Understanding the EU Democracy Support: the Case of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The European Union is the major actor providing largest development and democracy supports to Bangladesh. As its support for democracy is evolving, the state of democracy in Bangladesh remains fragile and frustrating. This thesis takes this point seriously and undertakes a study to examine whether or not EU's existing democracy support policy is in line with local political settings. The study suggests that the EU democracy supports in Bangladesh follow a neoliberal policy script and endorse reform programs along that line. The views of local civil society members imply that the EU's neoliberal democracy support scheme is often poor guide in understanding democracy in Bangladesh. The democratic crisis needs to be seen, instead, from political and educational perspectives. The thesis concludes by providing some policy recommendations to the EU.

List of Abbreviations

AL   Awami League

BNP   Bangladesh Nationalist Party

Council   Council of the EU

CSO   Civil Society Organizations

CTG   Caretaker Government

EC   European Community

EIDHR   European Instruments for Democracy and Human Rights

EOM   Election Observation Mission

EP   European Parliament

ESDP   European Security and Defence Policy

EU   European Union

LDC   Least-Developed Country

MDGs   Millennium Development Goals

OPPD   Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) is a longstanding partner in supporting democratic process in Bangladesh. As a principle of its external relations, the EU promotes democracy and human rights in the country through both direct and indirect mechanisms. It has emerged as the largest donor and biggest trading partner for Bangladesh and concentrates that development cooperation (indirectly) on the support of democracy and human rights. It supports democracy directly through assisting electoral reforms, good governance, building democratic institutions through technical and financial assistance and funding civil society organizations (CSOs) to strengthen democratic practice at all levels of governance.

Nevertheless, the EU democracy promotion efforts have largely been undermined in recent years by Bangladesh's frustrating democratic performance. Political instability, violent encounter between two major political alliances, increasing political use of electoral institutions and a dysfunctional parliament feature the country's democratic situation. Given this fragile state of democracy and the EU's longstanding democracy supports to Bangladesh, it is worth studying whether or not EU's policies are addressing the context, specific to Bangladesh's social and political settings.

Using interpretive research methodology with ontological and epistemological insights of constructivism, this thesis aims to examine that puzzle by understanding the EU's conceptualization of and members of local CSOs views on the EU democracy supports in Bangladesh. Its objective is to evaluate the existing democracy support policy and provide policy recommendations for the EU.

The analysis of the EU policy documents and the interviews conducted by the author suggest that, the EU maintains a neoliberal view of democracy, good governance and development.

Its policy in Bangladesh therefore endorses developmental, good governmental, technical and electoral reforms with neoliberal underpinnings. Its belief is that, liberal democracy best ensures peace and stability. The civil society members in Bangladesh, on the other hand, regard this developmental, good governmental, technical, electoral and civil societal supports as poor guides in understanding democracy in Bangladesh. They think, going beyond the neoliberal policy script, Bangladesh's democratic crisis should be seen from political and educational perspectives.

The thesis begins by specifying the research problem in Part I. In Part II, it reviews the literature, defines key concepts and elaborates the methodology of the research. It provides a broad overview of the EU's actions in supporting democracy in Bangladesh in Part III. The Part IV presents the main discussion on the EU's conceptualization of and Bangladesh civil society members' views on the EU's democracy supports based on the data collected from the EU policy documents and interviews in Brussels and Bangladesh. The Concussion recapitulates the important aspects of the thesis and provides policy recommendations for the EU's effective democracy support engagement in Bangladesh.

Part I: Problem Specification and Research Objective

Research Puzzle

As the defender and promoter of democracy and human rights, the EU continues to support democratization in developing countries including Bangladesh in South Asia. With a relation that strengthened in 1976 with the first official 'Commercial Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the People's Republic of Bangladesh' (COM, 1976/396), the EU has evolved as the largest outside actor providing

substantial trade, development and democracy assistance to the country. As stipulated in the 2001 Cooperation Agreement, democracy and human rights constitute the 'essential element' in all bilateral engagements. Accordingly, EU concentrates its development cooperation on the support of democracy and human rights (COM, 2011/637).

Its democracy support in Bangladesh is channelled through two mutually inclusive mechanisms: indirectly through development cooperation and directly through assisting electoral reforms, building institutions through technical and financial supports and funding local CSOs to strengthen democratic practice at all levels. The EU links development cooperation with human rights promotion (COM, 2006) because both serve the ultimate objective of improving human wellbeing and freedom. Again, it sees democracy as 'inextricably' linked to human rights (COM, 2006/0023).

