



**Rethinking and Reshaping the EU's Democracy Support
in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood**

**Magdalena Góra
Jagiellonian University**

Presentation for a webinar: "Democracy in the neighbourhood and EU enlargement:
Horizon Europe research insights", Brussels 26 February 2026 (online)

Rethinking and Reshaping the EU's Democracy Support in Its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods

<https://shapedem-eu.eu/>



Rethinking and Reshaping the EU's Democracy Support in Its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods

SHAPEDEM-EU IN A NUTSHELL

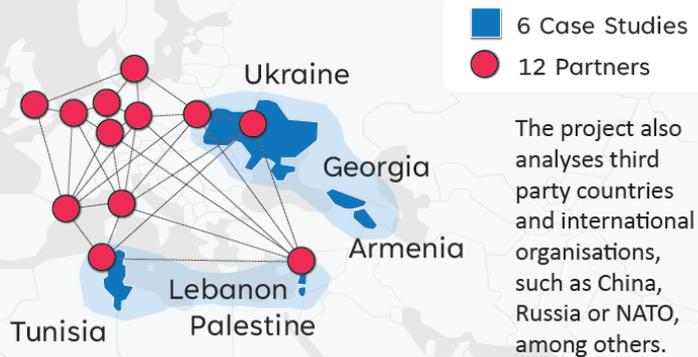
Who we are and what are our goals

shapedem-eu.eu
@SHAPEDEM_EU

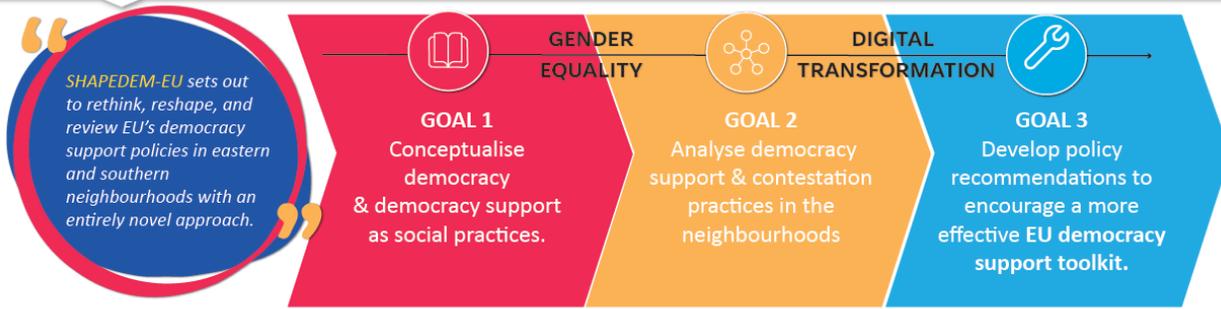
SHAPEDEM-EU is an EU-funded research project partnered by 12 universities and think tanks, involving more than 50 researchers.



12 Partners
+50 Researchers
10 Work packages



OUR RESEARCH OBJECTIVES



METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALISATION

Core Concepts: Contestation
Democracy
Democracy learning loop
Democracy support
Practices

PROJECT'S RESULTS WILL:

Improve EU's Democracy Toolkit in terms of: Accountability
Transparency
Effectiveness
Trustworthiness

Making neighbourhood countries more: Resilient
Equitable
Responsive to local needs

MAJOR OUTCOMES



PUBLICATIONS
Working papers
Policy briefs
Video interviews



EVENTS
Online discussions
Foreign policy dialogues
Joint panel discussions with sister project



DIGITAL OUTREACH
EU's Democracy Support Database
Online Digital Dashboard
Infographics



PODCAST SERIES
Democracy Support Dialogues
On Spotify, Amazon Music and Apple Podcasts
<https://democracysupportdialogues.buzzsprout.com>

