SHAPEDEM-EU

Domestic practices of contestation
in EU member states

SHAPEDEM-EU Publications

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List of Abbreviations

AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Agency of International Development Cooperation)
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
AFD	Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)
AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo)
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CICID	Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development
CoP	Community of Practice
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAG	Development Assistance Group
DANEP	Danish Neighbourhood Program
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DAPP	Danish-Arab Partnership Program
DC	Development Cooperation
DIIS	Danish Institute for International Studies
DIPD	Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Party
ECC	European Economic Communities
EED	European Endowment for Democracy
EEDC	East European Democratic Centre
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
EUMS	European Union Member States
FdI	Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy)
FSM	Fundacja Solidarności Międzynarodowej (Solidarity Fund PL)
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
IAI	Istituto Affari Internazionali
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
MAECI	Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation)
MEF	Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, Ministry of Economy and Finance
MS	Member States
NDF	New Democracy Fund
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEZA	Austrian Development Cooperation Agency
OeEB	Austrian Development Bank
OIF	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (International Organization of Francophonie)

QUANGOS	Quasi-Non-Governmental Organisations
RLS	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
RSF	Reporters sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SPO	Strategic Partner Organisations
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
V4	Visegrád Group
VENRO	Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid Non-Governmental Organisations

Executive Summary

This report investigates how selected EU member states – Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Sweden – support democracy in the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. We analyse and map involved actors, applied instruments, and funding schemes. Of particular interest in the report is whether internal actors in countries under investigation contested democracy support. It is an important element of a broader perspective offered by the SHAPEDEM-EU where understanding the dynamic of EU democracy promotion must include a look at the domestic preferences, institutions, policy dynamics etc. in the EU member states that complement EU efforts.

Each national research team built a sample of documents produced by actors identified in their respective countries as active in democracy support in one of the neighbourhoods. The study covered the period from 2011 to 2022. After building the sample for each national team, we coded all documents using MaxQDA software and using unified codebook.

To identify the democracy support practices and contestation of such practices, we focus on various actors who act in different capacities, are differently situated in the political structure, and vary in the power to influence the state's policies or broader public discourses. We identified actors who are usually involved in such practices. This group includes national governments, national political parties and their leaders, national parliaments, regional and local governments, national think tanks and experts, civil society actors, and interest groups.

The report finds that democracy support in selected EUMS under investigation is more pragmatically related to regional stability and security rather than is more based on assumed shared values. The other relevant finding is that democracy support practices in EUMS are more based on developmental aspects of democracy support. Democracy support is often anchored in the practices of development cooperation, like supporting good governance or human rights. In most of the analysed cases, the contestation of democracy support is not dominant in the public discourse of EUMS under investigation. Moreover, there has been very little impact of illiberal and populist political forces on contesting democracy support in those EUMS.

1 Introduction: Democracy support by EU member states

2 Research Methodology & Report Structure

2.1 Research Objectives

Two main objectives guide our study. Firstly, the research aims to identify democracy support practices towards the European southern and eastern neighbourhoods as exercised by various actors at the national level in the selected EUMS. As the study draws on Merkel's concept of embedded democracy, the democracy support practices are understood as support expressed by an actor for an aspect(s) (partial regimes) of democracy, i.e. democratic election, political participation rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern. Additionally, to identify the DS mechanisms, the study also focuses on identifying the instruments and funding schemes used or proposed by the actors to support democratic practices (i.e. financial, economic, political, diplomatic, social, cultural or other instruments).

Secondly, the study aims to capture the contestation of democracy support. Within the SHAPEDEM-EU, contestation concerns the political conflict that emerges around the international realm focused

on support for democracy in the EU neighbourhood. It is primarily an act of discontent or criticism toward an issue, event or institution. It often challenges dominant intersubjective meanings or established norms, and, as a result, it can restructure the debate on a given issue (Contessi, 2010). However, it can also highlight critical junctions that may initiate a change in practices and the underlying norms. So, in this study, contestation is understood as an activity undertaken to voice differences of experience, expectation and opinion on practices of democracy support (Wiener, 2014). More specifically, we focused on identifying voices or practices that question, challenge or criticise democracy support practices aiming to strengthen liberal democracy as a fundamental principle and its various dimensions, organising principles, and standardised procedures of democracy support.

In identifying the democracy support practices and their contestation, we were also interested in capturing if and in what capacities both support and contestation touch upon or involve instruments related to the promotion of gender equality or digital transformations (see more SHAPEDEM-EU research on gender equality in Gawrich, Konrad 2024 and on digital transformation in Osypchuk, Suslov, Shaporda 2024) . The former is a key litmus test for liberal values underpinning democratization in the EU neighbourhood countries. The latter allows capturing novel challenges that democratisation efforts face in the digital era such as fake news or disinformation and new opportunities stemming from digital participation or e-administration. The former we understood as support for gender equality defined as entailing "equal rights for women and men, girls and boys, as well as the same visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life. It also implies equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men" (Council of Europe 2018, p.5). They accepted that respective instruments may take more specific shapes when including LGBTIQ equality (i.e., legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, sex or gender reassignment). The latter, digital transformation, we understood broadly as instruments that involve digital channels of communication essential for transparency, public participation, and accountability in all processes of democratisation, as well as preventing the creation of new mechanisms for authoritarian control and opportunities to spread disinformation, eroding societal trust in state institutions and the EU and other external actors in democracies and autocracies alike.

2.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

The central research question of this report is if democracy support is more based on assumed shared values or is more pragmatically related to regional stability and security. In recent years, the EU and its member states (particularly actors not in government) tend to prefer a more pragmatic approach to relations with neighbours. This means they aim at increasing stability and security for the EU rather than normative underpinnings (Wunsch & Olszewska, 2022). That has fundamental consequences for democracy support as the conflicts around the fundamental norms are visible.

Our first key hypothesis is that democracy support practices in EUMS tend to focus on either political or developmental aspects of democracy support (including issues of social justice or welfare). In some cases, EUMS tend to prioritise the latter. Hence, we would focus on understanding how, through contestation, we can map the dynamic of the relation between the two aspects.

Our second key hypothesis is that, following Achrainer and Pace (2024), contestation patterns are determined by belonging to a specific Community of Practice (CoP). Insider actors (CoP1) will be the least contesting (unless there are populist and extreme parties in the government of a given member state). The contestation of actors gathered in CoP2 (CSOs, political parties and others cooperating on DS) will be characterised by agreeing on fundamental norms but contesting organising principles and technical procedures. Finally, the CoP 3.1 (European Outsiders Contesting DS made of disruptive actors

such as populist and far right and far left parties, social movements as well as non-pluralist CSOs) will contest specifically democracy support focusing on criticism of liberal democracy, pluralism, equality (as a fundamental norm) and bring forward other competing fundamental norms such as security, stability or sovereignty and locate them above DS. The last very specific community of practice is formed by actors whose prime interest is in another policy/subject dimension, such as trade, security, migration, energy or other policies (CoP4). They will instead contest DS by locating it as secondary to their prime area of interest and using it instead as a contestation of standardised procedures and organising principles rather than fundamental norms. Hence, in our study, we focus on identifying CoP in selected EUMS and their contestation.

2.3   Research Design: Case Selection, Documents Selection and its Limitation

The study covered eight countries: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden in alphabetic order. These countries reflect the diversity of the EU. They are located differently geographically and vary in proximity to the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Our sample includes countries whose borders overlap with the external borders of the EU (Spain, Italy, Poland) and more centrally located countries (France, Germany, Denmark, Austria, and Sweden). The cases included in our study also differ regarding their national foreign policy preferences and traditional avenues of behaviour towards partner countries. Some countries, such as Sweden or Denmark, are historically significant actors in providing democracy support and development aid. At the same time, others, such as Germany, are also significant in terms of the volume of financial support for democratic aims. Finally, there is a difference in the length of EU membership between the countries in our sample. Hence, the Europeanisation of EU foreign policy (of which democracy promotion and development aid is part) has impacted their support for democracy in the EU neighbourhoods.

Applying the diverse cases allows us to identify the patterns in democracy promotion practices across the EU. As our second research aim relates to contestation of democracy support practices, the study of different countries helps to identify patterns of contestation in terms of the actors and strategies involved and how democracy support was challenged. Specifically, in some countries, populist right-wing parties were in government (Austria, Italy, Poland), supported acting governments (Sweden, Denmark) or were strong opposition to liberal democratic ruling parties (France, Germany, Spain). This raised the question of how they impacted the practices and instruments of democracy support in their EUMS.

To identify the democracy support practices and contestation of such practices, we focus on various actors who act in different capacities, are differently situated in the political structure, and vary in the power to influence the state's policies or broader public discourses. We identified actors who are usually involved in such practices. This group includes national governments, national political parties and their leaders, national parliaments, regional and local governments, national think tanks and experts, civil society actors, and interest groups. The list, however, was not exclusive, and we were also open to capturing the additional and less expected actors involved in the democratic support practices and their contestations. Each national research team involved in this part of the SHAPEDEM-EU project attempted to map specific actors involved in democracy practices support or contestation of such practices in their respective countries.

The documents produced by the actors involved in both democracy support practices and contestation served as our empirical material. Such a choice of empirical material is derived from the general framework of the social practice approach that informs our study. We aim to capture practices, i.e. doing and sayings. Social practices can be defined as "socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in

being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world" (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 4). Accordingly, such knowledge governs social practices (Schatzki, 2005, p. 471), and its implicit nature indicates that it contributes to the repetitiveness of practices. Hence, it plays a crucial role in stabilising social and political orders and "provides for meaningful action" (Bueger, 2014, p. 387).

Identifying such knowledge enables recognising and understanding the fundamental norms, organising principles that inform specific actions, and standardised procedures that constitute the enactment of broader norms (Wiener, 2014; Poppe & Wolff, 2017). Analysis of documents produced by the actors from different countries allows to capture doings (i.e. acted out or envisioned as desired acts) and saying (i.e. discourse and background knowledge that informs patterns of actions) related to democracy support practices and contestation of such practices. In addition, we also analysed the level of spending by selected countries to substantiate the doing of democracy support further. However, analysis of documents also offers insight into the background knowledge that governs democracy support practices or feeds the contestation of such practices.

We are also aware of the limitation of using the documents as the primary empirical material. Since democracy support is part of foreign policy, sometimes the actors avoid publishing specific documents (or videos, podcasts) on their activities. Moreover, identifying gaps in documents about democracy support is also an important finding. We can refer to the "politics of silence" analysis (Vieira, 2021), where silence is a form of political agency, not simply a lack of speech/action. Silence can also be described as either a strategic omission (intending to avoid discussing given issues, problems, or regions) or negligent, where marginalisation of issues/regions comes from setting different priorities (in the foreign policy of the given country or within the EU). In the case of this study, it may indicate to what extent neighbourhoods constitute a 'legitimate political problem' for a given country. The silence may also mark cultural and political implicit or tacit biases resulting from the perception of European vs. non-European differences. Finally, it could be interpreted as a country, elite or society's conviction that a given neighbourhood lacks the potential for democratic change.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis: Coding Documents Procedure

Each national research team built a sample of documents produced by actors identified in their respective countries as active in democracy support in one of the neighbourhoods. The study covered the period from 2011 to 2022. Table 1. includes the number of categories of actors, documents collected for each national case and contestation.

After building the sample for each national team, we coded all documents using MaxQDA software. The codebook developed for the study was divided into two interlinked parts. The first one served to identify specific dimensions of democracy that are supported by a given actor (i.e. democratic elections, political participation rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to governance) and proposed instruments of implementing or executing such support. The second part of the codebook was developed to capture the contestation of democracy support. It aimed to identify voices or practices that question, challenge or criticise practices aiming to strengthen democracy support practices in the neighbourhoods.

The documents that included at least one of the codes related to contestation were listed in Table 1, indicating the overall level of detected contestation. The codebook also involved codes related to gender equality and digital transformations as we aim to identify if and how democracy support practices or their contestation involved any of these issues.

Table 1 Numbers of actors included in the study, analysed documents and documents with contestation

EUMS	Number of categories of actors identified for the study	Number of documents collected for the study	Number of documents with at least one of merit code
Germany	6	172	73
Italy	7	100	76
France	6	99	63
Denmark	4	49	44
Spain	6	50	39
Poland	8	228	92
Sweden	8	155	58
Austria	6	49	33
Total	–	902	478

Source: Own compilation.

Each team used the unified codebook with three major categories of codes. All codes are listed in Appendix 1. The first one refers to the contestation of democracy as a fundamental norm. Different actors express in diverse ways what they mean by democracy support in the context of the EU neighbourhood. The EU's founding documents inhabit the model and values of liberal democracy. Numerous actors in the EUMS do not necessarily follow such a version of democracy. Hence, we assumed that democracy could be contested internally in EUMS and, more generally, as the vision of what and how shall be supported in the EU neighbourhood and what shall not.

The second group of codes enabled us to highlight in the given documents the contestation of organising principles of democracy support, mainly what actors are engaged in and in what capacity.

The third group of codes deals with contesting standardised procedures of democracy support. Researchers investigated whether the document indicated specific instruments of democracy support, understood as specific sets of techniques employed to support democracy. We differentiated financial, economic, diplomatic, cultural, political and social instruments. These were not exclusive categories, and each group of codes has numerous specific codes. During the coding process, it turned out that researchers in national teams only used some codes. It allowed us to map silence practices, as we saw which areas of democracy contestation are not debated, investigate and why.

2.4.1 Democracy Support Funding in EU member states – data gathering

An important part of democracy support is the mobilisation of financial resources. As part of our research, we gathered official data from selected EUMS. The European Commission and all European Union Member States report their official development assistance expenditures to Development Assistance Committee (DAC) within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the forum of consultation and cooperation between countries providing development assistance. Development Assistance Committee continues the Development Assistance Group (DAG), established in 1960. Provided by states, data must follow the rules established by the OECD, which later checks and validates them before publication in the Creditor Reporting System. A unified system of reporting development aid and assistance allows comparisons of data provided by countries and harmonisation of provided aid and assistance, including meeting the targets of reaching levels of development assistance in comparison to Gross National Product.

Development Assistance Committee provides development assistance providers with detailed rules for classifying expenditures. They include seven main sectors of assistance: Social Infrastructure & Services (100), Economic Infrastructure & Services (200), Production Sectors (300), Multi-Sector/Cross-Cutting (400), Commodity Aid / General Programme Assistance (500), Action Related to Debt (600), Humanitarian Aid (700).

Out of these comprehensive categories, the funds provided for financing of the activities related to democracy support and development of civil society are grouped in category 151, which includes public sector policy and administrative management (15110), public finance management (15111), decentralisation and support to subnational government, (15112), anti-corruption organisations and institutions (15113), domestic revenue mobilisation (15114), Legal and judicial development (15130), democratic participation and civil society (15150), – Elections (15151), legislatures and political parties (15152), media and free flow of information (15153), human rights (15160), women's equality organisations and institutions (15170), ending violence against women and girls (15180), facilitation of orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility (15190). These are part of the "Social Infrastructure & Services" sector in category 151 "Government and Civil Society, general". The data related to the selected EUMS was gathered and presented in the following parts of this report concerning each EUMS under investigation.

2.5   Structure of the Report

Each EUMS research team followed a similar research design, reflected in this report's structure. After demonstrating the methodology in Chapter 2, we explain in Chapter 3 how DS has been located in the foreign policy of EUMS, its relationship with development cooperation (DC) and the challenges to assessing DS's effectiveness. We also conceptualise the contestation of democracy support. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the general context and historical conditions of democracy support in selected EUMS. It refers to the relations between democracy support, development cooperation and foreign policy. Another context was how democracy support is located within the country's conception of role in international relations.

Chapter 6 analyses the main actors and instruments of democracy support in EUMS 2011-2022. The authors demonstrate actors who are active in democracy support and which domain of democracy support each actor focuses on. Next, they list key instruments employed to support democracy, understood as means mobilised by a supporting country to support democracy in a given partner country. In Chapter 7, we give the overview of financing for democracy support by EUMS. In Chapter 8, we present to what degree crosscutting issues like gender equality and digitalisation are essential in EUMS. The report ends with Annex 1 showing the list of codes used to analyse documents and, in Annex 2, the distribution of codes in each EUMS case.

3   Democracy Support Conceptualization

3.1   Foreign Policy, Development Cooperation and Effectiveness

Individual states were traditionally the leading actors in conducting foreign policy and, more broadly, external relations. The advancement of European integration was a game changer. The EU and its supranational institutions impacted foreign policy's role and competencies division by entering the international environment. Some roles, competencies, and tasks started to be shared between the EU and the member states (MS), while others shifted from the national level to the EU level (Wetzel et al., 2015).

However, EUMS continued to include democracy support in their external relations agendas, but they gained a new European dimension. The EU democracy support is, to some extent, secondary to the preferences of the member states. Emerson notes that the individual EUMS naturally prioritise their neighbours to whom they are closest (Emerson et al, 2005). Moreover, the European Parliament and European Commission also developed their policies and have gained much independence regarding activity in democracy support, specifically in the policy areas where the European Commission has many competencies, e.g., trade policy, migration policy, energy and climate policy. Regarding southern and eastern neighbourhoods, the most significant difference between the EU and member states external policies was the 'membership perspective' of neighbours, with some MS presenting enlargement 'fatigue'. More recently, however, the EU and MS advocated relative stability rather than investing in systemic democratic changes in the southern and eastern neighbourhoods. The membership perspective was not realistic until 2022's outbreak of unprovoked Russian war against Ukraine.

