



EMBRACE

A blueprint for a dynamic Toolkit on EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood

Isabelle Ioannides

Table of Contents

Introduction to the EMBRACE project.....	2
1 Introduction: A paradigm shift towards an adaptive and context-sensitive toolkit	3
2 Advancing from generic to country-specific customisation	4
3 Deepening stakeholder engagement and accountability	5
4 Contextualising data and measurement	6
5 Enhancing forecasting and scenario planning capabilities.....	8
6 Smart leveraging of EU external action instruments	10
7 Conclusion: From blueprint to toolkit	13
8 References.....	14

Introduction to the EMBRACE project

The EMBRACE research project (2022-2025) collects evidence-based knowledge on the obstacles to democratisation and ways to overcome them in five regions of the European neighbourhood: Southern Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Middle East and North Africa. Its aim is to strengthen the capacity of policy-makers and pro-democracy forces to develop effective strategies to promote democratic progress in the European neighbourhood. In addition to research reports and policy briefs, new policy tools for EUDP practitioners and pro-democracy activists are developed based on the project's findings.

The EMBRACE consortium consists of 14 partner organisations based in 13 countries, and places particular emphasis on locally-led research with deep contextual familiarity and stakeholder access within the regions under study. It brings together partners with unique and complementary strengths as well as shared areas of interest, in order to foster joint learning and development.

Empirical data was gathered in twelve case study countries through a variety of research approaches, investigating episodes of political closure and opening to identify, analyse and explain behavioural, institutional and structural blockages, and the conditions under which they can be overcome. A new quantitative dataset was generated on the larger trends of EU Democracy Promotion and its effects on democratisation over the last two decades in all 23 neighbours.

The research is structured around four thematic clusters: the re-configurations for democratic policy shifts after popular uprisings; democratisation and economic modernisation in authoritarian and hybrid regimes; the nexus between democratisation and peace; and the geopolitics of EUDP and the competition that the EU encounters in its democracy promotion efforts.

***Disclaimer:** The content of this briefing is the sole responsibility of the author, and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the European Parliament.*

1 Introduction: A paradigm shift towards an adaptive and context-sensitive toolkit

In this report, we suggest a blueprint for a new Toolkit for policymakers on EU democracy promotion (EUDP). The EMBRACE project examined the factors that are conducive to democratic opening in recipient countries, pointing to timing (critical junctures) and political structures and their legacy, as being key (Grimm et al. 2024). In this context, this blueprint seeks to provide a conceptual design, guidance and best practices to create the Toolkit, which then contains the specific tools, templates, and forms needed for practical application. Accordingly, the blueprint for a new Toolkit explains how to integrate existing EUDP instruments and suggests enriching them with local stakeholders' knowledge in a co-design approach. It also urges the EU institutions to embrace a dynamic, continuously adaptive system for foreign policymaking, which would help the Union move from reactive to pro-active policymaking, therefore preventing democratic backsliding. In that vein, this report outlines the foundations on which the Toolkit could be built and examines its intended principles in greater detail.

This blueprint for a Toolkit for policymakers on EUDP builds on the lessons identified and conclusions drawn from a series of scenario-building workshops held in four neighbourhood countries (namely North Macedonia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine) and a series of interviews (conducted with stakeholders from Algeria), undertaken in the context of EMBRACE research.¹ The broad-based consultation of stakeholders in those five selected countries sought to interrogate the existing conceptual framework for advancing EUDP in key partner countries and provide pointers for a robust EU response to democratic backsliding in its neighbourhood.² The results of the workshops are outlined in a separate briefing that examines the triggers and trends for EUDP 2030 and highlights the most plausible and impactful scenarios and recommendations (Ioannides 2025). The report at hand builds on the findings of the scenario-building workshops and develops a blueprint for the new Toolkit.

