU has twenty-seven member states, it is clear that a set of interests and ideas have motivated these developments, from which value can be shared with partners.

First, it is clear that the process in Europe has not been linear. The European story is one of many pitfalls, setbacks, and reversals, but a union of 27 democratic states is an achievement to be recognised, and the lessons learned in this achievement can be shared. Second, democratization is a continuous process as new challenges arise from changes in technology, demographics (e.g. migration and an ageing population), the threat of global terrorism, financial crises, among many others. Third, there are clear linkages between different policy areas and democracy that are informed by this larger European democratic narrative. A stable set of democracies yields a regional peace dividend, enhanced trade relations, and economic surplus for long term sustainability. Other regions can also benefit from the pacifying effects of democratization while linking democracy with larger questions of trade and development. And development itself benefits from wider degrees of population participation in the process of development, the policies for making development sustainable, and the deliberations about the distribution of its benefits.

4. EU Intentions

With these conceptual and historical aspects of democracy in place, the paper can now turn to a discussion of EU 'intentions' with respect to the democracy agenda in its foreign relations. These intentions come from a reading of different policy documents

across the many different areas of European foreign policy, including trade, security, and development. The discussion centres on the general commitments to democracy and then evaluates those commitments in the main regions for EU activity: (1) the wider Europe, (2) the Mediterranean, (3) Africa, (4) Asia, and (5) Latin America. The paper is based on a set of EU policy documents and communications with a general appeal and more specific engagement with regions in the world in which the EU has worked or would like to enhance its work through greater engagement.

A Commitment to Democracy

The integration of democratic principles into EU external policies was most notably articulated in 1993 with the entry into force of the Treaty on European Union, where the Common Foreign and Security Policy found within the treaty has a primary objective 'to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. The 1993 summit in Copenhagen declared that 'the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and promotion of minorities' is the first criterion to be met for countries seeking membership in the EU.

Following the Copenhagen Declaration, the European Commission has stated that a commitment to respect, promote and protect democratic principles and human rights is an essential element of the Community's Agreement with third countries (EC-com 23 May 1995) and that progress in the protection of human rights, good governance and democratization is seen as fundamental for poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development.. Article 6 of the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam reaffirms that the EU 'is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States'; while article 49 re-emphasizes the commitment to these principles by requiring their respect by applicant countries.

European institutions have increasingly endorsed recommendations on further integrating democracy and human rights within the EU agenda. The European Commission outlined measures to mainstream democracy and human rights in external relations with third countries (EC-COM 2001); the Council of the EU has adopted a similar approach in its guidelines for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); and the Commission's Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) now include an assessment of the situation of human rights and democratisation as an integral element in the strategies of assistance that are adopted, which is reviewed regularly to provide the opportunity for expanding and refining references to democracy and human rights. There is thus a combined interest within the EU in promoting democracy in ways that are linked with questions of security, enlargement, technical cooperation, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as conflict-prevention, crisis-management and conflict resolution. These general commitments find particular expression in policy documents developed for the regions in which the EU is engaged.

In policy terms, direct practical activities surrounding democracy in which the EU engages typically focus on elections and electoral observation, while activities in other policy areas, such as development, security, conflict prevention, and post conflict peace building, efforts at promoting democracy are integrated and mainstreamed alongside other activities. The most salient example of democracy promotion is the

European Initiative (now Instrument) for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which was founded to provide support for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide and is now identified across a variety of policy documents considered for this paper. The EIDHR sees these two concepts as linked and as integral to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, while the democratic processes of accountability are seen as vital to ensuring government transparency, which can have a key role in combating corruption. The EIDHR is thus a strategic tool used to mobilize resources more effectively and in a more co-ordinated fashion towards the goal of 'mainstreaming' democracy-building into the wider EU policy agenda.