The other important variable is the degree to which democracy support overlaps with development cooperation policy. In 2019, the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) published a comprehensive comparative study on democracy promotion by EUMS. The report examines twelve EU countries and finds out that most of the examined cases of MS policies and actions "have incorporated democracy support into their development cooperation policy (EPD, 2019, p. 2). The report emphasises that there is much focus on good governance within the development cooperation policy that is – in principle – a part of the democracy support agenda. The report also finds that the activity of member states that can be considered democracy support lacks a clear definition of democracy. As a result, their focus on 'good governance' elevates the promotion of public policy reforms, the improvement of public services, and the adjustment to EU standards. The report shows that MS focus on three significant aspects of their relationship with neighbourhoods: human rights, development aid and providing peace and security (EPD, 2019, p. 11).

EU democracy support in its neighbourhoods has not successfully implemented long-lasting changes in partner countries, and the EU seems not to be able to tackle these problems. (Gafuri, 2022; Berti et al., 2015; Pace et al., 2009; Schuetze, 2019). The biggest challenge is that the EU takes the role of the sender of democracy promotion instruments under its strict conditionality, while the neighbouring countries have been only regarded as passive receivers of the EU's democracy support (Keukeleire et al., 2021). Moreover, each of the member states has its democracy support agenda. Hence, it is hard to evaluate the overall effectiveness of DS in the EU and at the EUMS level.

3.2   Conceptualising Contestation of Democracy Support

For the SHAPEDEM-EU project, we understand contestation as the political conflict that emerges around the international realm, mainly focused on support for democracy in the EU neighbourhood. Contestation is primarily an act of discontent or criticism toward an issue, event or institution. In that sense, we focus on expressions of criticism by different actors in EUMS toward various aspects of democracy support. In general terms, contestation can be understood as an activity to voice differences in experience, expectation, and opinion (Wiener, 2014).

There is a lack of agreement among the authors regarding the results of the contestation. Some, such as Wiener (2014), see some positive aspects in realigning the practices resulting from contestation. However, others, such as Contessi (2010), stress that contestation leads to the deconstruction of dominant intersubjective meanings or established norms and often reshuffles the debate on a given issue. In studies on foreign policy, it is often argued that contestation is an act that results from growing

political conflict over a given issue (Biedenkopf et al., 2021). In that sense, contestation is linked to politicisation characterised by three elements: the increased salience of an issue, the broadened scope of the actors engaged in debates, and the growing polarisation of opinions (De Wilde, 2011; Góra, 2021; Thevenin, 2021). The contestation in foreign policy is usually limited as it is kept at a distance from public deliberations and is often securitised (Hegemann & Schneckener, 2019).

Moreover, the report's authors also consider the ongoing crisis of liberal democracy within the EU and particular member states (Zielonka, 2018; Zielonka & Rupnik, 2020). It mainly concerns the growing prominence of populist and nativist movements across the continent (often also Eurosceptic) that undermine the established consensus on liberal democracy. The de-democratisation within the EU has not only been visible in these countries' foreign policy discourses (Varga & Buzogány, 2021; Buzogány, Costa, and Góra, 2021; Cianciara, 2022; Lovec and Fenko, 2019) but also significantly weakened the normative influence of the EU in the close neighbourhood (Pech, 2016; Raube, Burnay, and Wouters 2016).

Scholarship on democracy promotion and support is linked with contestation (Wetzel and Orbie 2015). However, the main research relates to overall development cooperation (Hackenesch et al., 2021) and, in particular, in connection to migration (Kiratli, 2021; Lauwers et al., 2021). Scholars underlined the importance of negotiation and contestation in defining and implementing democracy promotion norms and programmes (Poppe, Leininger, and Wolff 2019). As regards contestation of democracy support as a norm – a novel taxonomy (Buzogany, Costa, Góra 2021) is debated in literature (see Table 2.).

Based on these works, we assume that the contestation of democracy support can be related to treating democracy as a fundamental norm. It refers to general debates on what type of democracy member states and civil society actors want to promote (Wiener, 2014). Such contestation relies on the tensions between liberal democracy (assumed meaning within EU documents) and illiberal or majoritarian democracy understandings among various actors in EUMS (Krastev, 2018; Zielonka & Rupnik, 2020; Meyer-Resende, 2018; Galston, 2018). In this regard, the definition of liberal democracy is linked to the embedded democracy concept described above (Merkel, 2004; Merkel & Kneip, 2018). The key aspect in capturing the contestation of liberal democracy is also how it is related to other fundamental norms. The most specific are security and stability, as well as potential economic prosperity. In addition, some actors raise the principle of sovereignty, which is understood as the primacy of a given country's well-being over aid to others.

Secondly, we can capture the contestation of democracy support imprinted within its organising principles. Following Poppe and Wolff (2017), contestation may be related to what kind of political order might be installed in partner countries; contestation can concern the means of democracy promotion that are employed. Finally, it can also relate to who are legitimate participants (recipients) in the partner countries, predominantly (secular and non-secular) civil society actors or non-democratic governments.

Thirdly, analysing contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support highlights the role and meanings of specific instruments or programmes (different programmes, funds, instruments, and measures) aimed at enacting democracy support.

Table 2 Analytic framework for analysing contestation of democracy support

Norm type	General definition and application for DS	Codes developed to capture contestation of DS at the levels
<u>Fundamental norms</u>	Broad moral reach, quasi-constitutional quality: i.e. Article 21 of Treaty of European Union (TEU). TEU refers to the general concept of democracy in conjunction with "the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity".	References to explicit statements that liberal democracy is problematic in general terms. For instance, supporting the majoritarian conception of democracy, using anti-pluralist arguments, supporting concentration of power by a strong executive (with emphasis on the role of strong leadership and referring to the nativist idea of 'people'); when liberal democracy is perceived as problematic in the context of its operation in EU neighbourhood countries. In addition, specific subcodes for capturing such aspects of DS contestation as human rights, rule of law, or if liberal democracy is fitting partner country. In addition, coded conflicts with other fundamental norms, specifically the security, stability, and prosperity (economic gains) of EUMS. Actors may prioritise these other fundamental values. Statements coded in which actors mention that another norm (security, stability, prosperity) is more important than promoting democracy.
<u>Organizing principles</u>	Translate fundamental norms into specific actions, establish how the fundamental norm of liberal democracy is interpreted related to the supported political order (what outcome of democratisation at the polity level), the means of DS (conditionality, differentiated access to EU), and legitimate participants (what relations to autocratic governments, which CSOs supported).	Contestation of <u>actors engaged in DS</u>, specifically contestation of who decides on DS in EUMS, who provides DS in EUMS, CSOs' role, who decides on DS in the EU, and how the EU provides DS. In addition, the codes capture the contestation of DS for specific partner countries and DS for autocratic regimes and how local actors are engaged in DS. Secondly, contestation of <u>what is supported as an aspect of democracy</u>, with specific attention to support for democratic elections, support of political participation, civil rights, rule of law, independence of judiciary, media freedom, legitimate governing institutions, social justice policies, good governance measures, and anti-corruption measures. Finally, the contestation of the assessed outcomes of democracy support provided by a given EUMS. Often, actors criticise DS based on limited positive impact in partner countries.

| Standardized procedures | Flanking measures are specific enactments of broader norms, such as electoral monitoring missions, financial tools, or party cooperation. | The coding covered critical referring to specific instruments of democracy support understood as means mobilised by a supporting country to support democracy in a given partner country. We distinguish financial, economic, diplomatic, cultural, political and social instruments. We treat instruments as specific sets of techniques that are employed in order to support democracy.
In addition, we coded the contestation of the level of financial support. |

Source: Own compilation based on Buzogany, Costa, Góra (2022) Wiener (2014) and Poppe and Wolff (2017).

4 Democracy Support in EUMS: Historical and Political Context

Each research team within the SHAPEDEM-EU project investigated the importance of democracy support within their EUMS's historical and political context. We identified how democracy support is often used by countries in their self-perception of international politics and to what degree it affects their foreign policy. Promoting democracy in the neighbourhood strengthens its country's image of established democracy or front-runners of democracy (Sweden, Denmark). It was also essential for countries that underwent the transition from totalitarian (Germany, Austria, Italy) or authoritarian regimes (Spain, Poland) to democracy or had their colonial and imperial rule legacy (France). Most countries under investigation generally see democracy promotion as a way to maintain their regional and international political positions. It is also broadly seen as contributing to regional stability and the European integration project. We present each EUMS's historical and political context of democracy support below separately.

4.1 Germany

Germany frequently presents itself as a model country with a successful transition to democracy (Holthaus, 2019, p. 1223) in the aftermath of the breakdown of the totalitarian Third Reich. The tragic lessons learned from National Socialism led Germany to cast itself as a civilian power (*Zivilmacht*), which defines multilateralism at the centre of German foreign policy (Wolff, 2013, p. 479). Germany followed this civilian power role model based on three distinct commitments. First, 'never again', as Germany will never again fight a war of aggression. Second, 'never alone' in which adheres to principles of multilateralism. Third, 'politics before force', which foresees that Germany will aim to prioritise civilian conflict management (Lapins, 2007, p. 7). These three principles are reflected in Germany's foreign policy guidelines regarding its values and goals linked with historical learning processes (Kirste & Maull, 1996, p. 299).

In the case of Germany, the historical responsibility for the totalitarian, imperialist and genocidal regime during National Socialism is the guiding principle of a civilian and multilateral-oriented foreign policy paradigm. Hence, Germany is willing to transfer sovereignty (e.g., within the European integration process), and its advocacy of multilateral norms and values (even when these conflict with its national interests) are a result of this learning process (Maull, 2007a, p. 74). This background on the long-term consensus between all German governments after 1990 may explain why Germany perceives democracy as not something that should be imposed on other countries with no preferred

concrete institutional design. Instead, German support for foreign countries focuses on broad values, primarily regarding the rule of law and human rights. (Wolff, 2013, pp. 481–489; Wolff & Spanger, 2017, p. 92).

4.2 Italy

Italy has seen support for democracy – with particular emphasis on development and economic assistance – as a fundamental element of its foreign policy strategy for several decades. Since the end of World War II, Italy has committed to democracy. The Italian Constitution of 1947 affirms the promotion of democracy as a cornerstone of Italian policy. Over the years, there have been strategic fluctuations depending on the governments of the time. However, the basic ideas have remained unchanged, even under challenging circumstances, including those caused by, for example, international terrorism or the migration crisis. It should be emphasised that post-war democratic European unity has always enjoyed broad affirmation among Italian public opinion, starting with the Ventotene Manifesto announced in 1941 by Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli, who were sentenced to internal exile for opposing fascism. The subsequent international role of the Italian Republic, created as a result of the institutional referendum of 1946, has established itself hand in hand with the strengthening of large multilateral organisations and alliances of which Italy is a part.

By promoting democratic values, within the foreign policy framework, Italy aims to strengthen its regional influence and international prestige. It recognises that stable and democratic neighbours contribute to regional security and prosperity. At the same time, it should be emphasised that in Italy, it is not merely a part of a foreign policy tool but also a reflection of its commitment to the principles that underpin the European project. Italy perceives this issue not only as a strategic interest but also as an ethical and moral obligation.

> *"We all believe in democratic values and the deliverables of democracy, [such as - authors] economic growth and shared prosperity. Since ancient times, people have discussed the connection between the form of political organisation they choose for their community and the impact that choice had on the economic system of that community. Democracy and economic development are interdependent. Democracy influences a nation's economic and human development. Moreover, economic development can affect democratisation processes" (Meloni, 2023).*

With these words, Giorgia Meloni began her speech at the Democracy Summit in March 2023. This statement from the serving Prime Minister of Italy since October 2022, and simultaneously the president of the national conservative and right-wing populist political party, the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, FdI), as well as the president of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR), since 2020, seems to indicate Italy's primary strategy towards the broadly understood issue of supporting democracy in partner countries. Italy considers that economic development is an essential precondition for a sustainable democracy.

4.3 France

France is committed to maintaining the image of an exemplary country in promoting democracy, having been the originator of human rights and continuing to uphold a humanitarian policy in the world. The adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1789 permanently embedded the values of human rights and democracy as cornerstones of domestic policy. Since then, it has consistently been referenced in France's foreign policy. The Fifth Republic explicitly expressed

its commitment to it by citing it in the preamble of its Constitution, and 1971, the Constitutional Council recognised its constitutional value. The declaration defines 'natural and inalienable' rights such as freedom, property, security, and resistance to oppression, acknowledges equality before the law and justice, and asserts the principle of the separation of power.

Nevertheless, the strategic documents outlining the Fifth French Republic's foreign policy do not explicitly articulate a priority for supporting and promoting democracy abroad. Numerous strategies and declarations within domestic and international policy contexts cite the universal principles of human and citizen rights, the rule of law, and good governance.

French discourse on self-perception and global influence revolves around the unwavering ambition of the Fifth Republic to ensure the 'rayonnement de la France' - the radiance of France, symbolising its global impact and prestige (Lefebvre, 2019, pp. 71-75). The French concept of soft power or normative power focuses on the idea of cultural influence. Its implementation is based on promoting the language, but what often escapes attention is also the promotion of values (Montbrial, 2021, p.10).

The leading platform for cooperation in this regard is the International Organization of Francophonie (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, OIF), which, in addition to language promotion, incorporates democratic values into its statutory activities. The organisation, with a broad membership of 54 countries in total, includes four countries from the southern neighbourhood (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon) and two from the eastern neighbourhood (Moldova, Armenia), with Ukraine holding observer status. The conceptual extension of the normative/soft power French paradigm is the policy of influence (*in*fluence diplomacy), viewed as a distinct element of foreign policy and a new pillar of France's international actions. The Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs introduced the first 'French strategy of influence through law' in March 2023. This strategy prioritises law as one of the key actions of French diplomacy. France stresses its role of being the engine of European normative power. Europe and France play a significant role in advocating, among others, for an international order based on the rule of law, ensuring international peace and security and conception of law grounded in universal principles, starting with human rights (French Strategy of Influence through Law, 2023).

4.4 Denmark

Denmark perceives itself as a normative actor in democracy support. The country has long placed DS and defending the rules-based international order as key pillars of its engagement with the world (Larsen, 2021). Although a small country, Denmark is recognised as a strong advocate for human rights and the rule of law. It has been described as a "norm-entrepreneur" (Ingebritsen, 2002) and as a "staunch and vocal supporter […] of democratic values, the rule of law, and good governance, as well as of multilateral frameworks that have guaranteed the upholding of these" (Haugevik and Sending 2020: 114). Denmark's normative approach became institutionalised in 2003 under the slogan *værdipolitik* (value-based politics) by then-Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Rasmussen declared that "in the fight between democracy and dictatorship, one cannot stand neutral. One must take a stand for democracy and against dictatorship" (quoted in Kaarsholm 2016; authors' translation). Notably, the introduction of *værdipolitik* became nuanced in the post-9/11 context in which Rasmussen's government unconditionally sided with the US, claiming to spread freedom and democracy and protect the liberal global order. Since then, priorities in Denmark's foreign policy have continued to change gradually due to, among other things, migration, energy and security concerns, economic crisis and trade interests, terrorism, and Russian aggression. In 2010, the new strategy for development cooperation introduced the principle of including Danish interests as a criterion for

selecting partner countries and a stronger focus on state fragility, terrorism, and migration (MFA, 2010).

In 2015, the new centre-right government of Lars Løkke Rasmussen initiated a comprehensive foreign policy review. He argued that, in times of limited resources, Denmark should focus on what is truly important for the country and thus reduce spending on 'nice-to-have' issues, such as development cooperation, further moving towards an interest-driven foreign policy. The development cooperation strategy from 2017 was then "very explicit in its emphasis on Danish interests" (Kjær, 2020, p. 509), stating that DC should serve to address "threats against our security and lifestyle, and to promote our own economic and trade interests" (MFA 2017: 1). As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021b: 2) noted in its 2021 DC priorities, Denmark "must be the small cog that makes the large machine turn in the right direction." Although, Denmark is a small state, and the government is aware of its limited resources regarding finances and manpower, it should aim to shape international developments, including democracy support.

4.5   Spain

Spanish's main asset in supporting democracy in foreign policy is its legacy in transitioning from dictatorship to democracy. A dominant narrative was that Spain completed it peacefully and progressively. It did not involve revolution or conflict, and democratic reforms prevailed. Since then, Spain has had this narrative that this transition model could be exported to other countries in need that were struggling to get from an authoritarian past to a full democracy. It was the case for Eastern European states after the fall of the USSR in their way to become 'European' again (Maxwell, 1991). Spanish foreign policy was readjusted after the transition to democracy. In less than ten years since the first democratic elections were held, Spain successfully integrated itself into the West's political and security structures. It started achieving economic prosperity and political stability in Western democracies. Being part of the European Communities made Spain treat the EU as its primary foreign policy focus. In that sense, European integration became a priority. Being part of the EC allowed Spain to redefine its policies to the Arabs, which became the Mediterranean policy.