EU evidence-based decision-making in democracy promotion lies on comprehensive democracy measurement frameworks (either created internally within the EU institutions or borrowed from other intergovernmental organisations), data collection and management tools, forecasting and foresight methods, policy analysis and scenario planning, and alert and rapid response systems. The purpose of these elements is to provide condensed knowledge and actionable guidance for EU policymakers. This Toolkit does not aim to reinvent the wheel,

¹ For further information on EMBRACE | EMBRACing change – Overcoming Obstacles and Advancing Democracy in the European Neighbourhood, see: <https://embrace-democracy.eu/>

² Due to time constraints and the difficult political situation in some of the case studies examined, the scenario building exercise focused on the three first steps of the foresight process to stress-test public policy: explore disruptions, imagine interactions, create scenarios, and discussed the two last ones - (i) envision and strategise and (ii) recommend policies - in a concluding session on lessons learned. For further information on foresight methodology, see OECD 2025.

but rather to propose a paradigm shift from a static and disconnected set of tools to a dynamic, continuously adaptive system. The recommendations emanating from the scenario-building workshops illustrate that a Toolkit's true potential lies in its capacity for country-specific customisation, local co-creation, and the synergetic utilisation of existing EU external action instruments. By evolving into a living instrument, this Toolkit could leverage data, foresight, and local expertise to achieve smarter, more resilient democratisation outcomes, here in Algeria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. But the Toolkit's approach is generalizable and adaptable also to other countries' contexts.

A key strength of the Toolkit's design is the intended feedback loop: the scenario-building workshops have demonstrated that the "connecting dots" between democracy measurement, data tools, and foresight methods lie in their integrated roles for developing evidence-based and context-aware strategies. The outputs from democracy measurement frameworks, which rely on datasets, consultations with stakeholders in the neighbourhood (and more broadly in recipient countries) and public opinion surveys, are designed to directly inform foresight methodologies. This is also true for how the EU uses foresight in its policymaking.³ Statistical trends and risk maps derived from this data then become the basis for scenario planning and policy design. This cyclical process is meant to create a continuous learning system wherein measurement facilitates understanding, data guides planning for financial aid, loans and investment, and forecasting shapes future policy choices, ultimately leading to more responsive and effective EU external action.

The primary limitations of the existing EU methods on forecasting change stem from the fact that they are largely driven outside the recipient countries, as is the data used to feed these methodologies. No matter how logically one interconnects EU tools, methods and approaches to democracy promotion, a framework that is not solidly grounded on data and needs emanating from the recipient country itself, however comprehensive, risks oversimplifying the complex and diverse realities in the EU neighbourhood. Such a framework may fail to capture the unique characteristics and (informal) power structures present in each country. The central challenge, therefore, is to transform broad 'mapping tools' into dynamic, responsive, and operationally contextualised ones.

2 Advancing from generic to country-specific customisation

The true measure of the Toolkit's value will be its capacity for a continuous, tailored application that addresses the specific needs of each country in the EU neighbourhood (Bosse et al. 2025). To move towards country-specific approaches, the Toolkit must be able to reflect the unique political dynamics, democratic deficits, and reform priorities of each of the countries of the EU neighbourhood. This customization must be dynamic, incorporating

³ For examples of how EU foresight methodology is used in policy design, see: European Commission, Foresight in Policymaking – EC Library Guide, [Selected publications](#).

regularly updated contextual risk assessments that consider recent events, such as elections, protests, or legislative shifts within each specific nation. For example, in Serbia, the Toolkit must address the unique dynamics of the country's "stabilitocracy" model, while in Ukraine, it must be adapted to a "post-trauma society" dealing with the challenges of rebuilding after a conflict (Pogodda and Richmond 2024).

A core principle for this transformation is the imperative of co-creation (Ansell and Torfing 2021), while recognising that there could be problems with equality in terms of access and resources (Røiseland 2022). The Toolkit must prioritise the integration of local partners, such as think tanks, journalists, academics, youth organisations, NGOs and civic groups, to co-design measurement frameworks and policy responses. This is more than a procedural step for data collection; it is a fundamental reorientation of the power dynamics in EU foreign policy. By shifting local civil society from passive beneficiaries to active co-creators, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) can significantly mitigate the historical risk of top-down democratisation failures. This collaborative approach fosters local ownership, legitimacy, and long-term resilience, transforming the paradigm from one of "democracy promotion" to a more sustainable model of "democracy co-creation" (Vike et al. 2018). In Algeria, where the state has intensified repression and locked down public space, this co-creation with local actors is critical to bypass formal political channels which are fully controlled by the regime. In Serbia, where the opposition is vocal and has shown clear resistance to authoritarianism, the EU's support to canalise this engagement and demand for democracy is key. The following section explains more concrete how this can be incorporated in the EU's approach to democracy promotion.