Understandably, the EU development assistance to Bangladesh is an implicit form of democracy support. Bangladesh receives the second largest humanitarian and development aid in Asia from the EU with an annual €500 million in development assistance. Its assistance takes the form of grants, not loans (Rahman, 2014). The EU absorbs more than half (57%) of all exports from the country (EU Delegation to Bangladesh, 2014). As the head of an EU delegation once said, "Nobody is more engaged in supporting Bangladesh's development than the EU" (Ibid). This size of development assistance and trade concessions indicate the EU's strong commitment and supports in the areas of human rights and democracy in Bangladesh.

The EU's direct support to democratization in Bangladesh proceeds along three main lines of action. First, it provides extensive financial and technical assistance to promote free and fair electoral practice, strengthens the capacities of parliaments, and promote media freedom and so on. Under this program, the EU is providing continuous support to the Bangladesh Election Commission. Second, the EU is also working with local CSOs to promote democratic representation at all levels. European instruments for Democracy and Human

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Rights (EIDHR) is a concrete example of the EU's engagement with CSOs to support democracy and human rights in Bangladesh 'from below'. EIDHR is funding various local CSOs in hundreds of projects in the defence of democracy and human rights (COM, 2014/4865). Last but not least, the EU occasionally promotes political dialogue to support democratization. It has emerged as the major external actor playing a wide role in encouraging dialogue between governments and oppositions. Thus, in both direct and indirect way, since 1990s, EU is extensively involved in supporting democratization process in Bangladesh, and its support is evolving.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's democratic performance curve is markedly downward. Democratic space is gradually shrinking. Rodrik (2014) says a true democracy is expected to have two important elements: institutions of representation (political parties, parliament and electoral system) and institutions of restraint (independent judiciary, media and vibrant civil society). After 15 years of military rule from 1975 to 1990, what Bangladesh continues to struggle for is an 'electoral democracy'. In forms and shape it is a representative democracy, but in practice a true representation of the people is a remote reality.

Political parties use elections as means of grabbing power. Rather than acting as agents of democracy, they nurture a patron-client political structure that not only hinders intra-party democratic practices, but also shrinks the space in fostering democratic political culture in the country. Political parties also tend to be the leading force of national division rather than unity. When in power, state institutions become tools to sustain power and suppress, as well as weaken the opposition. Opposition parties, too, often fail to internalize people's concerns; party interests more often win over the people's interests. This undemocratic party culture seriously undermines democracy in the country.

The electoral system is fraught with politicization and violence. The *modus operandi* of national election can be called a national headache. As parties lack a culture of mutual trust,

since the 1990s a 'caretaker government' (CTG) was put in place to hold elections in 'interregnum' between out-going and incoming government. In 2007, following the violent encounter between two main political alliances regarding the head of the interim government, and Awami League (AL)-led opposition alliance's claim of possible vote rigging by the then ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led alliance, a military-backed civil government took control of the country in a state of massive nationwide violence and loss of lives.

In the 2008 election under military government, AL came to power with majority and, despite widespread public and civil society opposition (Prothom Alo, 2013), abolished the CTG to hold the next election under the AL regime. The AL itself actively supported the introduction of CTG in 1996. The opposition called for nationwide strikes protesting this amendment. Violence erupted across the country (Daily Star, 26/12/2013). On 5 January 2014 election, BNP declined to participate under AL and boycotted the poll. The international community including the EU withdrew election observation missions. Consequently, 154 MPs were elected uncontested and AL coercively came to power with an absolute majority. The 2014 parliament is dominated by the AL-led alliance, a trend terrifying for representative democracy.

The politics of attrition features the political culture in Bangladesh. Without popular legitimacy, the ruling AL tends to further politicize national institutions and weaken the opposition alliance. As Transparency International Bangladesh reports-

> *"A dysfunctional parliament, an all-powerful executive, an exploited judiciary, and an increasingly politicised bureaucracy and police force have essentially eroded the check and balances that are pivotal to good governance".* (Daily Star, 8/3/2015)

The space for civil society is shrinking (Prothom Alo, 2014) and the media faces implicit sanctions through intimidation and national broadcast policy (Daily Star, 8/3/2015). Amid the

Opposition alliance's movement for a new all-party election under a neutral Election Commission, political use of police and judiciary is widespread to suppress the opposition. Violence continues to grow and (democratic) political culture is deteriorating in all possible ways in an unprecedented manner.