Spain sees itself as a bridge between the most northern countries of the EU, with the Mediterranean countries and Latin America, both linked with Spain by history and, in the case of Latin America, also by language. Considering geography, it is understandable that Spain has devoted more interest to the southern neighbourhood than the eastern one. Spanish foreign policy worked with the concept of compensation (Barbé, 2000). It allowed the EU and other significant players to lead foreign policy towards the eastern neighbourhood, ensuring that commitments towards the southern neighbourhood would compensate for every step towards the eastern one.

4.6   Poland

Democracy support is a relatively important element of Polish foreign policy strategy. It predominantly features Poland's relations with its eastern neighbours. Poland promoted democratisation and assisted them in seeking to consolidate their democratic institutions. Following the fall of the Soviet bloc, Poland reembarked on a path of democratic transformation after overcoming the communist authoritarian rule. It was seen as a civilisational choice of a figurative 'return to Europe', mainly through an accession its accession to NATO and the European Union. Poland promptly sought ambitious political and economic reforms necessary for EU membership.

Poland has often advocated for democracy support, especially in its relations with eastern European states (Piskorska 2013, 2020; Cianciara 2008, 2017). It played a key role in forming the eastern

dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), known as the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Historically, the eastern dimension has been the primary focus of Poland's democracy support and advocating the EU enlargement efforts of the eastern neighbourhood. By contrast, Poland's involvement in the southern neighbourhood has been notably more limited. Poland's commitment to democracy support is also reflected in its development cooperation programmes, which often include initiatives to strengthen democratic institutions, civil society, and the rule of law in the European neighbourhood.

4.7   Sweden

Sweden is one of the most dedicated EUMS to support democracy. Swedish development cooperation started in 1962 with Government Bill 1962:100, in which one of the overall goals for development cooperation was to "contribute to societal development in a politically democratic […] direction" (Wohlgemuth, 2012, p. 6). In Government Bill 1995/96:153, an additional overarching goal for development aid was introduced: equality between women and men. The new goal meant a gender perspective would be mainstreamed throughout development cooperation (Prop. 1995/96:153). The Swedish approach includes not only supporting "democracy" but as stressed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, also promoting a model of the democratic state similar to Sweden's – a welfare state with developed labour rights (including union rights), rights for sexual minorities, and prominently women rights (as part of Swedish feminist foreign policy).

In most of these areas, bipartisan support has been from the two main political parties (the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party). Over the years, democracy support was deeply integrated into Swedish foreign policy. As Margot Wallström, Sweden's Foreign Minister (2014–2019), stated: "Sweden is and will continue to be a strong voice that stands up for and defends human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout its foreign policy" (Regeringens skrivelse 2016/17:62). In 2019, the Swedish government launched the initiative Drive for Democracy, which meant that they increased democracy support – especially towards Eastern Europe (Wallström, 2019; Kronholm, 2019).

Recently, the Swedish political scene saw a rise in the far-right Sweden Democrats party. After the 2022 Swedish election, a minority coalition government was formed with the Moderate Party (liberal conservative), the Cristian Democratic Party and the Liberal Party with support from the Sweden Democrats (which remained outside government). The new coalition did not significantly impact the Swedish approach to democracy support. Overall, democracy support continues with an increased focus on supporting human rights and democracy defenders, free elections and independent journalism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024).

4.8   Austria

After the Second World War, Austria was occupied by the four Allies (the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom). To prevent a permanent partition of the state, which was possible given the escalating rhetoric and actions between the Soviet Union and the USA, Austria endeavoured to pursue a policy of neutrality to regain its full sovereignty (Senn, 2023, pp. 29–31). The USSR aimed to prevent Austria from being integrated into the Western structures and perceived Austria's neutrality as a condition for granting full-fledged independence by calling for a 'third camp' between East and West. Austria regained its full sovereignty on 26th October 1955 by enshrining neutrality into its constitution as a leading state principle, similar to the Swiss model (Senn, 2023, pp. 23–24). Sean (2023,.23) delineates four stages characterising Austria's neutrality: 'consolidation' lasting until the 1970s, 'expansion' through the mid-1980s, 'reorientation' until the mid-1990s,

encompassing the accession to the EC/EU in 1995, and a period of 'stagnation' persisting to the present day. Austrian neutrality has become de-politicised during this final phase and is less important. Two more recent events led to the prevailing amenable attitude towards neutrality among the Austrian population: one hand, the Austrian leadership of the UN mission in Kosovo in the late 1990s and the terrorist attack on the US on 9th September 2011. However, the high level of legitimacy of neutrality within Austrian society remained the same (Eder, 2023, p. 296).

Based on desk research, Austrian democracy support and development cooperation are primarily ignored in academic and policy-related analyses. Scholarship has noted a discrepancy between Austria's ambition to emphasise human rights as a guiding norm in its foreign policy on the one hand and its restrained position in the European Union's human rights-related policies on the other. Cuts at the national level in funding humanitarian aid and asylum policies have been standard practice over the last two decades (Rosenberger, 2023, p. 417).

5 Factors impacting democracy support in EUMS

In this section, the report focuses on key factors that impact democracy support in the EUMS under investigation. Firstly, how is democracy support located within the country's foreign policy? The other relevant question is the relationship between democracy support, development cooperation and foreign policy. Next, we analyze how the country's broader geopolitical reasoning drives democracy support and the position of democracy support in EUMS priorities. Lastly, the authors present the role of EU commitments in the country's democracy support and how the EUMS participate in the EU's activities.

5.1 Germany

From the 1990s onwards, democracy support was an important part of its foreign policy, and the German government was particularly interested in supporting democracy in Eastern and Central Europe. The German government emphasized Germany's historical responsibility in the region due to crimes committed during the Second World War (Babayev, 2014, p. 947; Lapins, 2007, p. 15; Wolff et al., 2012, p. 11). The media and broader civil society have criticized Germany's benevolent behaviour towards Russia, where human rights and democratization played a subordinate role (Wolff et al., 2012, p. 11). Despite Germany's geopolitical preference for the eastern neighbourhood, Germany, and in particular, its political foundations, has been an important external contributor to democracy support in Tunisia and also played an influential role in supporting democratic transitions in most countries in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa).

Germany is very much engaged in the EU's activities concerning democracy support, although primarily in the frame of human rights and development aid. The Ministry of Development aims to foster a deeper interdependence of German development policy within the European Union (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 2023b). Hence, it aims for a closer collaboration of foreign security and development politics. During Germany's EU Council Presidency in 2020, it initiated the 'Neighbourhood, Development and Cooperation Instrument' (NDICI), with a budget of 80 billion Euros for foreign countries (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 2023a).

Since the EU launched its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) policies in 2003/4, there have been different geographical priorities among the EU member states. While France and Spain lobbied for stronger integration of the Southern Neighbourhood countries within the EU agendas, Germany launched the 'ENP Plus' initiative in 2006 (Kirch, 2016, pp. 73–74). Germany's goal for the ENP Plus

initiative was to involve Russia more in the ENP and draw more attention to the region within the EU. Even though the German initiative was unsuccessful within the EU, some aspects were reflected in the Polish-Swedish initiative on the Eastern Partnership of 2009 (Kirch, 2016, pp. 73–74).

5.2 Italy

Democracy support plays an important role in Italy's foreign policy. Moreover, geopolitical considerations have determined Italy's entire foreign policy. Its strategic geographic location undoubtedly places it at the intersection of different regions, each with its unique political challenge. Italy's role as a bridge with the EU's southern neighbourhood regions has always been central in the heated debates that have engaged diplomacy and public opinion. The country's geographical proximity underscores the significance of these areas in Italian foreign policy. The support of democracy in contemporary Italy includes the issue of identity. Italy's identity, not only as a democratic nation but also as a Mediterranean nation with historical and cultural ties to neighbouring regions, profoundly influences its perception of its role in the world.

On the one hand, Italians take pride in their democratic traditions and the successful post-war political transformation, viewing themselves as champions of peace and democracy on a global scale. On the other hand, Italy belongs to the Mediterranean culture, which forms the basis of the identity and heritage of modern European nations and Western civilization and is reflected in its historical influence on the development of democracy in ancient Rome. Consequently, the country often sees itself as a bridge between North and South and East and West. This broad understanding of identity encourages Italy to participate actively in democracy-promotion initiatives and aligns with its citizens' broader views, which can influence government decisions and policies.

Italy's engagement in democracy support is significantly influenced by its EU-related commitments. As a historic founding member of the European Communities, Italy has played a leading role in shaping the EU's approach to neighbouring countries, advocating for a comprehensive and inclusive strategy that addresses the political, economic, and social dimensions of democratization. Italy's alignment with the EU's values and objectives means that it shares responsibility for implementing and shaping EU democracy support policies. These commitments are integral to its foreign policy agenda, aligning with the broader EU objectives. It can even be confirmed by Italy's cooperation with the ENP countries under the EU-funded twinning instrument.

The treatment of EU external activities related to overall democracy support varies among different actors in Italy. It should emphasize the role of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, AICS), which, as a strategic partner of the EC, has been making a technical and managerial contribution to implementing democratic initiatives financed by European instruments and entrusted to the Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation). The two-way relationship between the Italian cooperation system and the EU is regulated by Article 6 of Law 125/2014, which outlines that, on the one hand, "Italy participates in the definition of the EU's development aid policy, contributes to the budget and funds of the EU and harmonizes its own guidelines and programming lines with those of the EU, encouraging the implementation of joint projects". On the other hand, it states that "Italy contributes to the execution of European development aid programmes, also participating in indirect centralized management, usually through the Agency". The Agency's position demonstrates the complex relationship between EU and Italian development policies and its overlaps with democracy support.

5.3   France

France does not strictly focus on democracy support as a separate policy. Instead, democratic principles such as human rights and good governance are integrated into its overall development cooperation policy. The dialectic democracy - development is a part of the 'La Baule speech' by François Mitterrand on June 20, 1990, during the Franco-African Summit (Marchesin, 2004, p. 491). Mitterrand articulated a vision where democracy was a cornerstone for political stability and economic development in the African nations collaborating with France. He highlighted the interdependence of democracy, economic growth, and social progress, suggesting that these elements were mutually reinforcing. Reiterated over the years, depending on the circumstances, this doctrine is forcefully reaffirmed in the Orientation Document of French Cooperation Policy "For Democratic Governance," published in 2003 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003). France also pursues a policy of promoting democracy by implementing the 2030 Agenda goals, or even more covertly, under the guise of Agenda 2030. Since the 1990s, the development discourse has evolved from a purely mercantilist view where development is equated to GDP growth to a more human-centric development paradigm, where access to human rights and stable institutions forms the foundation of democracy.

The Fifth Republic's foreign policy is shaped by its location and historical context regarding geopolitical and national interests, with particular emphasis on its Arab policy. Among the nine Mediterranean countries encompassed by the European Neighborhood Policy, five were historically under French influence, either as colonies and overseas departments (Algeria), protectorates (Morocco, Tunisia) or mandated territories (Syria, Lebanon). As a result, France has developed solid political ties, close economic relations, and a significant military presence across the MENA region. With aspirations for a prominent role in the area, France continues its traditional leadership stance within the EU concerning matters about North Africa and the Middle East (Rapnouil, 2018).

It can be argued that from the very beginning of the existence of the European Community, France has been a promoter of cooperation with Mediterranean countries. Under France's leadership in the EU Council, a framework program for the Euro-Mediterranean partnership was adopted in Cannes in the first half of 1995 and officially accepted in Barcelona in November 1995 (Szczepankiewicz, 2010, pp. 201-204). In July 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was established, recognized as an initiative of President Nicolas Sarcozy and the French Presidency of the EU Council, officially launched in mid-July in Paris. This initiative aims to revitalize cooperation within the Barcelona Process. It is seen as a response to expanding neighbourhood cooperation to countries in Central and Eastern Europe within the ENP (Szczepankiewicz 2010 pp. 236-237).

5.4   Denmark

In Denmark, most democracy support practices are embedded in development cooperation. Both are deeply intertwined, as "[d]emocracy and human rights [serve] as the foundation for our [Danish] development cooperation" (MFA, 2021a). Democracy and human rights are both seen as values and goals in themselves as well as instruments in the quest for poverty eradication and improved livelihoods (DIPD 2014: 11). Development cooperation, again, is deeply embedded in foreign policy more generally and reflected by the structure of governance. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs currently has two ministers: the minister of foreign affairs and the minister for development cooperation and global climate policy. Both work under the roof of this Ministry, illustrating the intertwining of democracy support, development cooperation, and foreign policy. Accordingly, democracy support is dominated and guided by the Ministry, which is, however, supported by a variety

of actors, such as parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, interest groups, and the private sector, who together run the "industry" of democracy support.

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has introduced democracy support-focused region-specific programs for only two regions in the world: the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. It shows the importance of both neighbourhoods for Denmark's general foreign policy and its DS in particular. Nevertheless, the Danish government also seeks to protect (other) national interests in both regions, including in the policy areas of energy, migration, trade, and security. Hence, DS is just one field of Danish engagement with these regions.

Regarding geopolitical interests and foreign policy priorities, Denmark is aligning itself with the US and the EU. Denmark joined the European Economic Communities (EEC) only in 1973. After that, "Denmark has upheld a reputation as the more skeptical 'footdragger' in the context of European integration" (Haugevik and Sending 2020: 115). Consecutive Danish governments have adopted an intergovernmentalist instead of a federalist vision of Europe, with a strong preference for national autonomy (Ingebritsen, 1998). Accordingly, Denmark negotiated four opt-outs when the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992 (currency, security and defence, justice and home affairs, and citizenship).

Observers stress that Danish foreign and security policymakers have prioritized relations with the US, as "Denmark […] continue[s] to put Atlanticism first" (Haugevik and Sending 2020: 114). This became apparent in the aftermath of 9/11 when Denmark sided with the US and contributed to US-led military interventions. Røren (2019: 562) in that context argues that "one of the aims for Denmark, when it joined the US-led coalition of the willing in 2003, was […] to build a stronger reputation [amongst US policymakers]." In a way, Denmark has always 'looked up' to its big brother – the US.

The US remains Denmark's key partner in hard security questions until today. In December 2023, for example, Denmark and the US signed an agreement allowing US soldiers to use military bases in Denmark (Reuters, 2023). Nevertheless, at the same time, the importance of the EU for Denmark's foreign affairs has significantly increased since the end of the Cold War (Larsen, 2009). In 2022, two-thirds (of the voting population) voted to renounce Denmark's opt-out on EU defence matters in a referendum, which "is a historic decision that will allow Denmark to participate fully in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy" (EEAS 2022): However, this vote came in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 24 February 2022 which shattered Europe's peace and altered its security situation. Moreover, Denmark has increased the presence of Danish staff in EU institutions in recent years, aiming to boost its presence and influence.

5.5 Spain

Spain perceives itself as a promoter of democratic values and human rights internationally. It considers democracy support an integral part of its identity, aligning with its historical transition and commitment to democratic principles. Democracy support is subordinated to Spain's influence as a middle power. It means that rhetorically, democracy will always be supported and will be one of the values guiding foreign policy in Spain regardless of the governing party. It is one of the reasons why Europeanization works well for Spain, as it promotes democracy as much as the EU. As Vaquer (2014) stated, Spain has achieved more substantial advances when it has coordinated its actions with other partners rather than when it has acted unilaterally. In that sense, Spain is an essential promoter of multilateralism, as it understands that coordinated initiatives have more capacity to succeed.

The discursive practice that has shaped Spain's democracy support is its experience with its transition and its capacity to draw lessons from it that can be exported to other scenarios. This narrative has

been constant in Spanish foreign policy since the restoration of democracy, but it has always been linked to development cooperation policy. Ramos Rollón (2022) explained that during the Cold War, it was assumed that economic prosperity would bring democracy, and it was part of the Western foreign policy to promote democracy through economic and financial aid to gain areas of influence. With the end of the Cold War, however, regarding the electoral dimension of democracy, support lost importance in favour of the efficiency dimension. Making institutions work started being considered as a key to economic prosperity.

Democracy support is considered a high priority within Spain's foreign policy because Spain recognises the link between democratic stability and regional security, underscoring the significance of promoting democracy to ensure lasting peace and prosperity. This is why North Africa is the primary focus of Spanish democracy support in foreign policy to foster stability. As Spain's primary focus (and that of other European states) on the south of the Mediterranean is stability, it has been translated into cooperation in security, especially in the domains of antiterrorism, fighting organised crime and drug trafficking, managing flows of migration; securing energy supply; and access to fisheries and control of agricultural products into the internal market.

Spain actively aligns its democracy support initiatives with the European Union's agenda. As a member of the EU, Spain actively supports EU-led democracy promotion activities within its neighbouring regions. The EU is a platform to coordinate efforts and pool resources, amplifying Spain's impact and influence in promoting democracy. Since Spain entered the EU, the national approach has lost relevance in favour of a more Europeanized foreign policy towards the region. This has served the purpose of gaining weight and influence. Spain has learnt that it will be more influential when participating in multilateral initiatives rather than being a solo player or acting more unilaterally. Framing its policy as a Mediterranean one gives Spain enough leverage to be perceived as a partner for the rest of the Mediterranean countries and an actor to talk to in the context of a broader European agenda.