3 Deepening stakeholder engagement and accountability

A more effective Toolkit on EUDP in the neighbourhood requires deeper engagement with local actors and the use of transparency as a policy tool. The Toolkit must provide a detailed plan for engaging with local civil society groups, journalists, academics, and youth organisations to shape EU tools and policy proposals. It should also facilitate participatory workshops in recipient countries to capture genuine public sentiment on democracy reforms and a 360-degree view of the development of policies and reforms.

Transparency is a powerful tool for building trust and accountability. Research has shown that domestic elites can play a decisive role in shaping the direction of foreign alignment, often exploiting ties with Russia and China to cement their hold on power and dilute EU influence (Armakolas et al. 2025). In that vein, the Toolkit should aim to build a relationship with non-governmental stakeholders, moving away from mere consultation to a situation where local stakeholders receive feedback from the EU institutions on their input. This implies that there is follow-up on the policy on which local stakeholders are consulted to explain what and why certain recommendations were taken up while others not, and how the EU institutions intend to move forward (Ioannides 2018; 2022). Especially in the case of the candidate countries,

which will participate directly in EU policymaking and implementation once integrated, sectorial consultation should be further developed.

Additionally, civic representation metrics should be enhanced to include marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, women, and rural communities. The EU institutions should make a bigger effort to also embrace smaller NGOs and civil society actors in their policy discussions, even those that can only work in local languages. In that respect, independent grant-making organisations, such as the European Endowment for Democracy, that can support newly created or pro-democracy movements, non-registered organisations, informal platforms, youth groups and individuals, civic and political activists, and independent media platforms and journalists, could be further expanded and the implementation of their projects reinforced (Rennick et al. 2025).

The Toolkit should therefore facilitate the development of country-level public dashboards and scoreboards and share them with local stakeholders to promote open dialogue (Rose-Redwood 2018). To ensure clear communication, the methods and data underpinning the Toolkit must also be made accessible in local languages and culturally appropriate communication formats. This approach could also act as a counter-disinformation measure. By providing credible, accessible data directly to the local public, the EU creates a powerful antidote to narratives countering democratisation that Russia and other authoritarian regimes promote. In North Macedonia, where public trust in the EU has been undermined by the Bulgarian veto, such transparency is essential. Local civil society and independent media can use this data to inform their own reporting, thereby reinforcing pro-democratic narratives and building public trust in the reform process. In Serbia, the government's repression of protests has led to a new form of solidarity with people from different professions uniting to protect one another; this is an emerging dynamic that the Toolkit should track and support.

4 Contextualising data and measurement

'Embracing the local' constitutes a critical step to ensure that the Toolkit adapts its data collection and measurement frameworks to local realities, moving beyond generic metrics. It involves incorporating country-based data sources, such as national statistics offices, local independent surveys, and media monitoring platforms, in addition to Eurostat and other international datasets (e.g., Eurobarometer, UNDP's Human Development Index, Gender Development Index, the Multidimensional Poverty Index, or the OECD's Public Integrity Indicators). By developing a new epistemology of measurement that is both culturally and politically relevant, the Toolkit can provide a more accurate picture of democratic trends, acknowledging the limitations of Western-centric models and ensuring that the Toolkit itself can effectively analyse the dynamic nature of democratic backsliding (Galinanes et al. 2025).

This approach ensures that the assessments of electoral processes, political participation, and civil liberties are grounded in the specific conditions of each target country.⁴ For example, the scenario-building workshops went beyond discussing anti-corruption, highlighting another pervasive problem in parts of the EU neighbourhood, namely, "state capture". One of its side effects is private interests controlling government policy and institutions. In Serbia, for example, Chinese investments are a source of high-level corruption and are described as operating outside the rule of law. In response, a tailored methodology could be developed to identify and combat this phenomenon, using indicators monitoring state-business relations and the lack of institutional impartiality.