Given Bangladesh's frustrating democratic performance and the EU's longstanding democracy support to the country, it is worth examining whether or not the EU's policies are addressing the context specific to Bangladesh's social and political settings. For that, the thesis aims to understand the EU's conceptualization (both meanings and actions) of democracy support in Bangladesh and local CSO's views about it. The EU predominantly works with CSOs in supporting democratization in Bangladesh. CSOs operate in between the government and the opposition political parties. Therefore, they are more likely to offer an apolitical perspective on the democratic process and EU democracy support.

Research Objective

By understanding how the 'EU conceptualizes democracy support' and 'how local CSO members view its policy', the thesis' objective is to evaluate EU's existing policy in Bangladesh and provide useful recommendations. However, the thesis does not assume EU policy failure in democracy support since democratization is a continuous process and the lack of democracy is subject to multiple factors. It simply aims to evaluate EU's existing policy to explore ways of effective EU engagement in the field of democracy support given the on-going democratic crisis in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

The large literature on EU democracy promotion is an important guide to seek answers to the thesis' questions. One stumbling block in this regard is its vast size and fragmented nature making it too difficult to catch the actual dimension of EU's democracy support activity (Peter, 2011). However, a deeper look into the democracy-related work of the EU seemingly unravels four broad categories of scholarly discussions. As the Table-1 below suggests, first category takes up a conceptual line in discussion and makes an attempt to conceptually demystify what democracy means in EU's political lexicon and what spreading democracy implies in external context. The second category which is large in size features discussions on how the EU democracy support policy is evolving, its scope and limits, the challenges it faces and the reforms it requires. The discussion on the EU's diffusion of norms and ideas in the democratization activity in external relations makes up the third category. The fourth category looks at EU democracy promotion policy from an Europeanization perspective and explores its institutional modes, mechanisms, and instruments (Belal, 2014). However, the categories do not provide an exhaustive list. Detailed highlights on the categories are as follows.

Table-1:	Literature on EU Democracy Support/Promotion	
Category	Focus	Authors
Interpretive	Conceptual (and contextual) line of discussion.	Hobson and Kurki (2012a)
Explanatory	Discussions on the evolution, scope, limits, mechanisms, challenges and reforms.	Beichel, 2012; Cardwell, 2011; Schimmelfennig et al., 2006; Magen and MacFaul, 2009; Youngs, 2001; Kelegama, 2010; Sobhan, 2009; Jain, 2009
Normative	Emphasis on the diffusion of ideas and norms.	Chandler, 2012; Youngs, 2002; Kubicek, 2013; Tonra, 2009; Youngs & Pishchikova, 2013.
External Governance perspective	Europeanization; Institutional Modes; mechanisms; Instruments	Schimmelfennig, 2012a & 2012b; Börzel, 2009; Kotzian et al., 2011, Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009; Youngs, 2009.
Source: author		

In exploring the meanings of democracy promotion among the range of global democracy promoting actors, some authors investigated the conceptual politics of democracy. Hobson and Kurki (2012a) highlight the roles concepts play in understanding how different actors interpret the notion of democracy. Kurki (2012b) elsewhere seeks to extensively examine what EU means by democracy and has discovered fuzziness and lack of a singular model in the EU democracy discourse. Because the EU promotes "27 different models of democracy". It makes the concept of democracy contestable (2010). Given that the concept of democracy is not constant and varies across actors and context, both Hobson and Kurki differentiate between the understanding of democracy by external actors and its localized conception.

Kurki (2011), analysing the EU's CSO-focused democracy promotion through the EIDHR, contrasts her fuzziness claim. She instead argues that, despite our understanding of non-interfering and non-ideological democracy promotion by the EU, particular democratic vision like 'neoliberal governmentality' may be hidden within the expectations of the EU of why and how EU-funded CSOs facilitate democracy. 'Neoliberal governmentality', as Kurki clarified, is a form of (EU's) "governmental control over the nature of individuals, society and governance in target states". This indicates that the concept of democracy support may provide us with important insights in understanding the EU's spread of democracy in an external context.

EU democracy promotion has been linked to the diffusion of norms by some authors. Norms understood as shared values and expectations about the standard of appropriate behavior remain important in democracy promotion (Chandler, 2012). The author charts norm-based democracy promotion by the EU and other actors in three conceptually shifting stages: 1990s' view of democratic norm as a universalized liberal idea, mid-to-late 1990s' view of barrier to norm promotion as product of state or elite self-interests, and the perspective of authors from the 2000s involving external intervention in norm-based democracy promotion with the aim of transforming social institutions and political practices in different societies.