5.6 Poland

Poland's geopolitical considerations and strategic priorities significantly influence the country's efforts to support democracy. Poland sees itself as a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe at a pivotal geographical crossroads, underlining its strategic emphasis on the East-West axis. Eastern Europe has always been a region of the utmost importance for Poland's national security and its development as an influential European power. Taking pride in its successful democratic transformation, Poland perceives itself as an influential regional leader. Therefore, it sees itself as a regional power capable of influencing Eastern European independent states by sharing its experience of democratisation and European integration to increase Polish and European security.

Consequently, democratisation and European integration of Eastern European states, primarily Ukraine and Belarus, rank as top priorities of Polish foreign policy (Cianciara, 2011; Góra & Zielińska, 2014). Moreover, historical and cultural ties connect Poland to its Eastern neighbours. The shared historical experiences offer Poland valuable insights into the local context and enable it to influence its democratic transformation. In Poland's view, democratisation and European integration are interdependent for its Eastern neighbours, with European integration serving as a tool for their democratisation, which, in turn, facilitates their European integration.

Poland's direct engagement in the European Southern Neighbourhood is constrained by its geopolitical priorities and historical factors. Poland's democracy support in the south is primarily within the

common EU framework for the neighbourhood and civic organisations' efforts. Polish foreign policy strategies strongly emphasise the prioritisation of Eastern Europe, while the Southern neighbourhood is recognised as necessary in the context of NATO collective security.

Poland's commitment to democracy support is also reflected in its development cooperation programmes, which often include initiatives to strengthen democratic institutions, local governance, civil society, and the rule of law in the European neighbourhood (Falkowski, 2016; Piskorska, 2017). Poland actively supported the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and worked towards bolstering the EU's democracy support through this initiative. Poland contributes to other EU financial instruments, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which provides funding for projects to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in various regions, including Eastern Europe. The Polish approach aligns with the broader EU commitment to promote democracy in its Neighbourhood.

Among the diplomatic actions aimed at supporting democracy in the European Neighbourhood, a particularly notable feature was Poland's political engagement in Ukraine during the 2004 and 2013–2014 revolutions, when Poland openly expressed strong support for the democratic opposition. Similarly, Poland has provided political support to the Belarusian civic opposition, especially after the 2020 fraudulent elections and the subsequent mass protests. Another example of Poland's staunch support for democracy was evident in its solidarity with Georgia during the Russian invasion of 2008. However, Poland's promotion of democracy in the eastern neighbourhood is often limited to the prioritisation of security interests over the actual democratisation process, resulting in unconditional support of pro-Western governments irrespective of their actual progress in implementing reforms and adherence to upholding values, as in the examples of Ukraine and Georgia.

5.7   Sweden

Sweden has a long tradition of development cooperation and democracy support. The priorities, nontheless, have been changing depending on the ruling parties. Between 2011 and 2014, Sweden was led by a centre-right coalition that prioritised growth-oriented development cooperation (MFA, 2011; MFA, 2012). However, Foreign Minister Carl Bildt declared that "growth alone is not enough. Swedish development cooperation's clear emphasis on democracy and human rights and freedoms is central to modern aid." (MFA, 2012, p. 12). This focus on democracy promotion was reflected in all statements of Swedish foreign policy made between 2011 and 2014. In a statement made in 2013, Bildt highlighted that Sweden is one of the largest donors of democracy aid in the world (MFA, 2013, p. 10). Moreover, in 2014, he reaffirmed Sweden's commitment to democracy support: "Sweden continues its efforts and contributes additional funds to strengthen democracy and human rights globally" (MFA, 2014a, p. 8).

The government's "Aid Policy Platform", introduced in March 2014, replaced a range of individual policy documents to clarify the goal hierarchy of Swedish development cooperation policy. Its overall objective was to improve the living conditions of people living in poverty and oppression (Skr. 2013/14:131, p. 14). This objective was divided into six sub-objectives. The first was "strengthened democracy and gender equality, enhanced respect for human rights and freedom from oppression." (Skr. 2013/14:131, p. 14).

In October 2014, a Social Democratic and Green Party minority coalition took office, with the Left Party as a supporting party. During Foreign Minister Margot Wallström's first interview, she declared that Sweden would adopt a feminist foreign policy. This foreign policy would promote gender equality and

integrate it into all policy areas and services of the foreign ministry, such as development cooperation (Towns et al., 2023). The feminist foreign policy was a working method and perspective based on "the three Rs": to strengthen the *Rights, Representation* and *Resources of* women and girls worldwide (MFA, 2018, p. 11). The government restarted work on the "Aid Policy Platform" from the previous government and presented a new framework in 2016, which stated that "human rights, democracy and principles of the rule of law shall permeate all Swedish foreign policy" and that "Sweden should be a global leader promoting, preventing and influencing developments in these areas" (Skr. 2016/17:62).

After the national election of 2018, a Social Democratic and Green minority coalition came into office. In the "January Agreement" between the governing parties – the Social Democrats and Green Party, and the supporting parties, Centre Party and Liberals – it was stated that democracy aid was to be increased (January Agreement 2019, p. 16). In response to this agreement, the government launched "A Drive for Democracy". This drive was to be included in all areas of foreign policy. In the Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström's Statement of Foreign Policy, she asserted, "We will increase our democracy assistance and stand up for democracy's defenders and institutions" (MFA, 2019, p. 2). Moreover, the newly appointed Minister for International Development Cooperation, Peter Eriksson, stated in a media interview that Eastern Europe would be the focus of the increased democracy aid (Torén Björling, 2019).

In 2021, Sweden experienced political turbulence due to a passed vote of no confidence, which led to a government crisis. However, in November 2021, a new government was formed, a single-party Social Democratic minority government led by Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson (Widenstjerna & Widfeldt, 2022). In her "Statement of Government Policy", she said that" the democracy focus of development cooperation continues" (Government of Sweden 2021, p. 13).

Following the national election of 2022, a centre-right coalition government took office, consisting of the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals, with the Sweden Democrats as the supporting party. In Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's Statement of Government Policy, he stated that one of the thematic priorities in Swedish aid is democracy support for human rights defenders and democracy fighters. Moreover, he said: "In the long run, trade and economic development are the path from poverty to prosperity" (Government of Sweden 2022, p. 14). As a result, the posts of the Foreign Trade Minister and Development Cooperation Minister were merged to emphasise the synergies between trade and development cooperation. Moreover, the government announced it would no longer pursue a feminist foreign policy (Towns et al., 2023).

5.8   Austria

The Austrian government adheres to a strict paradigm of neutrality in its foreign policy by not supporting any particular party in violent conflicts. It includes no direct participation in hostilities and avoiding indirect participation through other forms of assistance. Of course, this also involves not triggering a violent conflict themselves, demonstrating a throughline of its current relations to its Nazi past (Senn, 2023, p. 24).

After joining the EU in 1995, Austria amended its constitution to commit to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Alecu de Flers, 2012, p. 95). By the end of the 1990s, the governing Grand Coalition of the Social Democrats, SPÖ, and Austrian People's Party, ÖVP, Austrian accession to NATO was even discussed by the conservative governing party ÖVP. However, the SPÖ were critical of abolishing military neutrality (Alecu de Flers, 2012, p. 96). Finally, as a kind of compromise, the Grand

Coalition decided to join the NATO "Partnership for Peace" programme in an expanded mode (so-called "Pfp-plus") (Senn, 2023, pp. 32–41). From the mid-2000s to the present, the phase of the so-called stagnation characterised Austria's neutrality development.

Public support for neutrality grew stronger, especially after NATO intervened in Kosovo. However, neutrality was increasingly neglected in implementing Austrian foreign policy and political discourse, as indicated by fewer mentions of neutrality in media and parliamentary debates (Senn, 2023, pp. 32–41). Despite this, Austria's position of neutrality since the fully-fledged Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 has been strongly criticised by international partners as well as within parts of Austrian society. Austria does provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine but is clearly against the delivery of any weapons.

6 Mapping Democracy Support: Main Actors, Instruments and Contestation in EUMS

The main objective of this part is to map practices of democracy support in the EU member states under investigation. We analyse how various EUMS actors are involved in DS and discuss the instruments of democracy support that these actors have used in their practices. We scrutinise whether democracy support is contested as a fundamental norm or, in more general terms, liberal democracy. We also discuss who and how contests standardised procedures of democracy support, such as the role and meanings of specific instruments or programmes aimed to enact democracy support (different programmes, funds, instruments and measures). Moreover, we also examine actors locating other norms, such as sovereignty or security, higher than democracy support.

Table 3 Salience of contestation in selected EUMS

EUMS	Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	As % of all documents
Austria	33	67,3%
Denmark	37	75,5%
France	16	16%
Germany	70	40,7%
Italy	12	12%
Poland	88	38,5%
Spain	29	58%
Sweden	57	36,7%

Source: own compilation.

6.1 Germany

Germany is generally reluctant to frame its support for non-democratic countries as democracy support explicitly. Material and immaterial support for non-democratic countries has been implemented mainly within the frame of development cooperation. Hence, democracy support as an explicit policy field only emerged in Germany during the early 1990s. The Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are responsible for its implementation (Grävingholt, 2017). However, there is a division of competencies between the two

ministries: the Ministry of Development focuses on human rights, the rule of law (Rechtsstaatlichkeit) and political participation (related to civil society). In contrast, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports legal, transparent, free and fair elections. However, these are limited to technical assistance to avoid interfering too much with the internal political dynamics of other countries and impacting Germany's diplomatic room for manoeuvre (Wolff, 2013, p. 477).

The German Ministry of Development pursues a two-fold strategy: commissioning political foundations, church-related institutions and other NGOs to implement a broad range of projects in development cooperation support (Weßels, 2021). This strategy is typical within the German so-called "corporatist political system", which sees internal programmes enacted similarly. Within the German context, the Catholic and Protestant Churches have been traditional actors in the welfare and development cooperation (Renesse, 1995). Furthermore, German political foundations are closely linked to the party system and have been established actors in state-funded domestic democracy promotion for decades. These foundations operate independently from the political parties and maintain international civil society networks. The foundations receive state funding based on national parliamentary election results, leading to their designation as quasi-non-governmental organisations (QUANGOS), which represents a unique form of civil society organisations compared to other European states (Freise, 2004, 2005; Weissenbach, 2015).

The German Ministry of Development's second strategy relates to - state-run organisations such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ, Society for International Cooperation) or the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW, Bank for Reconstruction). Their overall mandates emphasise a rather technical and non-political approach, for instance, through technical consulting for reform projects in target countries (Grävingholt, 2017). Since the 1980s, political foundations have played a crucial role in Germany's democracy support. Despite receiving funding from the German state, the five largest political foundations enjoy high independence (Marzo, 2019). Despite their close link to a political party, the political foundations enjoy a high reputation beyond party boundaries in their international work (Schreck, 2020).

Table 4 The number of documents by actors in German democracy support (2011–2022)

Type of Actor	Number of documents
Civil society actors	11
Interest groups	1
National government	19
National parliament	9
National political parties and their leaders	36
National think tank	56
Other	40
All documents	172

Source: Own compilation.

As mentioned above, the German government owns the GIZ. The company describes itself as "Germany's leading provider of international cooperation services" (GIZ, GmbH, 2023a). The GIZ's main commissioning party is the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, which also acts as a shareholder in the GIZ together with the Federal Ministry of Finance. The GIZ's external work focuses on human rights, equal opportunities, and support for the rule of law and the political participation of the civilian population.

In the civil society sector, three major actors are involved in supporting democracy. The first one is Amnesty International Germany. In general, Amnesty International's fields of action are based on the demand for the release of non-violent political prisoners who were imprisoned because of their political, religious or other beliefs (Furtak, 2015, pp. 361–362). The first Amnesty group in West Germany was founded in the summer of 1961 (Furtak, 2015, pp. 353–354). Since then, the number of local groups has grown steadily - with nearly 650 Amnesty local groups in Germany as of 2023. The members of the various groups work voluntarily in an international network and address local issues and global human rights violations.

The second prominent civil society actor is 'Brot für die Welt' (Bread for the World). It was first launched in 1959 as a fundraising initiative by the *Diakonisches Werk* section of the Protestant Church to raise awareness about starving people in the Global South, particularly in African and Indian countries. Within Germany, Bread for the World lobbies political decision-makers to raise awareness of the need to combat global poverty. The aid organisation has over 2,000 projects in more than 90 countries, while its regional focus is on countries in the Global South. Here, its work focuses on combating poverty and promoting human rights equality. The aid organisation is also active in the eastern neighbourhood: in these countries, particularly in Armenia, Bread for the World supports local organisations that are "committed to the development of a democratic, sustainable and inclusive society" (Brot für die Welt, 2023d).

The Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid Non-Governmental Organisations (VENRO) is the last relevant actor in civil society. It was founded in 1995 as an umbrella organisation of over 140 development and humanitarian NGOs, including Bread for the World (VENRO, 2023c). VENRO's overarching goal is to shape globalisation somewhat, focusing on overcoming global inequalities and poverty. To this end, the association acts as an interface between its member organisations and policymakers. VENRO strengthens the role of NGOs and civil society in development policy in its consultations with policymakers, in particular the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The association comprises working groups of members of organisations, which facilitates its participation in other organisations. In 2020, VENRO received a total of 3,149,000 euros: Around 1.5 million euros came from public organisations, 500,000 euros from cooperation partners via public organisations, just under one million euros from membership fees, and 17,000 euros from private organisations.

6.1.1 Patterns of contestation in Germany

None of the actors in the analysed documents spoke decidedly against liberal democracy and democracy support. However, it is striking that democracy support was rarely addressed directly but mostly in passing in the context of development cooperation policy. Only the Left and its foundation affiliate, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS), criticise the liberal values of democracy and challenge the support of democracy, albeit discreetly. For example, the RLS and the Left Party see the Eastern Neighbourhood as an imperial redefinition of EU policy. The introduction of the neoliberal economy in the six post-Soviet states has led – in their view - to a lasting shift in the socio-political balance of power towards a socio-political order with a capitalist basis, which aims to convey democracy, but by force that ignores and destroys social realities (Dellheim & Wolf, 2015). In this context, it is striking that representatives of the Left repeatedly emphasise the role of Russia and its interests in the eastern neighbourhood states. Representatives of the Greens party also refer to the danger of continuing colonial exploitation, focusing on the Southern Neighbourhood and the Global South. However, their rhetoric is less sharp than the Left or the RLS against German and EU democracy support and

development cooperation. It is striking that the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) hardly mentions democracy support. The AfD focuses on other foreign policy areas and puts democracy support and development policy behind its agenda.

Table 5 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Germany (2011–2022)

Levels of contestation	Number of Documents
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	49
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	51
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	57
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	70

Source: Own compilation.

Overall, there is little contestation of liberal democracy and its support among all the actors analysed (only one in ten documents contained at least one code related to such contestation). While the SPD, CDU, CSU and FDP parties and their associated foundations did not voice any challenges in the entire data set, only the Greens/Alliance 90 and the Left Party made specific comments on the support of democracy and criticised the approach and the instruments used. Although the AfD also contests the support of democracy, it hardly comments on the topic. It is primarily vague in its demand that the support of democracy and development cooperation should only be in the interests of the "German people".

6.2   Italy

Italy focuses its democracy support activities mostly on the southern neighbourhood. As a result, Italian actors mostly show more interest in debates concerning the Mediterranean region while being almost absent in discussions on the Eastern Partnership. Nevertheless, Italian support within the framework of the entire ENP has taken many forms, including parliamentary and technical cooperation, political and cultural dialogue, or financial assistance combining activities at the political level with cooperation on the administrative side. This is particularly evident, similarly to other EU countries, in response to the Arab Spring, but also to the political crises in Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova) and the North Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan). However, assistance towards the latter is smaller and more sporadic. In the countries mentioned above, in 2011-2022, official assistance from Italy as a donor in the general "Government and Civil Society-general" sector did occur, but it is a relatively isolated case.

In Italy, a wide range of actors contribute to democracy support initiatives. Multiple entities actively engage in supporting democracy and implementing development cooperation policy, including local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations, as well as for-profit entities and civil society organization. However, it seems that government bodies remain the leading actor in supporting democracy. They are responsible for defining the overall policy framework in supporting democracy and for defining the overall policy framework in this area. The Italian government is central in coordinating and implementing democracy support programs. In particular, it should be indicated here a pivotal place of the MAECI, which holds the political responsibility for determining the general direction of Italian cooperation and coordinating various national initiatives.

Table 6 The number of documents by actors in Italian democracy support (2011-2022)

Type of Actor	Number of Documents
Civil society actors	2
Interest groups	1
National government	83
National parliament	4
National political parties and their leaders	2
National think tank	4
Regional and local governments	4
All documents	100

Source: Own compilation.

Through the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (Direzione generale per la cooperazione allo sviluppo), Italy contributes to the programming for intervention areas and countries, assesses the impact and achievement of objectives, and defines overall policy guidelines. Additionally, Directorate is responsible for transferring funds to AICS, established in 2014, which manages and implements projects promoting democracy. Through the AICS, Italy provides:

- funding to support the eradication of poverty

- the reduction of inequalities

- the protection of civil rights and personal dignity

- the prevention of conflict in developing countries

Furthermore, at the institutional level, it should also be mentioned that the Ministry of Economy and Finance (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, MEF) has the "economic responsibility" for cooperation as the leading provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA). At the same time, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, CDP, has been identified as the financial institution for international development cooperation and development bank. Lastly, the Interministerial Council for Development Cooperation, CICS, ensures coherence between national policies and the objectives of development cooperation, and it proposes the distribution of resources for cooperation among ministries.