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In more specific terms, electoral assistance projects and electoral observation missions (EOMs) have emerged as essential components of EU initiatives on democracy-building. Elections are an essential step in the democratisation process and represent a crucial opportunity for political participation and representation and are an important element in the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights. These initiatives are accompanied by work on strengthening civil society, strengthening regional frameworks for democracy building, and building confidence in the electoral process. But the EU also recognises that elections are necessary but not sufficient for moving towards democratic development. The promotion of an inclusive political society and functioning multiparty system with a focus on institutional development needs to be combined with the promotion of the effective functioning of newly elected institutions, while focusing exclusively on electoral processes may be counterproductive if it leads to an early disengagement from donors.

Indeed, the so-called 'electoral fallacy', which celebrates (sometimes prematurely) successful elections, can lead to the impression that no more cooperation is required at a time when such continued cooperation is vital. In extreme cases where the central government is not committed to democratic governance, the EU seeks engagement with other actors, such as civil society, local authorities or parliaments in ways that seek to enhance democracy. These developments are indeed welcome and demonstrate that the EU has a key role to play in democracy building around the world. This general commitment to democracy, however, has to be modified to fit the contextual specificities of the different regions in which the EU is currently engaged, and as the next section shows there is much work to be done to work with the great variety of country experiences and challenges that characterise these regions.

Regional Variations in Democracy Policy

European enlargement has of course included countries to the east and to the south, stretching into Southern Europe in the 1970s (as outlined above), Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean in the 1990s, and the larger European 'neighbourhood' through the turn of the new millennium. The EU had to confront the transition from Communism in Eastern Europe which brought with it the break up of the Soviet Union, the creation of new independent states, the division of Czechoslovakia, and the break up of the Former Yugoslavia. The 'velvet revolutions' in Eastern Europe contrasted sharply with the conflict in the Balkans, while countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia today

continue to struggle with process of state building and democratization. Across these regions, work on democracy is vital for conflict prevention and security in the wider Europe, and continues to be seen as linked to long-term patterns in sustainable economic development. Thus, throughout the 'wider' Europe the development of democracy and democracy in development are key concerns of EU policy as the logic of the European democratic narrative continues in new geographical areas.

In addressing neighbours to the immediate South of the EU, the 'Barcelona Process' remains committed to regional stability and democracy through cooperation and further integration, and has provided a forum within which all 'Mediterranean partners exchange views and engage in constructive dialogue, and political dialogue is a regular item on the agenda of the Euro-Mediterranean ministers' and senior officials' meetings'. Parties to the Barcelona Declaration are committed to the development of the rule of law and democracy within the confines of their own political, socio-cultural, economic and judicial systems. It os clear, however, that the persistence of conflict in the Middle East (most notably the 2006 crisis in Lebanon and the 2008-2009 crisis in Gaza) continues to challenge and 'stretch' the limits of the partnership in ways that have limited its abilities to 'preserve the channels of dialogue among all partners'.

The colonial and post-colonial experiences in Africa make its history and development intimately linked to that of Europe, as European countries extracted themselves from direct rule (or were expelled from doing so) since the 1960s. The parallel development of regional 'unions' (albeit at markedly different paces) means that the two regions share a common set of characteristics and commitments. European policy documents recognise this history and see common value commitments to 'the respect for human rights, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, the rule of law and democracy as enshrined in the relevant international agreements and in the constitutive texts of our respective Unions'. The European engagement with Africa is primarily dedicated to peace, security, democracy, and the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, as well as the achievement of the MDGs. And alongside these general commitments, the EU sees democracy as a central feature of its dialogue and partnership, welcomes the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

As in Africa, European countries have had colonial connections throughout large sections of Asia, which is divided principally between South Asia and East Asia. Democracy is seen as a 'cross-cutting' issue alongside development, security, and conflict prevention. Asia does not have the same kinds of regional mechanisms as those found in Europe and Latin America (see below) for democracy; however, the EU works through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Association of South-East Asia Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN regional forum (ARF) and the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). Asia is characterised by significant differences in the forms of governance in the region, including monarchies, communist regimes, authoritarian regimes, dictatorships, and 'guided' democracies (e.g. in Indonesia), but the EU sees a general trend towards political democratisation, even if it is characterised by the presence of some significant exceptions.