Likewise, Youngs (**2002**) sees democracy promotion as an essential feature of the EU's external involvement. Outlining EU's efforts to spread democratic norms in the Mediterranean and East Asia, he examines if any relationship between material interests and international norms in EU policies exists. Kubicek (2013) sees the role of norms as implicit and considers international factors having a greater role in democratization of states. The author conceptualizes how international actors shape the process of democratization through control, contagion, convergence and conditionality. The EU, by and large, employs the last three categories and influences domestic politics on the questions of democratization.

Other authors have tended to shed light on other areas, such as the evolution, scope, limits, EU's success or failure to rise above certain barriers, and diverse ways of engaging in democracy promotion abroad. A study by Cardwell (2011) examined the basis of EU democracy promotion in external relations. The author maps out EU external policies and shows that, while some policies are expressly vocal on democracy promotion others entail an implied character in the engagement with non-member states.

This strand of literature also involves discussion on EU's presence in South Asia (including Bangladesh) and points out that, EU's policy of using conditionality to promote democracy has its limits and is unconducive to local context (Jain, 2009; Kelegama, 2010). Sobhan (2009), in contrast, demonstrates a positive stance of EU democracy support in Bangladesh and highlights the importance of the EU's sustained involvement in Bangladesh's democratization process.

The final strand of the literature frames EU democracy promotion from an external governance perspective. It views EU promotion of democracy as one form of Europeanization phenomenon. Democracy promotion is conceptualized as the EU's external governance (Börzel, 2009) because, as Lavenex & Schimmelfennig (2009) argues, the notion of governance best captures the expansive scope of EU rules beyond the formal borders of EU membership. Youngs (2009) argues that, EU gains its external governance role given its unique international status. Kotzian et al. (**2011**) highlight the motivations and instruments of EU democracy promotion in external governance and underlined factors that shape their choices.

The literature outlined above provides comprehensive overview of EU democracy supports. While the second (explanatory) and fourth (external governance) variants address, more or

less, the 'why' elements in EU democracy promotion, the third emphasizes more on the 'what' aspect. Of the categories, Hobson and Kurki's (2012a) works offer a useful guide to conceptually understand EU democracy support. This study aims to draw on that line and focus more on the 'how' aspect: the conceptualization of democracy support (in Bangladesh), from the EU point of view.

However, the foregone literature is less vocal in understanding EU democracy support from the CSO point of view: what actors at the local level think the EU is and should do in the realm of democracy. This research aims to consider that gap. Doing so would be useful for understanding not only the EU conceptualization of democracy support in Bangladesh, but also how its support is perceived by local CSO members. Their conceptual involvement matters because EU maintains a CSO-focused democracy promotion strategy in external relations, a democratization strategy 'from below' (Kurki, 2011).

Moreover, the dominant tendency in the literature is to study EU's democracy promotion activity in member states, and the European neighbourhood. Very rarely is consideration given in cases like Bangladesh where EU acts as a significant development and democratizing actor. This study takes up the case of Bangladesh to understand how the EU conceptualizes and how CSO members views democracy support following an interpretive methodology with ontological and epistemological insights of social constructivism.

Theoretical Framework

This study has followed a constructivist approach to understand the EU democracy support in Bangladesh. Because it is difficult to understand the concept of democracy support using quantitative instruments, the idea of democracy support varies across context. Democracy support does not entail any clearly known properties. Hence, any attempt to know its concept

needs to be grounded in a methodology that enables the researcher to explore democracy support in dynamic (not constant) details.

Moreover, the aim of the research is to understand democracy support from two different contexts-EU and Bangladesh. Constructivist scholarship emphasizes particularity and context in social research. it tell us that, not laws, it's the meanings that are worth looking for by examining individual cases in different contexts within which meaning is situated (Moses & Knutsen, 2007: 223). Furthermore, the degree of uncertainty about the topic-little prior research on conceptual understanding of EU democracy support-is another reason for choosing constructivist approach (Belal, 2014).

1. Ontological and Epistemological Position

The thesis has embraced the distinct ontological and epistemological presuppositions of constructivism in social research. Unlike the 'realist' ontology of 'positivist' approach that claims the possibility of discovering objective (real) data (Guba& Lincoln, 1994:110), constructivist ontology believes in subjectivity-reality varies and is not independent of the knower. Reality is a two-way phenomenon; it is in conjunction with the knower and the known, and it is multiple (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:110). Accordingly, what democracy support underlies does not entail a single form or reality. Its concept is contextual and relational to where it takes place.