Italy's approach to democracy support is generally tailored to the specific context of each country, recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, when analysing the country's activities in this area, it seems that the Italian strategy aligns with the principle that citizens of the European neighbourhood countries (primarily Africa) prioritise development over democracy. According to the Italian strategy, this notion suggests that development is perceived as the first step in the democratic process. Thus, as indicated in the Programming Document for 2021-2023, the largest share of Italian bilateral resources is allocated precisely to African countries (50%), followed by the Balkans and the Middle East (28% collectively). Another manifestation of Italy's greater interest in the southern neighbourhood is that, from year to year, it maintains the trend of allocating EU financial resources to partner countries, with two-thirds of the funds allocated to the southern neighbourhood and one-third to the eastern neighbourhood.

6.2.1 Patterns of contestation in Italy

There are some elements of democracy support contestation in Italy but do not hold the central position in Italian political debates. It mostly refers to the relationship between Italian interests and

the EU's democratic support activities remains complex and controversial. Already in 2006, two years after the largest EU enlargement, in the document presented containing a proposal of 15 points for Italy's European policy, the president of Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in the years 2001-2013, Stefano Silvestri, considered crucial to restore the balance in the field of EU enlargement, as well as to increase security in the areas surrounding the EU. As he stated, EU enlargement is not balanced in relation to the south and east. Hence, Italy's primary interest was to complete enlargement towards the south, strengthen its neighbourhood policy towards the Middle East and Africa, and maintain the EU's involvement in striving for security stability in areas such as the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea Basin and Mediterranean Africa. It was within this framework that he found effective tools for cooperation with neighbouring countries, as these regions, in particular, play a key role not only in the field of energy supplies but also in the fight against terrorism, organised crime and the control of illegal migration flows.

Table 7 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Italy (2011–2022)

Levels of contestation	Number of Documents
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	10
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	3
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	3
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	12

Source: Own compilation.

There was also a peculiar kind of contestation under banners such as "too little money" or "we need more Europe" from the part of the actual opposition toward the promoted by the Meloni-led centre-right government coalition (FdI, Forza Italia and Lega) an Italian initiative of the plan to strengthen partnership with African countries (Mattei Plan). It is worth noting that the inaugural declarations of Italian President Sergio Mattarella during the Italy-Africa International Summit entitled "A bridge for common growth", which took place at the end of January 2024 in Rome, emphasised the importance of Africa's relations with Europe under the slogan of the African proverb "If you want to go fast, run alone. If you want to go far, go with someone" were accompanied by the voice of criticism, primarily from the centre-left parties of the Italian political scene.

6.3 France

France implements its democracy support policy through channels of public development assistance. Even though most aid is implemented through bilateral cooperation, the policy aligns with international cooperation trends, significantly determining its scope and direction. A turning point in understanding and directing development assistance was in 2015, dominated by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change, marking a significant shift. At Addis Ababa, the "Agenda 2030" was adopted, defining 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which replaced the Millennium Development Goals. The themes of the Millennium Development Goals were taken up and updated, but there was a new emphasis on social progress, reducing inequalities, and combating climate change and its consequences.

The emergence of elements of human development, including political rights and good governance, broadened the spectrum of actions to include democratic issues and provided an opportunity to

directly support policies beyond the classical avenues of humanitarian and economic aid. (www.agenda-2030.fr). The OECD's DAC defines the concept of ODA so that the accounting of contributions from countries providing it is consistent. This definition serves as a standard reference for donor countries.

Coordinating actions within the European Union is another factor determining France's development assistance policy. Since 2020, the "Team Europe" initiatives have provided a suitable framework characterized by modularity and pragmatism, facilitating greater cohesion among Member States of the European Union. This new dynamic is gradually replacing the older "joint programming" process. (Observations définitives, 2021).

Table 8 The number of documents by actors in French democracy support (2011-2022)

France	
Type of Actor	**Number of Documents**
Civil society actors	6
National Think Thank	1
National Political parties and their leaders	4
National government	81
National parliament	6
Other	1
All documents	99

Source: Own compilation.

In France, policy design and implementation are shared by two ministries, which are responsible for foreign affairs and the economy. Together, they oversee the secretariat of the Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID), which, since its creation by Decree No. 98-66 of February 4, 1998, defines the orientations of French policy and supervises the AFD (Agence Française de Développement).

The agency takes on an essential part of the design of ODA policy and almost all of its implementation. The latest text outlining France's policy on official development assistance is Law No. 2021-1031 of August 4, 2021, "relating to solidarity development and the fight against global inequalities." They are grouped into three themes: (1) Traditional development aid objectives: the eradication of poverty, combating food insecurity and malnutrition, action on education and health; (2) Concerns related to human rights, the rule of law, and democracy, with the promotion of the French language attached. (3) Willingness to protect global public goods, particularly the planet (Law 2021). A notable new aspect compared to the former Law of 2018 is the inclusion of goals directly related to supporting democracy. A broader view of France's engagement in promoting and supporting democracy can be obtained by analyzing its actions in the governance sector, which is one of the key activity areas of the AFD. The main projects in this area are implemented in the four following areas: (1) Sustainable public finances; (2) Macroeconomic stabilization; (3) Rule of law and responsible public action; (4) Democracy and social cohesion. Since 2016, when initiatives within the governance priority were implemented, we have observed an increase in the number of projects implemented and in the financial support provided.

Among the most engaged actors are non-governmental ones actively promoting democracy in France. Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans Frontières, RSF) takes the most notable position. It is an

international non-profit organization guided by principles of democratic governance. Established in 1985 in Montpellier by four journalists, RSF is dedicated to defending and advocating for freedom of information. Currently, it is one of the most recognizable NGOs promoting free access to reliable and quality information worldwide. Flagship projects include support for the Media Sahel project since 2019, aiming to build the capacities of media that can reach young people and women, such as community radio stations and social networks. They are trained to produce attractive, independent, gender-responsive, and conflict-sensitive content that gives a voice to young people and promotes their initiatives. RSF finances the *Qarib* project in the Middle East, promoting closer relations between authorities and citizens through media involvement. It involves supporting the production of community content, assisting initiatives to fight against misinformation, helping independent media with their economic model and the diversification of their sources of income, and coordinating local, national and regional debates. In Eastern neighbouring countries, the RSF-AFD partnership has enabled support for local journalistic production despite ongoing conflicts. RSF also monitors and investigates crimes committed against journalists and finances the maintenance of endangered local media outlets.

Among the civil society organizations actively supporting democracy is also ASF France. Founded in 1998, this international solidarity association is dedicated to safeguarding fundamental rights worldwide. ASF France operates in countries such as Haiti, Cambodia, Cameroon, Lesotho, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria, and Tunisia, focusing on initiatives that promote access to justice and defend citizens and human rights advocates.

6.3.1 Patterns of contestation in France

In France, it is challenging to trace the elements that contest the support of democracy. Firstly, France does not openly espouse a policy of directly supporting democracy. Instead, democratic support elements are integrated into public development policy. Additionally, a more nuanced examination reveals that France promotes democracy indirectly through the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda goals, sometimes overtly presenting it as part of Agenda 2030. This strategy aligns with prevailing theories of democratization, such as modernization theories, and serves as a strategic manoeuvre to deflect criticisms of neo-colonial practices while adopting a pedagogical stance. The elements of democracy support can be identified within sectors of French development cooperation policy, such as governance and gender, emphasizing principles like transparency, accountability, and civic participation. France supports reforms aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of public management. In strategic documents related to development assistance, there is a recurrent emphasis on promoting universal values and human rights, which aligns with concepts like Merkel's embodied democracy or universal standards of good governance, encompassing features like horizontal accountability and adequate governance power. This approach is consistent with the "French strategy of influence through law," which advocates for promoting not just French or Western norms but universal ones. This tactic seeks to curtail potential contestation of democratic practices endorsed in foreign policy by narrowing the channels and scope for such critique.

Table 9 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in France (2011-2022)

France	
Levels of contestation	**Number of Documents**
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	12
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	6

Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	5
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	16

Source: Own compilation.

6.4 Denmark

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the leading actor in deciding on democracy support. In the 1990s, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) was integrated into the Ministry. DANIDA operated with public funding and was a semi-independent agency, and it introduced issues such as gender equality and human rights into the traditional Danish DC approach to poverty reduction (DANIDA 2016). With DANIDA's integration into the Ministry, all government-led development assistance now falls within its scope. DANIDA, however, remains the term used to describe Danish DC until today. The Ministry manages Denmark's official ODA. Denmark has provided at least 0.7% of its gross national income to ODA since 1978. In 2021, it was one of only five countries to meet this United Nations target (OECD, 2023a). However, the amount has gradually decreased since the 1980s and 1990s, which was the "heyday of Danish development aid" (Engberg-Pedersen & Fejerskov, 2018, p. 145).

Table 10 The number of documents by actors in Danish democracy support (2011–2022)

Denmark	
Type of Actor	**Number of Documents**
Civil society actors	18
Interest groups	8
National government	14
National think tank	9
All documents	49

Source: Own compilation.

Another essential actor in Denmark's DS is the Danish Neighborhood Program (DANEP), launched in 2004. It explicitly supports and complements the EU's approach towards the eastern neighbourhood. Regarding the EU's eastern neighbours, Denmark aims to ensure that the EU "speaks with one voice in the region" (DANEP 2017: 1). While the overall strategic framework for DANEP is hence in harmony with EU approaches, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs does not, however, seek concrete alignment and integration of DS practices. Having operated in Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Moldova over the years, DANEP exclusively focused on Georgia and Ukraine from 2017-2021. The Danish government did not explain this shift, but it came in the context of spending cuts in the mid-2010s. Moreover, regional political events, such as the Orange Revolution and Russia's annexation of the Crimea Peninsula in 2014, made Denmark rethink its priorities. DANEP's strategic framework document openly states that the program shall support the ability to "counter Russia's negative influence in the region and attempts to undermine the democratic reform processes" (DANEP 2017: 1).

The Danish-Arab Partnership Program (DAPP) was launched in 2003 to address support towards the southern EU's neighbourhood. It occurred in the wake of renewed Danish engagement with Arab states, triggered by 9/11, the subsequent Bush doctrine and US Middle East Partnership Initiative with which Denmark aligned its activities. "Despite the attempts to frame the Danish reform program in the

Arab region as a distinct 'Danish' initiative, the overlap in program modalities, core democratic aims, timing and geographical preferences suggests a close strategic alignment with American democracy promotion programs" (Boserup 2012: 86). Until today, Denmark's relations with the southern neighbourhood appear less connected to EU and much more to US activities. Currently, DAPP focuses on Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.

In 2010, parliament established the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), with its purpose being "strengthening Danish democracy support" (The Danish Parliament, 2010, ch. 1, para. 1; authors' translation). DIPD receives all its funding from the MFA (from 2018-2020, the budget was EUR 4m annually) for cooperation and exchange between political parties in Denmark and other countries (DIPD 2023). Activities of DIPD include, for example, the Danish Social Liberal Party's support for five parties and movements in Georgia, strengthening their political communication capacity and internal organisation, and boosting policy development and outreach.

Danish NGOs are de jure, independent of government and parliament. Many NGOs are active in the context of DS, in one way or another, such as DIGNITY, Game, Globalt Fokus, KVINFO, or PlanBørnefonden. We selected two of particular interest for our research focus: Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (also called Action Aid Denmark) and International Media Support, IMS. Think tanks are also part of the Danish DS industry, for example, by advising policymakers, setting agendas, or shaping public opinion. Few Danish think tanks are active in discourses surrounding DS in the EU's neighbourhoods, such as think thank EUROPA. However, we decided to focus on the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), which is most relevant in this context. DIIS was established in 2003 and is largely publicly funded, with 60-70% of its budget provided under the Finance Act. The institute investigates foreign, security, and development policy and publishes many diverse publications. Some of these deal with Danish DS. In the Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2012, Rasmus Alenius Boserup (2012), for example, analyses Denmark's response to the 2011 Arab Uprisings and its efforts to promote democracy in the Arab region. Adam Moe Fejerskov, Trine Rosengren Pejstrup, and Alma Tjalve recently (2023) prepared an assessment of Tech for Democracy. Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard (2023) published an article on establishing a community of democracies.

6.4.1 Patterns of contestation in Denmark

Overall, no actor included in our analysis contested liberal democracy as the model to be supported. No substantial contestation of the model of liberal democracy to be supported by Denmark in the east and south could be found. Also, no (substantial) contestation of supporting human rights or the rule of law could be identified. The Danish case makes the conflict between DS and other fundamental norms and/or stability very apparent. Other policy areas (energy, migration, security, trade) significantly impact and are often prioritised over Denmark's DC, including its DS practices. Danish policymakers frequently value stability more than democratisation in the neighbourhoods (just like the EU), and they are aware that transformation processes can be unpredictable and lead to fragility. DS and Danish interests are increasingly aligned with each other, and DS practices are more and more performed only in cases where they are deemed to serve Danish interests and strengthen the security of Denmark. The general focus on youth in Danish DS, especially apparent in DAPP, is meant to reduce migration. DANEP, again, is very explicit that the democratisation of Ukraine and Georgia shall counter Russia's influence and bring both countries into Denmark's and the EU's sphere of influence.

Table 11 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Denmark (2011-2022)

Denmark

Levels of contestation	Number of Documents
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	26
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	19
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	41
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	37

Source: Own compilation.

The government's increasing prioritisation of Danish interests in DS has not been uncontested. DAPP's major shift from supporting democratic values and procedures to focusing on youth and employment. Hence, civil society actors have contested the increasing focus on migration. It is predominantly the financial instruments of DS, followed by economic and political instruments, which are contested. A significant degree of this contestation occurs when actors contest their previous modus operandi when presenting their new instruments, often portrayed as better and more tailor-made for partners' specific needs.

Contestation exists but is more focused on organising principles and standardised procedures. DS as a fundamental norm is hardly contested, which aims to reduce funds for DC and DS and/or link it even more to the prevention of migration. The Danish government's increasing intertwining of DC and Danish interests, which includes reduced funds for more traditional ways of DS, is contested by civil society actors in particular, arguably not least because it means a threat to their very own work. Occasionally, the exclusion of some actors in DS measures has been contested, mainly by NGOs, as well as the primarily top-down decision-making. Instruments of DS are hardly contested, but DS efforts in the Middle East and North Africa have been seen much more critically than in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

6.5 Spain

Several actors are actively involved in democracy support in Spain. First and foremost, the president of the government leads the country's foreign policy, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs executes the president's mandate. Spain is active in democracy support through the national government, its main actor through the president and its different ministries.

The Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID, Spanish Agency of International Development Cooperation) is the leading governmental actor managing and implementing development and cooperation aid. It is attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and democratic governability appears among its working lines. The AECID defines the priorities of the Spanish cooperation that reflects them in their Master Plans, in which the consolidation of democratic processes and the rule of law emphasising better governance and public management is always one of them.

Table 12 The number of documents by actors in Spanish democracy support (2011–2022)

Spain	
Type of Actor	**Number of Documents**
Interest groups	1
National government	21

National parliament	4
National political parties and their leaders	10
National think tank	12
Regional and local governments	2
All documents	50

Source: Own compilation.

Think tanks in Spain are active in democracy support practices, in particular immediately after the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011. They were demanding more commitment from national governments and the EU to uphold European values. Spanish think tanks have been more vocal in criticising how national interests often clashed with the democratic and human rights narrative practised by EUMS and the EU itself. They claimed that the strategy of coping with regimes of dubious reputation in exchange for stability, border control, and the fight against terrorism is a short-sighted strategy.

Spain practices democracy support in the Southern neighbourhood without supporting all regimes of democracy as defined by Merkel (2004). This trend has continued since 2008 when the Union for the Mediterranean was established as a follow-up of the Barcelona process (1995). The logic behind the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was to depoliticise Euro-Mediterranean relations in order to make possible economic and financial cooperation or security in terms of border control and terrorism rather than touching on thorny issues such as democracy or human rights (Kausch & Youngs, 2009; Grecco, 2017).

The Spanish Foreign Action Strategy (2014) argues in favour of following this logic shielding behind the argument that promoting democratic systems is a long-term task that cannot be based on pursuing "institutional engineering". The document argues that this strategy has not worked out in the last two decades, primarily if this is understood as foreign interference. According to this strategy and logic, the promotion of democracy is a different policy from that which addresses humanitarian crises or patterns of massive violation of human rights. Therefore, the Spanish vision distinguishes offering institutional and advisory support in the transition to democracy from defending human rights and basic freedoms. It is claimed that human rights must be respected regardless of the constitutional options of any given political system. The objectives set by the Spanish Foreign Action Strategy are to fight against the death penalty and gender and sexual identity discrimination and fight for the rights of people with disabilities, the right to drinking water access and sanitation, businesses respecting human rights and protection of human rights defenders.