Furthermore, refining the Toolkit's measurement tools to ensure that they are based on grounded evidence can generate nuanced evaluations. Consistent monitoring of the implementation of democracy reforms through the involvement of local experts with deep regional expertise would bolster the quality of evidence and strengthen relationships with local informers. Such engagement can elicit data on specific elements, such as informal governance networks or the characteristics of hybrid regimes. While established democracy indexes and panel consultations provide valuable insights, they fail to build the necessary relationship for long-term monitoring to capture the subtle, non-institutionalised forms of control and influence that are prevalent in the EU neighbourhood. The following table illustrates how a country-specific approach to data and measurement can be operationalised.

Table 1: Adaptive Data and Measurement Frameworks by Country

Country	Key Democratic Deficits/Context	Specific Local Data Sources to Incorporate	Measurement Adaptations
Algeria	Absence of media freedom and civil liberties, state control over civil society and governance, formal vs. informal power structures	Data from Algerian human rights leagues, reports from academic researchers on informal governance networks, local media reports	Scoring that accounts for the gap between de jure and de facto political freedoms; indicators for gauging the influence of the security and military apparatus
North Macedonia	Weak political conditionality, laggard legislative reform, restricted civic engagement, compromised multi-ethnic representation	National statistics on ethnic diversity, reports from local NGOs on inter-ethnic relations, voting attitudes and research programmes on the implementation of reforms required by the EU (in the	Metrics for political participation that account for ethnic quotas and informal agreements; analysis on the impact of the reforms

⁴ In cases like Algeria, where civil society is muzzled and in danger, reaching out to Algerian researchers and experts in the diaspora could also be key.

Country	Key Democratic Deficits/Context	Specific Local Data Sources to Incorporate	Measurement Adaptations
		context of the EU accession process)	
Serbia	Authoritarian populism, corruption, absence of media freedom and political participation, slow alignment with EU accession criteria	Data from national anti-corruption agency, reports from independent media associations, civil society/academic assessments of rule of law	Scoring systems to evaluate the impact of informal networks and state capture on governance and media ownership; data on Russian and Chinese loans investments
Georgia	Compromised rule of law, political polarisation, foreign influence, absence of media pluralism	Reports from the Public Defender's Office of Georgia, local media monitoring reports, surveys on public trust in institutions, civil society/academic assessments of rule of law	Indicators for assessing the impact of political polarisation on institutional efficacy; metrics for tracking Russian disinformation
Ukraine	Wartime governance, slow legislative reform, media pluralism under external pressure, insufficient reconstruction funding transparency	Data on internally displaced persons, wartime governance surveys, media monitoring platforms tracking disinformation from Russia	Metrics for assessing resilience of democratic institutions in conflict zones; indicators for transparency in reconstruction and anti-corruption

Source: Operationalises the author's analysis and results in Ioannides, I. (2025). *The geopolitics of EU democracy promotion 2030: Voices from the EU neighbourhood*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens, September.

5 Enhancing forecasting and scenario planning capabilities

To move from reactive to proactive policy on EUDP in the neighbourhood, the Toolkit would incorporate foresight methods such as horizon scanning and megatrends analysis, but with a focus on developing country-specific scenarios. These scenarios should account for each country's unique geopolitical position, external pressures, and domestic vulnerabilities, such as the potential impact of economic crises in Algeria or disinformation campaigns and hybrid warfare in Serbia and Georgia. A structured framework for collaboration with think tanks or academics in the region is also essential to validate and refine these scenario models, ensuring a higher degree of accuracy and local relevance, as the scenario-building workshops conducted for the EMBRACE programme have demonstrated.

By systematically linking the local data inputs from its measurement frameworks to foresight techniques, the Toolkit could move EU methods from a generic report generator into a dynamic and grounded predictive analytics engine. This would enable policymakers to generate contextualised "if-then" scenarios based on identified triggers and drivers. Local experts have largely been left out of foresight exercises and, as a result, their knowledge of forecasting methodologies is rather limited, as the scenario-building workshops have shown. Depending on likelihood and impact, drivers can be categorised as improbable, possible and probable. They can be organised in terms of their impact (low, moderate, high, intolerable). The resulting matrix helps EU decision-makers develop different scenarios and then prioritise them, so that they can better inform EU strategizing on democracy promotion (Van Woensel, 2024).