Constructivism also departs from positivism on the question of epistemology. Crotty (1998:8) draws a distinction between objectivism (of positivists) and subjectivism (of constructivists) in social research using a metaphor of a tree in forest:

> *"A tree in the forest is a tree, regardless of whether anyone is aware of its existence or not. As an object of that kind, it carries the intrinsic meaning of treeness. When human beings recognize it as a tree, they are simply discovering a meaning that has been lying in wait for them all along."*

As the metaphor on objectivism implies, knowledge (data) can be discovered and is immune from any outside values. Reality is not changeable through outside intervention. The research has to make attempts to get to that knowledge. It's there already.

To describe constructivist epistemology, Crotty (1998:43) uses a similar analogy of a tree in forest:

> *"We need to remind ourselves here that it is human beings who have constructed it as a tree, given it the name, and attributed to it the associations we make with trees."*

Following the metaphor, the meaning of a phenomenon is not simply 'there'. It comes to existence in association with those who inhabit particular cultural and historical context. Thus, what EU democracy support underpins is situated in a given social and political context within the EU. The views of CSO members are rested in their experiences, ideologies or beliefs that shape their perception on EU democracy support. Looking at the EU democracy support concepts and CSO views from the objectivism point of view might therefore be misleading (Belal, 2014).

2. Research Methodology

The thesis' ontological and epistemological position has paved the way for using interpretive methodology in this study. Interpretive methodology maintains a distinct mechanism to read social phenomena. In contrast with quantitative or qualitative methodology, it prefers not to begin with predefined variables or hypotheses (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). Neither does it

deploy deductive logic in social research because that indicates *a priori* acceptance of some form of measures or indicators. But concepts emerge from encounters in the field (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012: 38). By avoiding *a priori* conceptual preoccupation, interpretive methodology rather considers social context to inductively produce understanding of social phenomena or actions (Creswell, 2003:9). It also emphasizes 'thick description' which underlies that, the research subjects (e.g. interviewer and interviewee) need to elaborate, clarify and illustrate the data to provide complete understand of issues under research (Soss, 2006: 136).

Following the interpretive methodology, this research has not employed any predefined variable or concepts for measuring the concept of democracy support. As its aims is to know EU's concepts and civil society's views on democracy support in Bangladesh, it attempted to understand how EU defines the concept of democracy support generally, and in Bangladesh particularly, and what civil society in Bangladesh say about it. It has done that by looking at text (word-based data) instead of numbers or statistics.

3. Method of generating data

The thesis relied on both primary and secondary sources for collecting data. Secondary sources like books, journal articles, EU policy documents-EP resolutions, Council Conclusions, Commission's Communications, statements, EU projects-, newspaper articles and op-eds were studied. The primary data were collected following a (semi-structured) in-depth interview method. The interviews were recorded with permission and then transcribed into text. This method was chosen because it offers a dynamic way for pursuing specific issues of concern during data collection process.

As Soss (2006:140) clarifies, the interview method is useful guide for capturing 'indexicality'-variation of meanings across contexts. It allows flexibility for sustained

discussion with necessary follow-up questions and elaboration of vague statements in policy documents or during interviews. However, during the author's interviews, retaining the actual topic of discussion was difficult and participants often touched on peripheral aspects more than core issues.

Using an open-ended set of questionnaire, two EU Parliament officials and four civil society members were interviewed during July-August, 2014. The EU officials are associated with Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) and one of them recently visited Bangladesh as part of EU Parliament delegation. Four CSO members were selectively chosen to represent various ideological lines in Bangladesh.

4. Case Selection

The selection of Bangladesh, as a site for understanding EU democracy support policy in external relations, is situated against the background of deteriorating democratic situation in Bangladesh and the EU's increasing role as a major democracy supporter in the country (Belal, 2014). Studying democracy support from the EU and local perspective would help to examine EU policies in relation to local democratic crisis. It would help to explore better ways of EU engagement to further facilitate democratic development in the country. The study of such kind has not been done before. The case would be useful for understanding the roles the EU play and the impact it can have in contexts beyond Europe. Moreover, as Yin (1993:39) suggests, the author's degree of familiarity with Bangladesh's democratic situation and EU engagement in the country also contributed to the case selection.