The key instrument that Spain created to respond to the changes happening on the southern shore of the Mediterranean was the MASAR Programme (2012). This instrument had the overall objective of promoting institutional, social and economic development policies, supporting democratic governance and social cohesion for partner countries in Northern Africa and the Middle East by strengthening their institutions and their civil society. Its approach was tailoring the capacities it offered to the demands and characteristics of the countries where it was present and giving voice to local actors. Therefore, the actions undertaken by the MASAR program responded to the priorities established in its mandate but adapted the actions to the demands of the counterparts on the ground.

Democracy support has been a priority for successive Spanish governments, at least on rhetorical level. However, this democracy support is embedded in different practices unrelated to democracy support. The ultimate goal of democracy support would not be helping to achieve democratic transitions or strengthening democracy in third countries but avoiding insecurity and instability in countries that can

generate insecurity and instability in Spain. The Spanish Security Strategy (2011) establishes a direct link between the threats and challenges faced by the EU and Spain, such as poverty and inequality. It claims that investing in development cooperation is an investment in Spanish security. It mentions that strengthening institutions makes countries more stable, safer, and less prone to affecting Spanish interests. President Rajoy, in his inaugural speech at the *Conference on stability and development in Libya,* claimed, "We are called to coordinate the efforts deployed at the regional level and to contribute, in this way, to the stability and development of Libya and its institutions: The security of Libya is our security, the stability of Libya is our stability". The link between pursuing stability disguised as democracy promotion is established because it benefits Spain's stability.

However, Spain's governmental documents recognise the existence of alternative political regimes that can lead to economic growth, which may affect the impact of Spain and the EU as democracy promoters. Nevertheless, Spanish governmental actors still believe in the causal relation between economic development and democratic consolidation. In that sense, any action undertaken to improve societal and economic conditions of the population in third countries, especially those focused on women, is considered a step forward in democracy support.

The triangle between stability, security and democracy is a constant trend in all governmental documents. For example, the V Master Plan of Spanish Cooperation (2018) blames corruption, legal uncertainty, violence and conflict as the causes that impede economic growth, which, in turn, hinders democratic consolidation. Truth as this may be, it is also a source of contestation by non-governmental actors. They claim that democracy support has lacked consistency and specificity, and only democracy support will bring stability in the long run for EU member states.

6.5.1 Patterns of contestation in Spain

In case of Spain, not a single actor contests democracy support as a fundamental norm. Everyone, from the government to the opposition, from regional governments to local councils, and from NGOs to think tanks, is in favour of continuing democracy support in whatever possible form, even if it is very diffuse and unconcreted. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the government is contesting democracy support as a fundamental norm when it insists on separating democracy support from the defence of human rights as if it were desirable to separate both issues, as outlined in the Spanish Foreign Action Strategy of 2014-2017 and reaffirms it in the FAS 2021-2024.

Table 13 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Spain (2011–2022)

Spain	
Levels of contestation	**Number of Documents**
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	18
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	25
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	11
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	29

Source: Own compilation.

In the Spanish Strategy of Foreign Action 2014-2017, there is both a contestation of organising principles of democracy support focusing on the policy outcome of that support and the presence of a

learning loop because it acknowledges that what had been done in the past as democracy support has not worked and a new approach is needed. It also states that promoting democratic systems is a long-term task and cannot be done through "institutional engineering", as the last two decades have revealed. The Strategy says that in the best cases, this "institutional engineering" has been useless and, in the worst cases, counterproductive. There is also a contestation of the instruments used and "the balance between the sticks and carrots wielded by the EU" when the strategy refers to the "unwanted and seldom understood interference" and concludes that democracy promotion should step in only when citizens of a given country demand it. The acknowledgement that democracy support is about "offering all our support, institutional and advisory, in situations of transition to democracy" could be interpreted as a contestation of previously used instruments or as contesting the framework in which standardised procedures operate according to the fundamental norms.

Contestation of standardised procedures is also present in non-governmental documents by different actors. Political parties engage in opposition-government dynamics, accusing each other of not doing enough in terms of foreign action (thus, democracy support) and being absent from decision-making forums. It is evident in terms of the funds destined for cooperation. There is contestation claiming that funds are not enough to achieve the objectives set in different Cooperation Master Plans. Unsurprisingly, the funds have never reached the 0,7% aimed for development aid. Think tanks have also highlighted that the amount of funds is insufficient and have added that funds without political support and capital are less effective.

6.6   Poland

The leading actor and decision-maker in the Polish structure of democracy support is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the latest Polish Foreign Policy Strategy, issued by the Ministry in 2017, democracy is defined as one of the main Polish values. The strategy sets out the task of promoting the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights in the world. According to the strategy, the rationale behind this policy choice is the Polish conviction that promoting democracy is the best guarantee of peace and stability in the world, which simultaneously strengthens Poland's security. Therefore, for Poland, utility-based and value-based considerations are intertwined in international democracy support.

Table 14 The number of documents by actors in Polish democracy support (2011–2022)

Poland	
Type of Actor	**Number of Documents**
Civil society actors	76
National government	89
National political parties and their leaders	6
National think tank	6
Other	1
Regional and local governments	34
Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej	16
All documents	228

Source: Own compilation.

Development cooperation is regulated by the Development Cooperation Law of 2011. The law explicitly defines promoting and supporting the development of democracy and civil society, including

the development of parliamentarianism, good governance and respect for human rights, among the main goals of Polish development cooperation. The law also outlines the principles for implementing Polish development cooperation. According to the document, development cooperation is based on a Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme drawn up for not less than four years. The programme shall define the objectives and geographical and thematic priorities of development assistance, humanitarian aid and global education. Each year, based on the programme, the Foreign Minister develops an Annual Development Cooperation Plan, which specifies the development cooperation tasks to be implemented, forms of development cooperation and the number of financial resources allocated.

Currently, the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2021-2030 identifies ten priority countries, half of which are covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and Palestine. The number of Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries among Polish development cooperation priority countries reflects the traditional Polish foreign policy prioritisation of Eastern Europe and the objective of its democratisation, which increases Polish security and protects Polish minorities abroad.

A special brand was created to manage development cooperation: Polska Pomoc (Polish Aid). The Ministry coordinates Polska Pomoc and implements it in cooperation with other Polish actors involved in democracy support, such as civil society organisations and local government authorities. determines actors further directly engaged in development cooperation under the Polska Pomoc brand by holding an annual grant competition.

The implementation of external democracy support in Poland has primarily been delegated to civil society actors, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with experience working on economic and social development internationally. Their activities support building civil societies and establishing democratic systems in countries that require such assistance. Polish NGOs have primarily contributed to Poland's positive image as a promoter of democratic values in the European Eastern Neighbourhood and to the accumulation of social capital in the partner states in the region. The presence of NGOs in support of democracy corresponded with the idea of solidarity and democratic values, explicitly expressed in Poland's bilateral development cooperation policy.

Solidarity Fund PL (Fundacja Solidarności Międzynarodowej – FSM) is one of the key actors operating in the Polish development cooperation sector. The FSM is a state treasury foundation which specialises in supporting democratic transformations of partner states by developing good governance principles and local democracy, building civil society, and supporting free media and human rights organisations in the EaP states. Solidarity Fund PL plays a special role in Polish development cooperation, which is defined in the Development Cooperation Law of 2011, under which the Minister of Foreign Affairs may entrust the Foundation with development assistance tasks. Since 2012, it has organised annually a regranting procedure for Polish NGOs – Support for Democracy, the only programme exclusively devoted to democracy support. In amendments to the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2016-2020 adopted by the Law and Justice governing party at the time – in 2019, this opportunity for NGOs to apply for funding was removed, while the FSM was appointed as the only entity responsible for the implementation of Support for Democracy. Despite its democracy support specialisation, the FSM must act in line with the priorities of Polish foreign policy. Consequently, in recent years, the FSM has been exposed to the former government's democratic backsliding.

The list of prominent civil society actors includes the Education for Democracy Foundation. The main direction of the Foundation's activities is global education about democracy. The activities addressed

to the societies of the Eastern Partnership states consist primarily of creating social initiatives and supporting groups and institutions working for pro-civic society and pro-democratic change. Another such organisation is the East European Democratic Centre (EEDC). The EEDC focuses mainly on supporting civic societies in post-Soviet countries in implementing democratic change, particularly by supporting local social initiatives and independent media. Organisations such as the Foundation for Freedom and Democracy and the Foundation "Aid to Poles in the East" prioritise supporting Polish minority rights in the EaP partner states as part of democracy support.

6.6.1 Patterns of contestation in Poland

We detected a moderate level of explicit democracy support contestation in Poland. Generally, it is not a topic for wider public discussions, both in media and parliamentary discussions. However, the most active in contesting instruments of Poland's democracy support, primarily financial ones, were NGO actors involved in this process. However, this contestation pertained mostly to improving the scope and efficacy of Polish democracy support and not undermining liberal democracy as fundamental norm. There were also many calls to include more NGO actors and their experience. The leading NGO actor most involved in the democracy support contestation was the umbrella organization 'Grupa Zagranica'. However, one leading non-liberal NGO, 'Ordo Iurisis,' was contesting the values of liberal democracy and advocating for the promotion of traditional values.

 One reason for such limited contestation on the general level is that Poland is proud of its transition from communism to democracy after 1989. The change of status from recipient to donor of democracy support was considered an important milestone in this process. Being a donor validated Poland's sense of democratic transition success.

Secondly, such limited contestation occurred regardless of the eight years of illiberal practices of the Law and Justice government (2015-2023), which pushed for majoritarian democracy in Poland. We explain this paradox primarily by consensus of liberal and illiberal actors to support the eastern neighbours of Poland. Democracy support practices almost exclusively relate to the eastern EU neighbourhood. Both sides (liberal and illiberal) consider Russia a threat to Poland's security. Hence, Polish support for democratic reforms in eastern neighbours of Poland could be seen as a geopolitical priority as democratic neighbours were considered a buffer zone against Russian imperialist politics. In this context, liberal actors would emphasize the Polish transition's success and would self-portray Poland as a 'success story' to be followed by eastern neighbours. At the same time, Law and Justice referred to the legacy of President Lech Kaczyński, stating that the democratic eastern neighbours could prevent Russian interference in Eastern and Central Europe.

Table 15 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Poland (2011–2022)

Poland	
Levels of contestation	**Number of Documents**
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	57
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	60
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	29
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	88

Source: Own compilation.

6.7   Sweden

Sweden is active in democracy support and has developed a network of actors involved in this process. Most importantly, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) supports "the development towards a vibrant and pluralistic civil society in developing countries" (MFA 2017 a, p. 3). The civil society support is mainly channelled through Strategic Partner Organisations (SPO) in Sweden. This system of having a few—typically around 15—Swedish civil society organisations that are aid transmitters for governmental funding has existed since the 1970s (Statskontoret, 2013, p. 11; SIDA, 2005, p. 4).

Table 16 The number of documents by actors in Swedish democracy support (2011–2022)

Sweden	
Type of Actor	**Number of Documents**
Civil society actors	58
Interest groups	28
National government	29
National parliament	6
National political parties and their leaders	12
National think thank	2
Other	15
Regional and local governments	5
All documents	155

Source: Own compilation.

Some SPOs are umbrella organisations that unite smaller Swedish civil society organisations within a thematic area, such as labour movements or civil society support (Billing, 2011, p. 16). They mediate SIDA's funding to their member organisations in Sweden, which conduct development cooperation (SIDA, 2024). ForumCiv is the largest umbrella organisation with over 200 Swedish member organisations, focusing on civil society support as the thematic area, and has been an SPO since 1995 (Forum Civ n.d.a). They both mediate Sida funding and directly support local organisations, with the Eastern Partnership countries as one of their main geographic focus areas since the 1990s (ForumCiv n.d.b), aiming to support democratisation in the regions (ForumCiv n.d.b). Additionally, from 2012 onward, they run an office for Eastern Europe based in Vilnius, Lithuania (ForumCiv n.d.c).

Another umbrella organisation that functions as an SPO is Union to Union. It is the Swedish union movement's joint international cooperation development organisation, gathering together LO (Swedish Trade Union Confederation), TCO (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), and Saco (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations). Their development cooperation projects aim to create "strong democratic trade unions and more decent jobs globally" (Union to Union 2023, p. 6). Union to Union's member organisations operate in multiple regions, including MENA and Eastern Europe. One of the recent projects in the MENA region involves training to enhance the campaigning skills of female trade union leaders. The project is conducted by the Swedish Union of Civil Servants, with the aim of the project being to increase gender equality at work and in trade unions in the MENA region (Union to Union n.d.).

Another umbrella organisation within the Swedish labour movement is the Olof Palme International Center, which works for "democracy, human rights, social justice, peace and sustainability" in MENA

and Eastern Europe, among other regions (Palme Center n.d). The Palme Center receives funding from SIDA in accordance with the SPO agreement and the government strategy: "Strategy for Democracy Support through Swedish Party-Affiliated Organisations". Since 1995, Sweden has provided international party assistance through party-affiliated organisations (Svåsand, 2014). According to the strategy running 2016–2020, "the support should contribute to the development of well-functioning democratic multi-party systems and support sister parties or related political movements or organisations" (Sida, 2020a, p. 5). Moreover, the strategy aims to increase the representation of marginalised groups in the political systems, focusing on women and youth (SIDA, 2020a, p. 5).

6.7.1   Patterns of contestation in Sweden

The intensity of contestation was not very dominant as democracy support was not a main topic of political discussions. When there was contestation, it was mainly by far-right and far-left groups - the first were trying to establish larger changes, but they were unable, and far-left was rather supporting further development and creating stronger development assistance.

Between 2013 and 2020, SIDA funded a Gender-Responsive Budgeting project in Ukraine – the largest international Gender-Responsive Budgeting project. The project aimed to achieve "Increased economic efficiency and transparency in budget allocations that consider the different needs of different groups of women and men" (NIRAS n.d., p. 6). The liberal-conservative Moderate Party and their associate youth organisation, the Swedish Young Conservatives, have contested the gender-based budgeting project in Ukraine in social media and aid policy parliamentary debate (The Swedish Parliament 2019; Svantesson, 2019).

The Eastern Group is a civil society organisation that disseminates information and builds public opinion in Sweden on democracy and human rights issues in Eastern Europe, focusing on Belarus, Ukraine and Russia (The Eastern Group 2023). Between 2017 and 2020, the Eastern Group criticised the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and SIDA for funding Belarusian state actors within the scope of their democracy promotion. The critique ended in 2020 when the government and SIDA agreed to end all Swedish aid that involved Belarusian state actors (Sida, 2020). In SIDA's announcement on the suspension of aid to state actors in Belarus, they stated that, since 1995, SIDA had been one of the largest bilateral aid donors to Belarus, with the primary objective of promoting democracy. Moreover, they announced that out of about SEK 102 million (the year 2020), 9 million donated to state actors would be frozen and that they were looking into further strengthening support to civil society (Sida, 2020 b).

In 2021, the Eastern Group published a report summarising their criticism. Their main argument was that Swedish aid has gone to state actors who have violated human rights in multiple cases. As a result, they claimed, democracy support had, in reality, strengthened anti-democratic forces in Belarus (Uggla, 2021, p. 7). The report asserted that the following state actors receiving SIDA funding violated human rights: the Belarusian State University (BSU), the Ministry of Taxes and Duties, and the Public Employment Service (Uggla, 2021).

Most criticism has come from the Sweden Democrat party (radical right-wing populist party) and The Moderate Party (liberal conservative). The Green Party and Liberals have expressed some contestation with regards to funding – they wanted to increase funding. They insist on assistance (also in area of democracy support) was meant to be more focused on principals (being more focused on ideas like human right/minority rights), sustainability and environment. The Sweden Democrats have mainly criticized the lack of results from DS and that it is problematic that the results are difficult to measure.

The Sweden Democrats state that they do not believe that aid can contribute to democratic development. The Moderates have expressed criticism towards gender responsive budgeting. The criticism was targeting a SIDA funded project called "Gender Budgeting in Ukraine" that was conducted between 2013 and 2020. Prominent politicians from the Moderate Party have brought up critique about the project, stating that taxpayer's money is wasted on feminist snow removal in Ukraine.

The radical right-wing populist party, the Sweden Democrats, entered parliament in 2010 with 5.7% of the votes and has since experienced continued electoral success (Widfeldt, 2018). In 2022, it became Sweden's second-largest party, receiving 20.54% of the votes and acting as the supporting party in the centre-right coalition government (The Swedish National Encyclopedia, n.d.). The Sweden Democrats have repeatedly questioned whether democracy aid can contribute to progress in democratisation (Prot. 2018/19:52; Prot. 2019/20:78; Emilsson & Nordberg, 2022). As a result, they generally want to reprioritise funding channelled to democracy support and instead focus on humanitarian aid and domestic matters.

Table 17 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Sweden (2011–2022)

Sweden	
Levels of contestation	**Number of Documents**
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	30
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	29
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	23
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	57

Source: Own compilation.

6.8 Austria

The Austrian state is very cautious in its external support of democracy and has confined this policy area to the European Union. Accordingly, the data collected about actors practising democracy support in the southern and eastern neighbourhoods was limited in comparison to other EUMS. The state as an actor in external democracy support will be analysed in greater detail, particularly the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs activities.

Table 18 The number of documents by actors in Austrian democracy support (2011–2022)

Austria	
Type of Actor	**Number of Documents**
National think tank	3
Civil society actors	8
National parliament	8
National political parties and their leaders	8
Other	8
National government	14
All documents	49

Source: Own compilation.