Table 2: Matrix for prioritising drivers/triggers

		Impact		
		Low	Moderate	High
Likelihood	Improbable			
	Possible			
	Probable			

In practice, the European Commission and the EEAS could envisage, for example, that if electoral integrity metrics in Serbia fall below a certain threshold and foreign influence indicators rise, the Toolkit could automatically trigger a rapid alert and recommend specific policy responses (e.g. public diplomacy, targeted sanctions). This moves the EU from simply reacting to democratic backsliding to anticipating and mitigating it before a crisis fully materialises. This proactive capability is also critical for achieving a more stable and secure neighbourhood. The workshops also pointed to the need for a more detailed framework for countering disinformation. A robust Toolkit could include a step-by-step process for situational insight, impact analysis, and targeted communication to effectively counter misinformation and fake news. This could be particularly useful for Serbia, where Russian rhetoric is used to exploit political divisions and interfere in politics, and where the need for public officials to be trained on how to use social media effectively to counter it is evident.

6 Smart leveraging of EU external action instruments

The EU has already at its disposal well-oiled instruments that have been reformed and adapted over the years and have shown their merits to different extents. To enhance the Toolkit's operational effectiveness, it is essential to ensure that EU policy tools managed by the European Commission, the EEAS and the EU delegations not only complement each other but cross-fertilise each other. In that context, the toolkit can serve as a central hub for mapping and tracking the use of these tools to streamline both the financing and reporting. More specifically, the Toolkit should connect the dots between the following key ingredients of the EU's external action:⁵

-  **Political and Diplomatic Tools**, including high-level dialogues, summits, and association agreements facilitated by the EEAS and EU delegations. Political conditionality and mediation, as demonstrated in North Macedonia and Ukraine, are powerful instruments for supporting reform and resolving crises.
-  **Financial Instruments and Support**, including the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which provides flexible funding for pro-democracy projects and human rights defenders; the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe), which funds democracy, the rule of law, and civil society support; and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), which finances reforms and capacity-building in EU candidates and potential candidates. The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) offers rapid, targeted support for grassroots initiatives, adapting quickly to changing circumstances. For example, in Georgia, the EU has started shifting its support from a government-to-government model to directly funding civil society and NGOs to bolster democratic resilience in response to democratic backsliding.
-  **Programmes and Technical Assistance**, such as Erasmus+, TAIEX,⁶ and Twinning,⁷ can be mapped to strengthen civil society and build capacity in key areas. The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2027) sets out a framework for implementation through country-specific strategies and election observation missions. A key lesson drawn from the Ukraine workshop is that the EU's accession policy, based on EU *acquis* approximation, is ill-suited for the needs of post-war rebuilding. This suggests that further adapting technical assistance programmes to an ever more turbulent world is crucial.

⁵ The list of instruments, tools and approaches outlined here is not exhaustive.

⁶ TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) is an EU instrument focused on institutional capacity-building worldwide through the provision of targeted and rapid support to public administrations in EU candidate countries and beyond.

⁷ Twinning is an EU instrument for institutional cooperation between public administrations of EU Member States and partner countries through peer-to-peer exchanges.

 **Rapid Response and Monitoring**, whereby the Toolkit would incorporate situational awareness tools, notably the EU's Hybrid Fusion Cell, East StratComm Task Force and trial observation missions, for real-time risk monitoring and early warning. It should also provide guidance on the use of sanctions, public diplomacy, and monitoring dashboards to address democratic backsliding.

The live mapping of the state of the EU's monitoring tools combined with the live update of implementation of its external financing instruments could enable the Toolkit to more usefully allocate funds to build resilience against specific vulnerabilities identified by foresight methods. Therefore, creating a stronger correlation (if not a causal link) between data, analysis, and proactive resource allocation could ensure that the Toolkit goes beyond forming a simple data repository and engaging in simple tracking. For instance, if an analysis identifies a heightened risk of disinformation in Ukraine, the Toolkit could automatically flag this and recommend rapid, flexible funding via the EED to support local independent media outlets. The following table provides an illustration of these synergies.