5. Research Evaluation

The thesis has considered a different set of criteria for assessing the claims from the research. As Yanow (2012:92) notes, the presuppositions of interpretive research do not fit with the positivist standards of validity, reliability, objectivity and falsifiability. Because this research

abstains from using strict measurement procedure, the concept of internal validity makes little sense here. Its situated-ness to specific context, also, makes it less germane to the idea of external validity. The insistence on multiple realities (concepts) limits the relevance of reliability. The study therefore has made sure to maintain the evaluative criteria of credibility, transferability and dependability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in line with interpretive research standard.

To enhance research credibility, the tools of peer debriefing and member checking have been used. For peer debriefing, a researcher external to this research critically examined the main chapter 'conceptualization of EU democracy support'. For member checking, the data interpretations were sent to the research participants for verification. Some verified and some were unreachable. Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) suggests that, member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility".

Attempt has been made to enhance the transferability of this research by providing 'thick description'. Although the question of research transfer to other contexts largely depends on the judgement of the person seeking to apply the results, the research context has been elaborately described in 'thick' (elaborate) ways. Due to word constraints of the thesis, however, the description has mainly reflected on political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the research context.

Interpretive research regards the reliability concept as ill-suited because there is no guarantee that data collected at another time would produce the same result; because all research subjects are embedded in specific social context and participate in the co-generation of data (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2012:95). However, the method of inquiry audit has been used to enhance the dependability of the research. The consistency in arguments, in data, research design, interpretations and conclusions has been verified by an outside expert auditor.

Defining Important Concepts

Interpretive research design is less instrumental in defining key concepts (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012:18). It wants the researcher to develop a sense of how key concepts are discussed in existing literature. It avoids objective operationalization of concepts. As the aim of interpretive research is to explore concepts from the field context, researcher is not expected to convey deductively produced scientific concepts to field settings. In this study, key concepts are 'democracy' and 'democracy support/promotion'. 'Civil society', which is not the concept under study here, has also been clarified.

1. Democracy

Democracy is a contested concept and lacks scholarly consensus. Gallie (1956:167-98) suggested that, democracy takes on a variety of meaning in different societies and is best understood as "essentially contested concept". The multiplicity in its meaning was intelligently portrayed by Orwell (1946):

> *"In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning"*.

However, despite the variety and contestation in meaning, democracy has some common connotations. 'Electoral' and 'liberal democracy' are two of them. In the first, free and fair election is equated with democracy. In the latter, democracy is associated with liberal democratic values like rule of law, freedom of expression, protection of civil and political rights and so on (Hobson & Kurki, 2012:4-5). EU and other democracy promoters are seen espousing the practice of electoral and liberal definition of democracy (Peter, 2010:2;

Diamond, 2008:20-6; McFaul, 2010:28-32). The Part IV in this thesis provides an elaborate discussion on what underlies in EU definition of democracy.

2. Democracy support/promotion

In this thesis, democracy support or promotion is used to refer to any policy action by the EU to promote (its) democratic values in external relations including Bangladesh. Hobson and Kurki (2012:3) have seen democracy promotion as "the process by which an external actor intervenes to install or assist in the institution of democratic government in a target state". Democracy support may include measures like development assistance, electoral supports, sharing expertise, funding civil society, policy conditionality, or sanctions.

The thesis uses 'support' and 'promotion' interchangeably to mean assistance for democratization. So does the EU policy documents that use democracy 'support', 'promotion', 'building' and so on repeatedly (Wetzel & Orbie, 2012). The EU officials at OPPD told the author that, EU is moving away from the word 'promotion' to 'support', mainly because the former is seen as more proactive and generates unease among partners. Whereas support is more technical in connotation implying that, EU is there to provide technical, moral and material supports for democratization whoever needs that help. It is good for the EU's image as normative actor and is in line with its values of multilateralism (Interview-1, 2014).

3. Civil Society

The concept of civil society organizations (CSOs), widely considered as apolitical phenomenon, is a much-discussed topic in academia and policy making arena alike**.** Among definitions of CSOs, the most prominent one is suggested by Habermas (1992: 443):

> *"civil society is made up of more or less spontaneously created associations, organisations and movements, which find, take up, condense*

> *and amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it on to the political realm or public sphere".*

His definition implies a voluntary character of CSOs which pick social problems and problematize them in political sphere. The EU considers CSOs to

> *"include all non-State, not-for-profit structures1, non-partisan and non – violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic"* (COM, 2012/492).