Democracy support and development cooperation assistance are frequently only provided in connection with Austria's national interests. For example, Austria provides development aid and democracy support in the EU's southern neighbourhood to prevent refugees from reaching Europe and, ultimately, Austria. Security takes precedence over development cooperation, which is seen as a means to an end. The support of democracy and development cooperation aid in the eastern neighbourhood is usually mentioned in connection with Austria's economic interests. The stability of the eastern neighbourhood states is a prerequisite for Austrian companies to be able to benefit from economic relations with these states, in particular Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova. By concentrating on stabilising and supporting Moldova as a "link between the Danube and Black Sea regions" (Austrian Development Agency, 2012, p. 37), Austria is holding on to its historical sphere of influence. The support and stabilisation of the southern neighbourhood is also of great geopolitical interest to Austria. The Balkans are considered a priority region for Austria, which receives special attention in the form of democracy support. Austria is particularly interested in intensifying European integration in the Balkans and is the strongest lobbyist for accessing numerous Balkan states to the EU.

In Austria, foreign and security policy, as well as development cooperation, are all under the umbrella of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (Foreign Ministry). Alongside political and economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is one of the three pillars of Austrian foreign policy: cultural policy abroad thus serves Austria's foreign and security policy interests (Stadler, 2023, p.273). The Federal Ministry maintains a broad network of 30 cultural forums, 82 embassies, 10 consulates general, 65 Austrian libraries and 10 Austrian institutes.

The Foreign Ministry is responsible for the strategic orientation of development cooperation policy. As of 2004, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), a private-sector development agency, is responsible for implementing projects and programmes to act more quickly and efficiently outside the state administration (Obrovsky, 2023, p.401). ADA acts in concert with the Austrian Development Cooperation Agency (OEZA) to implement programmes and projects in cooperation with public institutions, organisations and companies. In 2022, ADA had an operating budget of € 112.750 million at its disposal (Außenministerium der Republik Österreich, 2023c). In addition, the ADA manages considerable third-party funds, including funds from the European Commission. The third actor in Austrian development policy is the Austrian Development Bank (OeEB), which provides financial support for the objectives of Austrian development policy. OeEB was founded in 2008 on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Finance to offer market-oriented financing and equity investments in developing and emerging countries (Obrovsky, 2023, p.401). OeEB was created to promote the private sector in developing countries. As OeEB primarily finances investments by private companies, these only marginally increase the Austrian ODA quota.

Most civil society organisations active in development cooperation aid and external democracy support are directly commissioned or co-financed by the ADA. As Austria's largest civil society organisation, the umbrella organisation "Globale Verantwortung" (Global Responsibility) should be briefly introduced here. The umbrella organisation represents a total of 36 Austrian non-governmental organisations internationally, which are active in the areas of development cooperation, domestic development work, humanitarian aid and sustainable global economic, social and ecological development (Globale Verantwortung, 2008). Overall, the organisations are active in both the southern and eastern Neighbourhood (except for Libya and Azerbaijan) on a balanced basis, with areas including gender equality, refugee aid, training for young people and poverty reduction and democracy support. The focus of democracy support is on educating young people about democratic processes at

the local level (AG Globale Verantwortung, 2024b). It makes it clear that although Austrian development policy prioritises poverty reduction and the protection of human rights, democracy support is also externally mediated.

6.8.1   Patterns of contestation in Austria

Austrian democracy support as a whole is nestled within its policy development cooperation, where instruments of democracy support are hardly mentioned under the term as such. Accordingly, little to no contestation of democracy support was found in the data set collected. The Austrian foreign policy role of a neutral state could be a possible reason for the low level of contestation, but also for the fact that democracy support is not mentioned. It makes it possible for Austria to negotiate with autocrats in conflict situations without risking accusations of political partisanship, even if this position is implied by membership in international organisations. Austria usually transfers all activities that explicitly deal with the support of democracy to the EU - Austria's sphere of action is absorbed into the EU, even if Austria is not very active within the EU and does not emphasise much in the area of democracy support.

Table 19 Distribution of three levels of contestation of democracy support in Austria (2011–2022)

Austria	
Levels of contestation	**Number of Documents**
Contestation of democracy (as a fundamental norm)	23
Contestation of organising principles of democracy support	1
Contestation of standardised procedures of democracy support	14
Total number of documents with at least one code related to contestation	33

Source: Own compilation.

7   Financial overview of the support provided by EUMS.

European Commission and European Union Member States are leading providers of assistance for general development and assistance for the government and civil society. As presented in Table 3.0, during the 2013-2022 period, amounts spent in both areas were increasing significantly, but the share of the funds provided for democracy support, after exceeding 10% of all provided funds during the 2018-2020 period decreased to the lowest level in the given period in 2022, at only 7,60%. Two main reasons for that were a significant increase of funds provided for Ukraine in areas different than support of democracy and civil society in that country after the Russian aggression of 2022 and a sharp decrease in the amount spent for democracy support in 2021.

Table 20 Amounts of development assistance in categories 1000 (Total. All sectors) and 151 (Government and civil society, general) provided by 27 current EU Member States and European Commission during the 2013-2022 period (in 2021 USD)

Year	Category 151	Category 1000	Share of the category 151.
2013	5 309 688 673,00 USD	53 250 775 962,00 USD	9,97%
2014	5 502 802 688,00 USD	58 152 603 207,38 USD	9,46%

2015	5 640 456 430,00 USD	65 692 111 667,59 USD	8,59%
2016	6 170 237 112,00 USD	77 439 446 874,26 USD	7,97%
2017	6 425 947 075,32 USD	76 633 791 861,00 USD	8,39%
2018	7 877 656 625,68 USD	73 322 043 366,92 USD	10,74%
2019	7 305 412 606,30 USD	70 963 933 885,87 USD	10,29%
2020	9 860 206 492,13 USD	83 843 436 943,07 USD	11,76%
2021	7 753 421 984,85 USD	83 637 881 046,01 USD	9,27%
2022	8 393 167 649,20 USD	110 372 724 597,04 USD	7,60%
2013-2022	**70 238 997 336,48 USD**	**753 308 749 411,14 USD**	**9,32%**

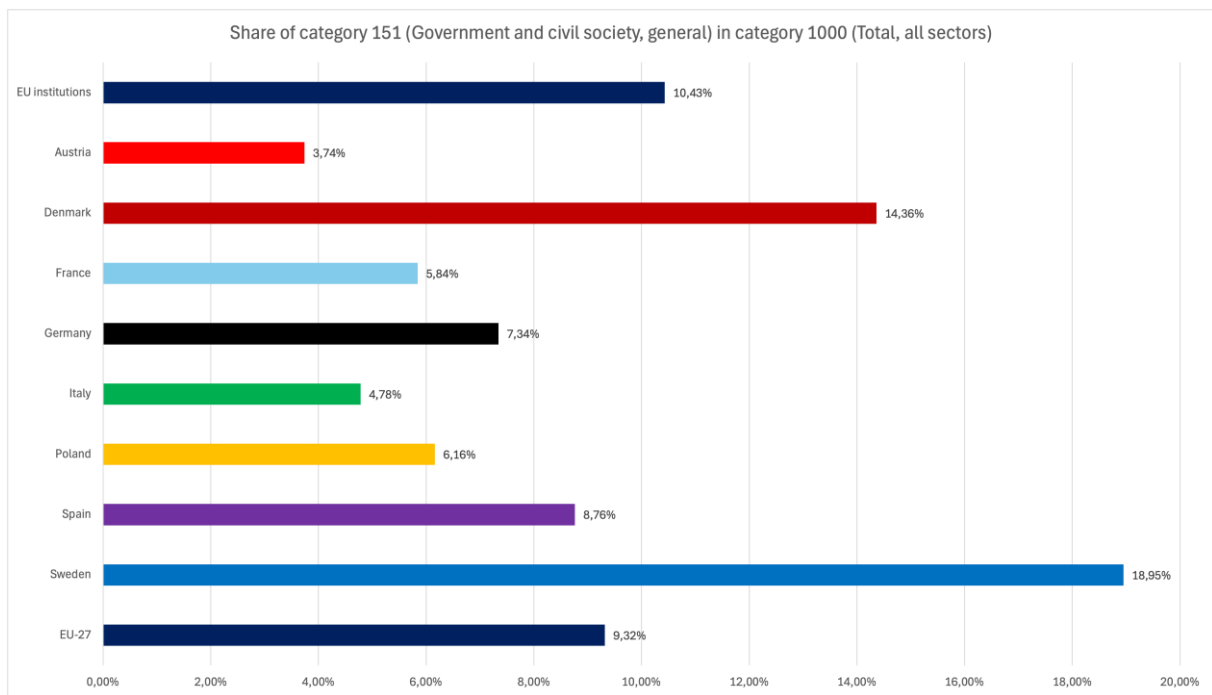Source: Own calculations based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System.

Significant differences between European Union Member States in the geographical and sectoral structure of the provided development assistance can be noticed. Generally, countries tend to provide more democracy assistance funding to countries that are either geographically closer (for example, Italy and North Africa, Poland and Eastern Partnership countries) or other factors lead to an increase in funding (for example, an increase of funds provided by France to Georgia during Salome Zurabiszwili presidential term, Spain's relatively high democracy support funding in South America related to historical and cultural links).

As presented in Table 21., among countries analysed in the project, there are major differences in the share of category 151 in all development assistance. It varies from 3,74% in Austria to 18,95% in Sweden, which stands for more than two times more than average for 27 EU Member States and the European Commission. Generally, countries from northern Europe tend to provide higher amounts of democracy support than eastern and southern European countries. However, many opposing tendencies can be seen, as well as in recent years, due to delivering data in the area of democracy assistance by all EU Member States, it can be seen that all countries do promote democracy and governance in developing countries, including Eastern Partnership and southern neighbourhood states.

Table 21 Amounts of development assistance of SHAPEDEM-EU researched EU Member States and EU Institutions during the 2013-2022 period reported to the Creditor Reporting System

Country	Amount of development assistance in 2013-2022 period (category 1000, millions of 2021 USD)	Amount of Government and civil society, general assistance in 2013-2022 period (category 151, millions	Share of category 151 (Government and civil society, general) in category 1000 (Total, all sectors)	Share of countries of Eastern Partnership in development assistance in category 151 (2013-2022 period)	Share of countries of Southern Neighbourhood in development assistance in category 151 (2013-2022 period)	Three main receivers of democracy support – Eastern Partnership (category 151, 2013-	Three main receivers of democracy support – Southern Neighbourhood (category 151, 2013-2022 period)

		of 2021 USD)				2022 period)[5]	
EU Institutions	218 898,3	22 823,2	10,43%	8,81%	11,31%	UA, MD, GE	PS, TN, MA
Austria	7 520,7	281,3	3,74%	8,86%	0,71%	UA, GE, MD	SY, PS, EG
Denmark	20 948,4	3 007,4	14,36%	3,85%	6,64%	UA, MD, GE	PS, TN, SY
France	103 867,1	6 070,3	5,84%	21,07%	16,08%	GE, UA, AM	JO, TN, MA
Germany	235 334,1	17 268,7	7,34%	2,35%	3,41%	UA, BY, GE	TN, PS, EG
Italy	22 754,2	1 088,1	4,78%	2,02%	22,79%	MD, UA, AM	LY, TN, PS
Poland	4 730,7	291,6	6,16%	68,77%	0,54%	BY, UA, GE	TN, PS, LY
Spain	14 607,4	1 279,8	8,76%	4,42%	10,77%	UA, BY, MD	MA, PS, JO
Sweden	41 869,5	7 935,6	18,95%	5,03%	5,57%	UA, MD, GE	PS, SY, EG
All 27 EU Member states & EU Institutions	753 308,7	70 239.0	9,32%	6,66%	8,14%	UA, GE, MD	PS, TN, MA

Share of category 151 (Government and civil society, general) in category 1000 (Total, all sectors)

Country	Share
EU institutions	10,43%
Austria	3,74%
Denmark	14,36%
France	5,84%
Germany	7,34%
Italy	4,78%
Poland	6,16%
Spain	8,76%
Sweden	18,95%
EU-27	9,32%

Source: own calculation based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System.

8   Cross-cutting issues: Gender Equality and Digital Transformation

In the SHAPEDEM-EU project, we identify the democracy support practices that involve instruments related to the promotion of gender equality or digital transformations (see more on gender equality in Gawrich, Konrad 2024 and on digital transformation in Osypchuk, Suslov, Shaporda 2024). As mentioned above, gender equality is defined – following the Council of Europe definition – as equal rights for women and men, girls and boys and LGBTIQ equality. However, it should also include visibility, empowerment, responsibility, participation in public and private life, and distribution of resources between women and men. Digital transformation should allow social actors to employ instruments of digital communication channels vital to achieve transparency, public participation, and accountability in all democratisation processes. Gender equality was a substantial part of democratic support instruments in all countries under investigation. The report's authors identified this in initiatives, actions, or strategies in selected EUMS. We did not evaluate the efficiency of these instruments. However, overall, we can state that actors pay moderate attention to gender equality and much less to digital transformation.

8.1   Germany

In Germany, gender justice is included in the Action Plan for Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding ('Aktionsplan zur zivilen Krisenprävention, Konfliktlösung und Friedenskonsolidierung') from in 2004, which aims to support democracy. It is listed alongside assistance for free elections, educational work, the promotion of political participation (civil society), support for independent media and the support of constitutional bodies. The other example of gender equality relevance in DS practices is German Amnesty International's activities, which strive to release non-violent political prisoners. Most often, they were imprisoned because of their political, religious or other beliefs, such as origin or gender, as well as the demand for equal economic, social and cultural rights, the protection of women and girls from violence and oppression, or more generally the demand for the investigation of human rights violations and the punishment of perpetrators (Furtak, 2015, pp. 361–362). Bread for the World is also active in education and health and is committed to protecting

human rights and gender equality. The organisation places trained personnel in the respective project countries.

GIZ focuses on the eastern neighbourhood, particularly in South Caucasus countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the core work of its projects is the development of democratic political systems. Many of their projects are dedicated to enabling the political participation of young people, girls and women, and eople in rural communities. However, the digitalisation of administrative structures also plays a central role here, which aims to transfer knowledge across the board and facilitate political participation. Another recurring theme of the projects in the MENA region is the decentralisation of administration.

8.2 Italy

The Italian agency AICS emphasizes the importance of gender equality in its programs and activities. They see this as a cross-cutting issue in its efforts to support democracy in European neighbourhoods. In Italian democracy support practices, these issues are closely intertwined with the fundamental principles of democracy, good governance, human rights, and the construction of resilient and sustainable democracies. Italy's democracy support programs in the European neighbourhood prioritize promoting gender equality, focusing on increasing women's political participation, women's economic empowerment, and combating gender-based violence. A notable example is the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network launch in Rome in 2017.

In general, Italy's democratic support programs in the European neighbourhood aim to harness the power of technology for positive changes. It includes promoting digital skills and access to them, strengthening civic participation online, supporting platforms and tools enabling citizens to engage in political dialogue online, participating in decision-making processes, and protecting rights and freedom of expression in the digital age.

8.3 France

France is one of seven countries worldwide explicitly adopting a feminist foreign policy (Thomson, Ahmed, Khokar, 2021). Integrating feminist diplomacy into actions within the foreign policy sector is a growing global trend. In 2018, France revised its international strategy for gender equality, adopting an approach referred to as 'feminist diplomacy', and a year later, in an op-ed written on International Women's Day 2019, explicitly proclaimed a feminist foreign policy (Schiappa, 2019). The most relevant indicator we have been able to examine regarding this policy scope is France's 2018 International Strategy for Gender Equality between Women and Men, which delineates several gender-related priorities that the French government must take into account through its foreign aid. According to the strategy, "gender equality is an absolute priority of the President's mandate. It will be a fundamental and cross-cutting theme, underpin France's external action, and specific measures will be taken to promote it" (Direction générale de la mondialisation, 2018). For example, the strategy aims to increase bilateral and programmable ODA that contributes to gender equality, from a reference level of 30% in 2018 to a total of 50% by 2022, with annual benchmarks. France has also established the High Council for Gender Equality between Women and Men, an independent body composed of experts, to advise them on implementing political conduct, both externally and internally, and its application, focusing on gender dimensions.

Regarding the concept of "feminist diplomacy," the French policy describes an approach identifying French priorities according to three principles to ensure it is comprehensive, rights-based, and gender-based, promising to include gender "in all French diplomatic priorities and all political, economic,

diplomatic, cultural, educational, and development cooperation actions." France's "comprehensive approach" is the best means to extend its policy framework and apply it more broadly to development. It explicitly emphasizes that gender should be included in diplomatic priorities, including a commitment to gender parity within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development (French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018).