Table 3: Synergies Between Toolkit Components and Existing EU Instruments

Toolkit Component	Relevant EU Instrument(s)	Synergy to feed into the Toolkit
Diplomacy and strategic dialogues	High-level dialogues, summits, and association agreements facilitated by the EEAS and EU delegations	Consider the conduct of high-level dialogues and the implementation of the agreements as they generate country-specific data and analysis on democratic trends and challenges.
Disinformation and hybrid threats	EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, East StratCom Task Force, EU legislation (e.g., Digital Services Act)	Incorporate situational insight, impact analysis, and targeted communication to effectively counter misinformation and fake news; draw transferable lessons from the implementation of relevant EU laws; push forward with reforms in candidate countries through smart conditionality. ⁸
Security, especially on security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)	EU's common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations	Particularly in the case of Ukraine, the Toolkit could benefit from local intelligence and consistent monitoring (beyond mid- and end evaluations of SSR and DDR activities).

⁸ The concept of 'smart conditionality' should ensure that final recipients and beneficiaries, including local and regional authorities, NGOs, students and other stakeholders, are not punished for the rule of law violations by the central government. This concept is applied in the EU's [2021-2027 smart specialisation programme for Moldova](#), which seeks to foster collaboration between businesses and research institutions, focusing on sectors such as agriculture, ICT, energy, and biomedicine.

Toolkit Component	Relevant EU Instrument(s)	Synergy to feed into the Toolkit
Mapping of EU external financing instruments	NDICI – Global Europe, IPA III, EIDHR, EED	Track democracy support funding to identify thematic and geographical gaps; further streamline (and simplify) grant application processes for local civil society and NGOs to expand the diversity and breadth of reach to stakeholders.
Comprehensive democracy measurement	EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, EU election observation missions, EU human rights dialogues	Incorporate country assessments into the annual EU report; metrics on electoral integrity to be validated by election observation mission findings; structured exchanges with human rights defenders to feed into democracy measurement.
Institutional and legislative capacity-building	TAIEX, Twinning	Use country-focused policy recommendations (e.g., anti-corruption frameworks); TAIEX and Twinning would deliver technical assistance to implement these recommendations.
Alert and rapid response systems	EED, political conditionality, Joint Research Centre (JRC)'s conflict mapping	When the Toolkit's dashboards signal democratic backsliding, trigger a recommendation for flexible, rapid funding from the EED to support at-risk civil society actors or consider activating political conditionality levers.
Stakeholder and civic engagement	EU delegations	Metrics on civic engagement could be informed by public surveys coordinated through the EU delegations; EU delegations to also map engagement platforms for local civic, academic, and youth groups.
Education and culture	Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps	Identify opportunities for educational and cultural exchanges to promote democratic values and civic engagement among young people.
Migration and mobility	EU migration policy, European Asylum Support Office (EASO)	Utilise analysis on migration trends and their impact on democratic stability, and the implementation of EU migration programmes (e.g. EU Talent Pool).
Forecasting & foresight methods	EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, JRC's horizon scanning and conflict mapping	Horizon scanning and scenario planning exercises identify disinformation threats; use the Hybrid Fusion Cell's intelligence and JRC's conflict mapping to refine risk assessments for specific countries.

7 Conclusion: From blueprint to toolkit

This report proposes a blueprint for a Toolkit for policymakers in EUDP that provides guidelines, including key principles and best practices, to adapt the EU's existing toolkit and ensure that it can be more pro-active. In that sense, it does not contest the value of the extensive panoply of EU tools on EUDP but seeks to strengthen their implementation. Building primarily on the scenario-building exercise and taking into account other research output produced in the context of the EMBRACE project, this Toolkit suggests ways to refine the methodologies underpinning the design and use of EU tools to better respond to obstacles of EUDP and reverse democratic backsliding.

This report calls for going beyond better adapting EU tools to the local context to 'embracing the local'. This implies incorporating the creation of local knowledge into EU intelligence for policy design and change, and actively promoting and facilitating the production of independent data and knowledge by local civil society.

A precondition for that to happen is the EU's continued and strong political and financial support to civil society. This means that funding commitments must be long-term (rather than broken down into short projects) and that the Union also assists organisations that are not located in urban centres, that are small and non-organised, have limited administrative capacity and can work only in local languages. Moreover, the difficulties of disbursing the funds tied certain EU instruments (e.g., EIDHR) in a timely manner shows that more needs to be done to ensure that EU instruments respond to the needs of a broader spectrum of civil society actors.