In the EU's lexicon, CSOs maintain a sphere, independent of centre of state power, and equate with non-partisan citizen movements. EU funds CSOs in Bangladesh based on that notion. Yet, it remains difficult to capture the conceptual essence of CSOs in Bangladesh due to their political affiliation along different political and ideological lines. However, in this study, CSOs would include all non-governmental entities officially autonomous from state power and institutions.

Part III: An Overview of the EU Democracy Supports in Bangladesh

The EU maintains an important number of instruments that address elements related to democracy support in Bangladesh. EU, generally, has extensive array of ways of supporting democracy at its disposal. The Council Conclusions (16081/09) elaborate on the EU's use of various dialogue instruments in external relations in the realm of democracy and human rights defence. Notable among them are policies, action under EU human rights guidelines, financial instruments, EOM, ESDP missions, and action in multilateral fora. Considering the democracy building process in variety of contexts, EU's level of engagement widely differs based on circumstances. Accordingly, the EU's mix of instruments in democracy assistance

in Bangladesh is perhaps based on its reading of local context. The study, however, highlights three important democracy support instruments that broadly reflect all other elements.

1. Political Dialogue

The most tangible approach of the EU in Bangladesh is dialogue promoting role. This role brings good social value for EU, because, it neither requires the EU to take sides nor it inhibits EU from expressing concerns over any democratic crisis in national politics. It gives a good impression that, EU is a dialogue promoter, not a trouble maker like many other foreign actors in Bangladesh. Using this instrument, EU holds talks with government executives and opposition leaders, and urges for talks in order to solve political and electoral problems that hinder democratic process. Formally, in conjunction with 2001 Cooperation Agreement, EU-Bangladesh Joint-commission was set up to hold government-level political dialogues (COM, 2011). Informally, meeting with opposition leader and civil society actors are held and official press releases are published.

EU's dialogue promoting role has been widely practiced in recent years. The visiting delegations from European Parliament play important role in this regard. The dispatch of EU Delegation itself implies that, EU cares how Bangladesh is doing on democracy and human rights and wants to share important issues or concerns with all relevant stakeholders. The government and the opposition accordingly prepare their agendas for meetings with EU delegation. Following the 2006 electoral deadlock between two major political alliances, EU was seen more active among the international community. The national media extensively featured on EU's role regarding that issue (Daily Star, 26/01/2006). Again, during violent situations before and after 5 January 2014 one-sided election, the EU delegation had extensive meetings with ruling and opposition leaders to urge for restraints and finding solutions to country's democratic turmoil through dialogues (The Daily star, 11/09/2013).

The EU's call for talks conveys the government the message that, elections should reflect people's rights to vote and the way the electoral system and Election Commission is running needs change. It also brings legitimacy to the opposition's concerns for electoral reforms and for free and fair national elections. The whole process has an intrinsic preventive dimension that works as 'check and assessment' of how democracy and human rights are upheld in Bangladesh. As a largest donor and biggest trading partner EU' dialogue promoting role for democracy and human rights carries extensive meanings to Bangladesh's democratic developments. Its vocal position on these issues has brought the EU an implicit recognition to take on a larger role in democratization among all external actors in Bangladesh including the US.

2. Mainstreaming Democratic Values

The EU makes consistent and coherent effort to mainstream democratic values and respect for human rights in Bangladesh. It takes place through agreement, assistance, civil society support and so on. In line with the 'essential element' clause in bilateral agreement, the EU concentrates its development assistance (including for MDGs) on the support of democracy, human rights and good governance (COM, 2011/637). EU maintains this posture in all bilateral meetings with Bangladesh government. The delegations that visit Bangladesh are seen vocal about democracy and human rights, perhaps, based on the 'essence' of EU-Bangladesh relations and the former's principle of upholding democratic values in external relations. Given the allegation of the deterioration of human rights and democratic situation in Bangladesh, the February 2015 delegation of the Sub-committee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, for example, delivered hard message to AL government representatives-

> "*We are here because of our concerns regarding human rights situation. We need Bangladesh as a strong partner…. The European Parliament*

considers human rights and democracy an essential element of the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the EU, in accordance with article 1 of the 2001 bilateral Cooperation Agreement" (Daily Star, 19/02/2015).

Bangladesh country strategy papers are important source to say how EU mainstreams democratic values in its cooperation with Bangladesh. As the Table-2 demonstrates, in almost all country strategies, the democracy support has either explicit or implicitly been underlined. The Country Strategy for 2014-2020 prioritizes 'strengthening democratic governance' as one of the three topmost priority sectors (COM, MIP/2014-2020).