France established a digital strategy for international affairs as early as 2017. This strategy aims to promote an open digital world (governance and interoperability), diverse (access in all countries, linguistic and cultural diversity, sharing of innovations, combating disinformation), and trustworthy (rights, security) (Strategy 2017, Discours de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, 2017). This strategy outlines the vision and framework of action for the French Development Agency (AFD) group, in which digital transformation is one of the six transitions that the Group supports as part of its Strategic Orientation Plan. AFD's support in the digital domain can be broadly categorized into three groups. Firstly, they fund digital applications, often in the form of grants, aimed at various sectors such as education (online training, mobile educational tools), healthcare (telemedicine, mobile health, hospital information systems), and supporting the private sector (computerization of microfinance institutions, coding schools, support for incubators). Secondly, they finance management information systems for networks (smart grids, SCADA systems) or operators (customer management, ERP systems) in key sectors like energy, transportation, water, and sanitation. This funding is provided through loan components within infrastructure projects. Lastly, AFD supports satellite systems for environmental protection and resource management (forests, fisheries), offering grants for research and loans for system implementation. (https://consultation-numerique.afd.fr/pages/bilan)

The AFD Group is a leading digital financier alongside the World Bank and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Over the years, the share of digital projects in AFD's portfolio has consistently increased. Evaluating AFD's activity in the digital domain is challenging due to its cross-cutting nature and the absence of a specific indicator to track digital components of projects. However, it is estimated that the AFD Group allocated €1.3 billion for digital initiatives between 2001 and 2015, covering 184 projects. Of this amount, €829 million went into the telecommunications sector (54 projects), accounting for 65%. The remaining €455 million funded projects in social sectors (e-health, e-education), supported the private sector and included digital components in transportation and energy projects. In 2018, nearly 8% of AFD's total financing volume and more than a quarter of its projects supported activities directly related to the digital sector. Since 2016, Proparco has provided €43 million in financing to benefit digital startups. On average, digitalization projects represent nearly 8% of AFD's total financing volume, with more than a quarter of the projects supporting activities directly linked to the digital sector.

8.4   Denmark

Gender equality issues are included in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiative of the New Democracy Fund (NDF), established in 2020. It aimed at supporting civil society and thus strengthening democracy in the eastern neighbourhood. The NDF comprises five consortium members: International Media Support, 3F, the Danish Cultural Institute, the Confederation of Danish Industry, and the Danish Youth Council. For 2023-2026, the NDF has a total budget of EUR 24m. It offers different funding mechanisms for partnerships between Danish and eastern neighbourhood NGOs. Initiatives must relate to one of six thematic areas: green transition, culture, gender, labour market, media, or youth.

Since its launch, the NDF has initiated various projects; examples include 1) the funding of Jurnal TV Moldova to make it more financially sustainable and ensure objective reporting; 2) a workshop and

stakeholder meeting on gender mainstreaming in culture, youth, media, and labour market initiatives, held in Georgia in November 2022; a project connecting young photographers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia with their peers in Denmark to jointly record social, economic, gender, and HR concerns; a "democracy festival" held in Lithuania in October 2022, aimed at supporting NGOs in Belarus to navigate digital activism.

8.5 Spain

Gender equality is listed in the Spanish Cooperation Agency Report of 2020. It relates to all the countries of the southern neighbourhood where Spanish cooperation is present. It highlights the actions linked to promoting women's rights, especially the fight against gender violence and increased female presence in the labour market and political decision-making bodies. Whereas the Foreign Action Strategy of 2014 argues that the exceptional sensitivity of Spanish society to gender equality translates into a very active policy at the multilateral level, seeking the creation of instruments and institutions that fight against discrimination based on gender and against domestic violence. Spain became active at the international level with the development of a Guide of recommendations for the effective investigation of the crime of feminicide. Another example of Spanish activity in this area is contributing to a model of the Investigation Protocol on Femicide by international organizations competent in the matter and supporting the campaign of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity with the conviction that sexual orientation and gender identity are part of the intimacy of the human being. As a result, Spain promotes decriminalising consensual relationships between adults in all world countries. The Foreign Action Strategy 2021-2024 establishes that promoting equality will be a transversal principle of Spanish external action because Spain aspires to be a referent in the fight against gender inequality and discrimination.

The Foreign Action Strategy 2021-2024 establishes that the active promotion of equality will be a transversal principle of Spanish external action because Spain aspires to be a referent on the fight against gender inequality and discrimination. This opened the door for the adoption of Feminist Foreign Policy Strategy that would incorporate the gender approach in all areas of foreign action. According to Arco (2022), feminist foreign policy have the following characteristics in common: first, the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in the different areas of foreign policy, in a more or less comprehensive way; second, the participation of women in foreign policy, both in the ministries themselves and in the bilateral and multilateral relations of states; third, the economic empowerment of women; and, finally, the promotion of women's rights and the fight against discrimination and gender violence, especially in the multilateral agenda (for a critique of Feminist Foreign Policy, see Arco, 2022).

Digitalisation is not mentioned in the Foreign Action Strategy 2014, except for communicating better Spanish diplomatic activities. In 2021, the Foreign Action Strategy shows how the debate about digitalisation has evolved and become a dimension of its own in the political arena. In the latest strategy, Spain incorporates the digital dimension of the economy and mentions the importance of double transitions. There is awareness on how digital issues have increasingly become important in international relations to the point that in the reinforced and reformed multilateralism chapter, Spain lists gender equality and digitalisation as areas of action where multilateral institutions can fulfil their mandates.

The digital issue is treated as unrelated to democracy support. It is treated as a transformative change that brings opportunities in terms of productivity, more connectivity or innovative developments; as a

challenge to overcome in terms of fiscality, labour, capacities and infrastructures that need to be developed to remain competitive in an increasingly connected and digitalised world; and as a threat in the field of cybersecurity. It is also described as an opportunity for Spain to improve its outreach and image in the world and homework for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself to improve its capacities.

8.6   Sweden

Gender equality is a high priority for Swedish democracy support practices. Between 2013 and 2020, SIDA funded a Gender-Responsive Budgeting project in Ukraine – the largest international Gender-Responsive Budgeting project. The project aimed to achieve "Increased economic efficiency and transparency in budget allocations that consider the different needs of different groups of women and men" (NIRAS n.d., p. 6). The government's new "Aid Policy Platform", introduced in March 2014, replaced a range of individual policy documents to clarify the goal hierarchy of Swedish development cooperation policy. The overall objective of development cooperation expressed in the platform was to improve the living conditions of people living in poverty and oppression (Skr. 2013/14:131, p. 14). This objective was divided into six sub-objectives, the first of which was "strengthened democracy and gender equality, enhanced respect for human rights and freedom from oppression." (Skr. 2013/14:131, p. 14).

In October 2014, a Social Democratic and Green Party minority coalition took office, with the Left Party as a supporting party. During Foreign Minister Margot Wallström's first interview, she declared that Sweden would adopt a feminist foreign policy. This foreign policy would promote gender equality and integrate it into all policy areas and services of the foreign ministry, such as development cooperation (Towns et al., 2023). The feminist foreign policy was a working method and perspective based on "the three Rs": to strengthen the *Rights, Representation* and *Resources* of women and girls worldwide (MFA, 2018, p. 11).

8.7   Poland

Gender equality is not a priority in Polish democracy support or development cooperation. Funding for this issue was minimal. Grupa Zagranica—a leading Polish CSO actor contesting democracy support instruments—advocated the need to include this more broadly and to increase the funding. If gender equality is mentioned, it is only in the context of the EU's requirements and programs, which Poland must adhere to. It is important to stress that gender issues and particularly women reproductive health rights became a main bone of contention in the domestic context in Poland under the PiS government (2015-2023). Before 2015 in Poland abortion was only permitted in cases of serious threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman. In 2017 the motion was put to the Constitutional Tribunal to assess constitutionality of abortions in the case of fatal impairment or an incurable disease. As a result, in October 2020 the Tribunal ruled such eugenic cases unconstitutional and the law since permits abortion only to safeguard the life or health of the woman or where a pregnancy results from rape or incest. Poland became the country with one of the most restricted accesses to abortion in the EU. It impacted the way gender issues were (not) included in democracy support for external actors since it constituted a flagship conservative stance of the government in the analysed period. Digital transformation is not mentioned in Polish documents and reports about democracy support or development cooperation. It is not considered an issue for inclusion in the DS instruments or actions demonstrating how static the approach was in the country.

8.8   Austria

Although the Austrian government does not directly address democracy support anywhere, the concept of culture abroad, which includes promoting and supporting gender equality, can be seen as part of Austria's democracy support. Priority programmes of foreign cultural policy deal with promoting women and girls, including disadvantaged people, digitalisation, or the intercultural exchange of visions for the future (Außenministerium der Republik Österreich, 2024).

9   Conclusions

In this report, we identified democracy support practices in eight EUMS towards the southern and eastern neighbourhoods of the European Union. The countries under investigation were Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. Our main goal was to analyze and map involved actors, applied instruments, and funding schemes and determine whether internal actors in countries under investigation contested democracy support. Our research has several major findings.

The first is that democracy support is rather pragmatic. It strives to help strengthen stability in neighbouring countries and, ultimately, aims to contribute to the EU and related EUMS regarding their security. Hence, democracy is viewed in selected EUMS as less based on idealistic views and is instead seen as a means to achieve other goals, including the particular interest of a given EUMS like trade, energy or migration control

Regardless of EU-wide priorities, the EUMS tend to prioritize their closest vicinity in democracy support practices. Those closer to the eastern neighbourhood primarily engage in the Eastern Partnership countries. They see their democracy support for them as a way of deterring Russian imperialist politics, in particular after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas. Meanwhile, those EUMS adjacent to the southern neighbourhood tend to get engaged in the Union for Mediterranean countries. They tend to manoeuvre between democracy support and dealing with authoritarian regimes in northern Africa and the Middle East to keep the region stable.

The subsequent finding refers to EUMS's historical and political context. We identified how democracy support is often used by countries in their self-perception in international and European politics. It varies from self-portraying as a normative power (Germany, France, Italy, Sweden) through a pragmatic approach to democracy support (Denmark), being a role model of democratic transition (Spain, Poland, Germany, Italy) to adhering to political neutrality and avoiding any direct involvement (Austria). These EUMS consider democracy support often as a means of strengthening their international political positions as a stable democracy, enhancing their prestige and being self-portrayed as a leading political force in the EU and Europe.

Our findings also suggest that democracy support is closely intertwined with development cooperation and is often not explicitly labelled as related to democracy building. In particular, it is concerned with strengthening good governance and human rights. This finding contributes to other expert conclusions on the relationship between DC and DS (EPD, 2019). In this regard, the EUMS commitments to EU priorities and activities play an essential role in the context of democracy support. Most EUMS anchor their DS within the broader EU policies and instruments, often intertwined with cooperation development policies. In many cases described above there was a certain attention to the tensions between the various policies and therefore to different practices specifically embedded in various communities of practice (Achrainer, Pace 2024). It specifically concerned DC and DS.

Two dominant actors have been involved in democracy support in eight EUMS under investigation: national governments and civil society organizations. These actors often reinforce their activity by outsourcing democracy support activities to NGOs. It occurred through funding grant schemes or umbrella organizations. In supporting democracy, CSOs are the key transmitting actors and the governments are utilising these to implement DS. There is, however, less reflection on how such model contributes to sharing democratic practices and engagement in exchanges with local democratic knowledge in partner countries. This will be further explored in our in-depth analysis of the role of CSOs in democracy support. Specifically, we will further explore how the CSOs act not only as providers and implementers of DS programmes on behalf of governments but is they act as transmission belts sharing the local democratic knowledge back to the central state actors.

The contestation of democracy support is not salient in the political discussions of our selected EUMS. None of the contestation practices refers to democracy as a fundamental norm. We identify this as a paradox since, in some EUMS, many illiberal political forces in the government support the government or act as a strong opposition. Illiberal and populist political forces have had minimal impact on contesting democracy support in those EUMS. It did not translate into increased contestation of democracy as a fundamental norm. We identify this phenomenon as contributing to silence practices (Vieira, 2021), where silence is a form of political agency, not simply a lack of speech or explicit action.

In the future, three major analytical gaps and unanswered questions will need to be addressed concerning the EU and MS and its impact on external European democracy support. Firstly, the relationship between the EU (its supranational institutions) and the MS is changing regarding the division of competencies, roles, and responsibilities. Secondly, we need to investigate the context of the de-Europeanisation process within the EU, the contestation of the EU norms by the MS themselves, and the increasing divergence between the MS regarding the foreign policy priorities and operational objectives. Lastly, in addressing those issues, one should also pay attention to the motivation of the MS and the EU institution's DS policies and their rational and emotional background.

10 Deviations Summary

The preparation of this report was delayed. Despite the smooth multinational cooperation on the data gathering and analysis for this report in partner institutions, we experienced some delay concerning Swedish case study (conducted within JUK). Due to difficulties in acquiring a candidate for research assistant with Swedish language proficiency this case study was only prepared in the first months of 2024. This impacted the works on the overall compilation and comparative analysis in the report.

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Annex 1: List of Codes

1. Contestation of liberal democracy (LD) mentioned

If YES:
1.1 Contestation of human rights mentioned
1.2 Contestation of rule of law mentioned
1.3 Contestation of LD fitting partner country mentioned
1.4 Contestation of other aspect mentioned

2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned

If YES:
2.1 DS strengthens EUMS security
2.2 DS weakens EUMS security
2.3 DS strengthens EU security
2.4 DS weakens EU security

3. DS impacting stability in partner country (PC) mentioned

If YES:
3.1 DS increases PC stability
3.2 DS destabilises PC

4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned

If YES:
4.1DS generates costs for EUMS
4.2DS generates costs for EU
4.3DS generates benefits for EUMS
4.4DS generates benefits for EU

5. Other norms are in conflict with DS

6.Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned

IF YES:
6.1Contestation of who decides on DS in EUMS mentioned
6.2Contestation of who provides DS in EUMS mentioned
6.3Contestation of CSOs role mentioned
6.4Contestation of who decides on DS in EU mentioned
6.5Contestation of how EU provides DS mentioned
6.6Contestation of other aspects of EU DS mentioned
6.7Contestation of DS for PC mentioned

If YES:
6.7.1 Contestation of DS for EE
6.7.2 Contestation of DS for SC
6.7.3 Contestation of DS for NA
6.7.4 Contestation of DS for ME
6.8 Contestation of DS for autocratic regimes mentioned
6.9 Contestation of local actors engagement in DS mentioned

7.Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned

If YES

7.1 Contestation of support for democratic elections mentioned

7.2 Contestation of support of political participation mentioned

7.3 Contestation of support of civil rights mentioned

7.4 Contestation of support of rule of law mentioned

7.5 Contestation of support of independence of judiciary mentioned

7.6 Contestation of support of media freedom mentioned

7.7 Contestation of support for legitimate governing institutions mentioned

7.8 Contestation of support for social justice policies mentioned.

7.9 Contestation of support for good governance measures mentioned.

7.10 Contestation of support for anti-corruption measures mentioned

8.Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned

IF YES

8.1Lack of results of DS mentioned

8.2DS weakens legitimate authorities

8.3DS strengthens domestic anti-democratic forces.

8.4Other outcome of DS mentioned

Annex 2: Distribution of Codes in Each EUMS Case Study

Germany	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	11
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	33
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	22
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	10
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	0
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	50
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	8
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	20
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	55
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	21
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	0
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	9
Document(s) with code(s)	73
Document(s) without code(s)	99
All documents	172

Source: Own compilation.

Italy	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	3
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	5
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	6
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	6
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	2
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	3
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	3
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	3

9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	3
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	2
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	21
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	56
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	7
Document(s) with code(s)	24
Document(s) without code(s)	76
All documents	100

Source: Own compilation.

France	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	3
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	3
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	8
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	2
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	0
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	5
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	1
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	1
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	2
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	3
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	19
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	51
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
Document(s) with code(s)	63
Document(s) without code(s)	36
All documents	99

Source: Own compilation.

Denmark	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**

1. Contestation of LD mentioned	4
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	12
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	17
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	17
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	0
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	15
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	4
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	10
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	10
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	39
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	2
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
Document(s) with code(s)	44
Document(s) without code(s)	5
All documents	49

Source: Own compilation.

Spain	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	11
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	8
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	9
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	7
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	1
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	21
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	11
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	12
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	6
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	9
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	0

12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	20
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	7
Document(s) with code(s)	39
Document(s) without code(s)	11
All documents	50

Source: Own compilation.

Poland	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	12
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	21
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	26
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	24
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	2
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	42
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	33
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	18
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	24
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	16
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	4
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	14
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
Document(s) with code(s)	92
Document(s) without code(s)	136
All documents	228

Source: Own compilation.

Sweden	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	0
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	9
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	15

4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	11
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	0
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	23
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	3
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	12
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	5
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	22
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	1
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	2
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
Document(s) with code(s)	58
Document(s) without code(s)	97
All documents	155

Source: Own compilation.

Austria	
Specific Codes	**Number of Documents**
1. Contestation of LD mentioned	0
2. DS impacting EUMS/EU security mentioned	17
3. DS impacting stability in PC mentioned	11
4. Costs and benefits of DS for EU/EUMS mentioned	8
5. Other norms are in conflict with DS	0
6. Contestation of actors engaged in DS mentioned	1
7. Contestation of WHAT is supported mentioned	0
8. Contestation of outcomes of DS mentioned	0
9. Contestation of DS instruments mentioned	14
10. Contestation of financing of DS mentioned	5
11. The digital aspects of DS are mentioned	2
12. Gender equality as part of DS is mentioned13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0
13. Learning between stakeholders in DS process mentioned	0

Document(s) with code(s)	33
Document(s) without code(s)	16
All documents	49

Source: Own compilation.