More information: shapedem-eu.eu



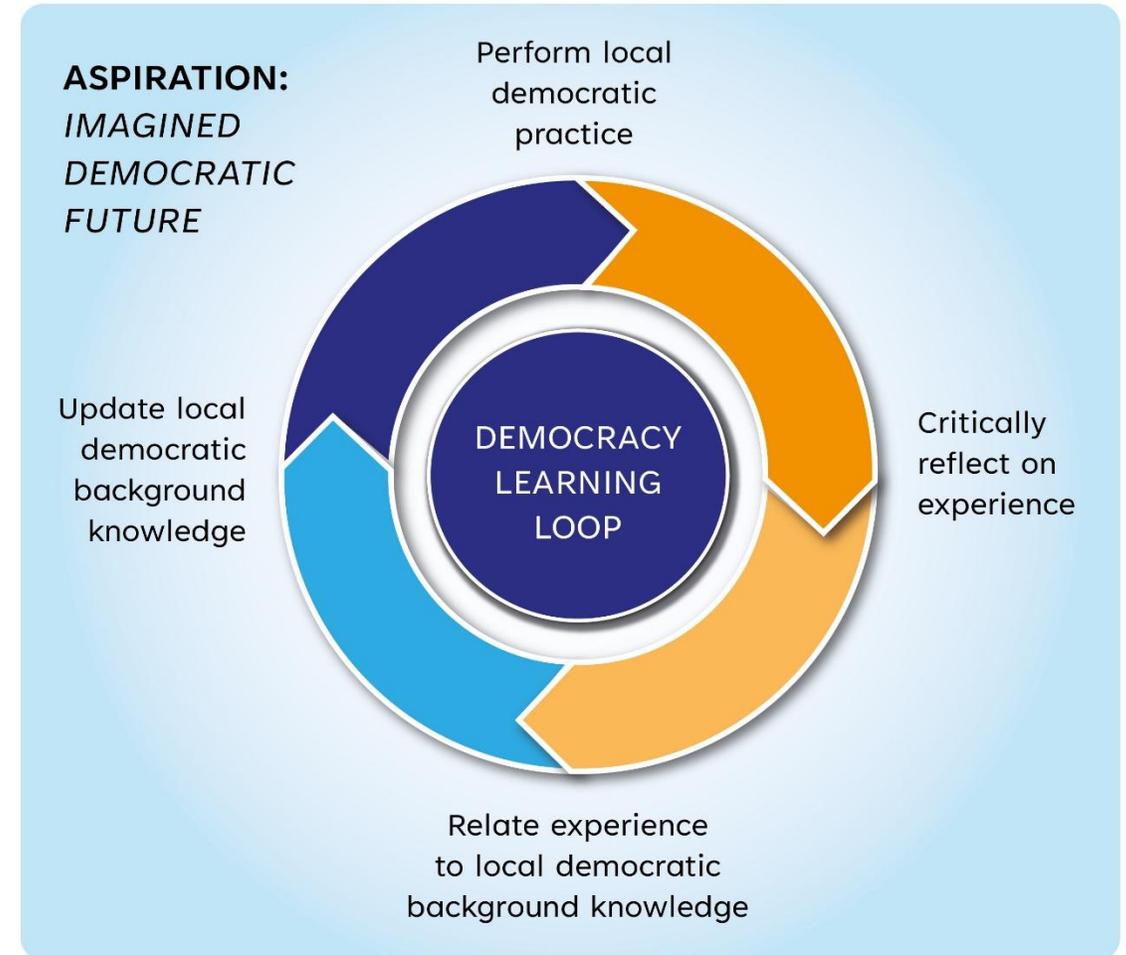
Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



- D5.1** • Database on EUMS on democracy support
- D5.2** • Report on democracy support practices in the EU's Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods in the selected EUMS case studies.
- D5.3** • Working Paper on the contestation of democracy support in EUMS.
- D5.4** • Working Paper on the role of CSOs in the EU's and EUMS' democracy support in the EU Neighbourhoods.
- D5.5** • Working paper with Comparative Analysis