Clearly, China looms large in any policy towards Asia; conflict has been persistent in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal; India is the world's largest democracy and is attracting greater attention through the EU-India partnership (since 2000); and developments in ASEAN promise more support for democracy in the future. In

addition to the variation in regime type, Asia has additional problems of large refugee and migratory flows; the potential risk of nuclear proliferation; lack of adherence to labour standards; unemployment; natural disasters, health threats, and environmental degradation; and related global threats. But against this backdrop of variety and challenge, the EU is committed to making a contribution to democratisation and strengthening its bilateral and multilateral dialogue with countries in the region.

In South East Asia, the EU also recognises the diversity of country contexts and regimes types, but its assistance has helped establish democracy in Cambodia and East Timor and Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia have all signed co-operation agreements, which include an 'essential element' clause that stipulates that respect for fundamental human rights and democratic principles underpins the internal and external policies of the parties. Such 'essential element' clauses must be included in all future bilateral agreements with countries of South East Asia. But even where an agreement including such clauses is not in force, the EU's political and development dialogue with its South East Asian partners will mirror the Treaty provisions on democracy.

Finally, as outlined above, the countries of Latin America have featured as key components in the 'third wave' of democratisation and have undergone long periods of political liberalisation shortly after the democratic transitions in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. By 1990, with the exception of Cuba, all the countries in the region had democratically elected leaders, and in only a few cases (e.g. Peru, Guatemala, and Ecuador) has democracy seen temporary setbacks. The region has undergone a remarkable set of developments towards democracy, institutionalised its human rights commitments under the Inter-American system, and in 2001 passed the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The Charter commits all countries in the region to the idea that people have a *right to democracy* and that democracy itself is 'essential for the social, political, and economic development of the peoples of the Americas' (see Article 1).

The EU recognises these achievements but remains concerned over the precariousness of democracy given its dwindling public support as the most suitable form of government for the region. Citizen satisfaction with democracy has declined dramatically since the early 1990s, a change in perception that accompanies the persistence of poverty and social exclusion in the region. But the Commission (primarily through the EIDHR) has pledged to continue its support for modernising government in Latin America. Moreover, the European Parliament has proposed setting up a Euro-Latin American transatlantic assembly that combines members from the European Parliament with those from Parlatino, Parlacen, Parlandino, the JPC, Mexico, and Chile.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has argued that experiences with democratization in Europe are shared across a wide geographical space and encompass an ever large proportion of the world's population. India is the world's largest democracy (1.2 billion people), along with other such giants as the United States (306 million people), Brazil (191 million people), Japan (127 million people), and Mexico (110 million people). Europe as a whole comprises a large geographical area and large proportion of the population, and its democratic story is one that has been told in other countries. But the European story is one that has combined the gradual achievement of protections of civil and political rights with the extension of social and economic rights in ways that ought to form the basis for a foreign

policy that places democracy at its centre. The twin principles of popular sovereignty and collective decision making, coupled with real opportunities and substantive outcomes for all individuals is a laudable goal for all democracies and all countries aspiring to become democracies. The routes to such a goal, however, are different and specific, such that the EU can learn as much as it can teach as democracy advances inside and outside Europe.

Any EU foreign policy ought to recognise these shared yet diverse experiences of democratization and work with partners on the construction of democratic systems that move beyond the minimal aspects of repeated elections and the peaceful transfer of power to include the real lived experiences of individuals. Putting democracy at the centre of foreign policy can bring together separate concerns over trade, security, and development by emphasising the need for participation, inclusiveness, representation, and accountability.

Democracy is an unfinished business within Europe and without. It is not a complete project or model that is then 'exported', but one that is constantly unfolding and changing as political systems grapple with new demands and new challenges. As this paper has shown, the lived experience of democracy has important lessons that travel to Europe as much as from Europe, while the EU itself has tremendous fiscal capacity to incorporate democracy into its foreign relations across the regions in which it is engaged and across the policy areas through which it pursues these relations.

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