This report also analyses how to create synergies between the specific areas of EU democracy promotion and the EU instruments for each of these areas to improve the measurement of EUDP. The EU has refined its external financing tools and streamlined its budget lines over the past two legislatures to better respond to the needs of recipient states. However, connecting the dots across EU internal and external policies and across policy analysis and budget and capacity-building projects remains a challenge.

When operationalising the proposed principles in this Toolkit, the EU institutions must address two critical challenges: how to reform conditionality in the EU neighbourhood, particularly for those countries that are on the EU accession path; and how to ensure that EU pro-democracy funding for civil society is not blocked by democracy-adverse political elites. Further research is needed to examine in practical terms how "less for less" conditionality can be effectively applied.

8 References

- Ansell, C., and J. Torfing (2021). *Public Governance as Co-Creation: A Strategy for Revitalizing the Public Sector and Rejuvenating Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Armakolas, I., D. Bechev and A. Krstinovska (2025). [The EU's Democracy Promotion and Geopolitical Competition](#), Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens, Greece, July.
- Bosse, G. et al. (2025). [Advancing Democratic Development in Authoritarian and Hybrid Regimes: The Need for Context-Aware EU Strategies](#), EMBRACE Policy Brief 4.
- Council of Europe (n.d). [Current tools on Good Governance](#) (consulted in August 2025).
- European Commission (2017). [Quality of Public Administration A Toolbox for Practitioners](#), Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.
- Galinanes, M. et al. (2025). "The Dual Seven Democratic Dimensions Index: A Novel and Simplified Metric to Accurately Assess Democracy", *Journal of Politics and Law* 18(4): 19-35.
- Grimm, S. and EMBRACE Consortium (2024). [Theory Framework Paper](#), Deliverable D2.2 of the Horizon Europe funded Research Consortium "EMBRACE - EMBRACing change - Overcoming Obstacles and Advancing Democracy in the European Neighbourhood", Coordinated by the Berghof Foundation Operations gGmbH and the Julius-Maximilians-University of Wuerzburg, Germany.
- Havlíček, P. (2020). [The EU's Lessons for Supporting Civil Society in Member States](#), German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), June.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (n.d). [Democracy Tracker](#), Global State of Democracy Initiative (consulted in August and September 2025).
- Ioannides, I. (2025). The geopolitics of EU democracy promotion 2030: Voices from the EU neighbourhood, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens, September.
- Ioannides, I. (2022). [EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders; European Implementation Assessment](#), European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, August.
- Ioannides, I. (2018). [EU external financing instruments and the post-2020 architecture: European Implementation Assessment](#), European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, February
- Karatrantos, T. and Armakolas, I. (2022). [Toolkit on cross-regional vulnerability/resilience factors](#), Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA (PAVE), July.

- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2025). [Strategic Foresight Toolkit for Resilient Public Policy: A Comprehensive Foresight Methodology to Support Sustainable and Future-Ready Public Policy](#), Paris, 21 January.
- Rennick, S.A. et al. (2025). [How EU Democracy Assistance to Civil Society Can Secure Democratic Gains](#), EMBRACE Policy Brief 2.
- Rose-Redwood, R. (2018). "The possibilities and limits to dialogue", *Dialogues in Human Geography* 8(2): 109-123.
- Pogodda, S. and O. Richmond (2024). [Emerging patterns of blockages to peace and democratisation](#), EMBRACE Policy Brief 1.
- Røiseland, A. (2022). "Co-creating Democratic Legitimacy: Potentials and Pitfalls", *Administration and Society* 54(8), December: 1493–1515.
- Vike, H., Aastvedt, A. and C. Lo (2025). "Democratic innovation and co-creation as self-help: the limits of normative overload in theory construction", *Critical Policy Studies*, March: 1-17.
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (2008). [Guidebook on Promoting Good Governance in Public-Private Partnerships](#), United Nations, New York and Geneva.
- Van Woensel, L. (2024). "Foresight in EU policy-making: Purpose, mindsets and methods", *European Law Journal* 30(3), September: 361-381.