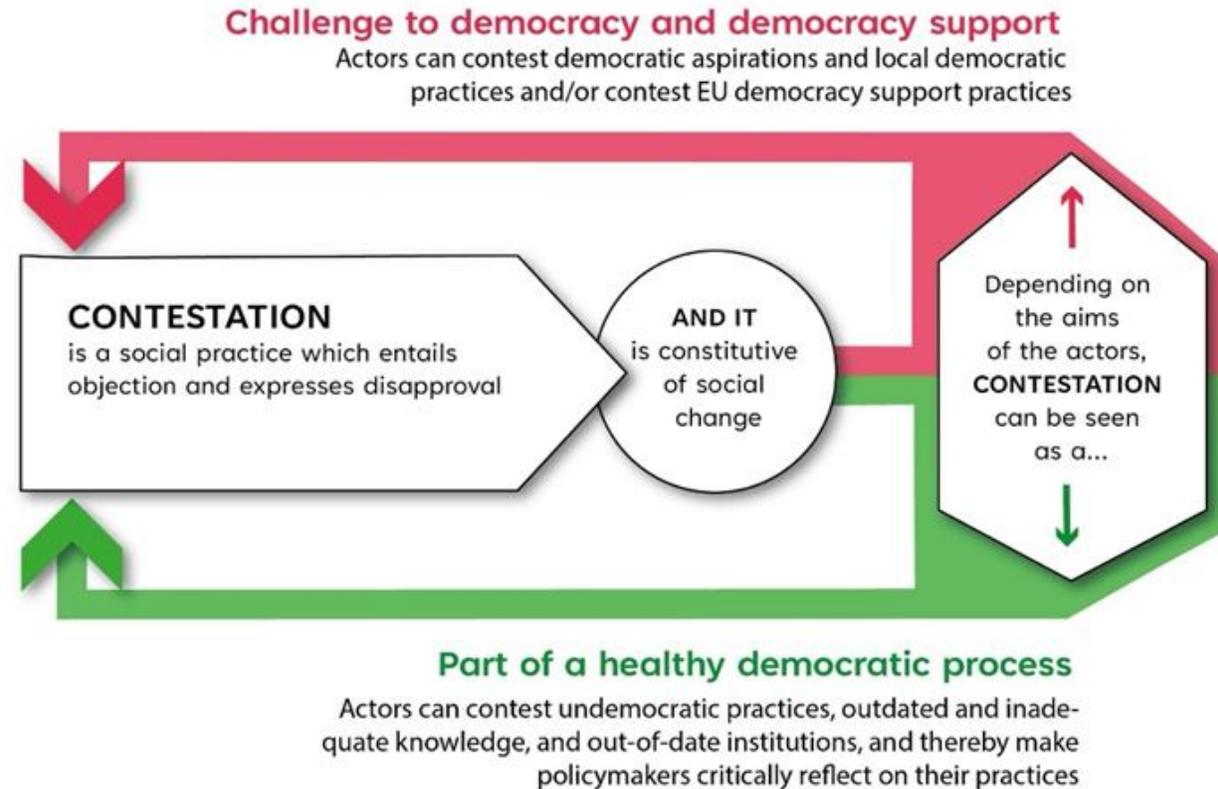
- Democracy support practices has been growingly **pragmatic**. EUMS predominantly aim to **strengthen stability** in neighbouring countries.
- **Before 2022**, geopolitical considerations were increasingly emerging in EUMS DS practices, altering the EU's traditional norm-based narrative.
- Regardless of EU-wide priorities, **the EUMS tend to prioritize their closest vicinity** in DS practices. CSOs are key actors in delivering DS to the EN.
- Contestation practices did not often refer to democracy as a **fundamental norm**, but rather occurred through the repositioning of DS as a **secondary value** in comparison with security.

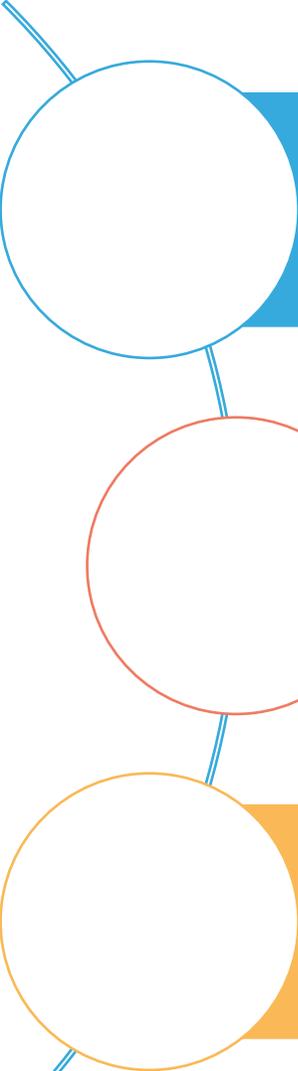




- **After 2022**, a new dynamic emerged (1) security concerns undermined the EU's normative approach to democracy support BUT (2) geopolitical and security considerations became increasingly intertwined with the defence of democracy and the DS practice.
- Enlargement emerged as **the primary instrument for democracy support** in EN, providing a framework for advancing democratic reform agendas in candidate countries.
- **Differentiated approach** by EUMS.
- New emerging patterns of **domestic contestation** caused by enlargement prospects for EN.

Contestation as a positive dynamic of reflection for EU Democracy Support





Addressing the **relationship between the EU** (its supranational institutions) and **the Member States** regarding the division of competencies, roles, and responsibilities.

Defining the involvement of **civil society and non-governmental actors** supporting democracy in EN & being more flexible and responsive to the local needs in EN.

Addressing the context of the **de-Europeanisation** process within the EU.



Thank you for your attention