Table-2:	Democracy Support in Country Strategy Papers		
Country Strategy Papers	Degree of focus on democracy support	Development and democracy relationship	Official Assistance
1993-1996 (1998)	not addressed	not addressed.	€
1999-2001	addressed as the 'governance and institution building'	seen as a component of 'development cooperation' focal area.	€100 million
2002-2006	addressed as 'Promoting democracy and human rights'	addressed in 'other intervention areas'.	€560 million
2007-2013	'governance and human rights' as one of three focal areas	seen as central to the achievement of MDGs.	€403
(MIP) 2014-2020	'Strengthening Democratic Governance' as one of three priority sectors	seen as enabler for Bangladesh's pursuit of MIC by 2021.	€690 million
Source: adapted from past country strategy papers			

For mainstreaming democratic values, EU has also partnered with local CSOs. In line with 'The roots of Democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations' the EU thinks CSOs have a central role in building democratic culture of representation, participation, accountability, and equality (COM, 2012/492). Under the EIDHR Country Based Support Scheme in Bangladesh, EU's works with CSOs are evolving as an instrument of democracy support.

3. Specific Financial and Technical Assistance Programs

Apart from EU's concentration of development assistance in support of democracy and human rights, its technical assistance broadly involves capacity building of democratic institutions and EOM. The hallmark capacity building and technical support for democratization was its support for the 2007 interim government by funding a major Election Commission project to overhaul the electoral roll. The project provided photographed voter ID cards for millions of people, the first of its kind in the country's history. The EU's objective was to ensure a free and fair parliamentary election in 2008 through a credible photo voter list. Its support in electoral reform process continues through on-going 'Strengthening Election Management in Bangladesh' project to enhance the capacity of the Election Commission to organize and supervise credible elections at national and local levels to international standards (EU Delegation to Bangladesh, 2015).

The EOM remains a vital component of EU's technical support for democracy in Bangladesh. Since 1996, it observed three national elections. The EU's 'observing' and 'not observing' elections (both) carry meanings to how it promotes democracy. By observing elections, EU as a global democratic actor adds credibility to elections, provides international legitimacy to winners, and assists in peaceful transfer of power. Accordingly, the EU's EOM in 1996, 2001 and 2008 largely ensured peaceful transfer of power in Bangladesh. However, it abstained from sending EOM in 2007 and 2014 general elections on the ground of lack of national consensus on electoral process and opposition parties' election boycott (EP, 2014/B7-0037). The EU's refusal to observe the elections undermined the credibility of the process and brought the electoral and institutional reform agendas for free and fair parliamentary elections to the forefront of national and international discussions on democratization in Bangladesh (Daily Star, 20/12/2013). Thus, EOM as instrument of democracy support largely facilitates

democratization process in Bangladesh. The following chapter elaborates how the EU conceptualizes its democracy support in Bangladesh.

PART IV: Conceptual Discussion of the EU Democracy Supports in Bangladesh

The analysis of the EU policy documents and the interview materials suggest that the EU's concept of democracy support implies a 'neo-liberal' view of liberal democracy, good governance, and development, as claimed by Kurki (2011). It fosters a narrow conception of how development is linked with the progress in good governance and democratic process, and its democracy support strategy in Bangladesh is seen endorsing (neo-liberal) reform initiatives- developmental, good governmental, technical and electoral and so on. Its new liberal view in democratization is founded on the ground that, it ensures peace and stability to the EU and the world at large.

On the other hand, the interviews conducted by the author in Bangladesh express critical views of the EU's support of democracy in Bangladesh through various reform programs. CSO members were found endorsing EU's existing dialogue promoting role, although its nature and intensity was debated. The EU makes important contributions because without developmental, good governmental, technical, and electoral supports, democratization

remains difficult. However, a view that runs parallel across the interviews is that, developmental, civil societal, good governmental (e.g. anti-corruption) technical and electoral supports are often poor guides in understanding what one should actually do in democratizing a socially complex country like Bangladesh. The essence of democratic deficit and crisis in the country is political and educational and democracy supports should address them accordingly. The chapter firstly discusses the EU's concept and then Bangladesh's CSO members'' views on the EU democracy support.

How the EU defines democracy?

Understanding the EU's concept of democracy would be useful for understanding the concept of its democracy support in external relations. EU's commitment to democracy promotion has repeatedly appeared in EU Treaties and policy documents. Yet, any successful attempt to define what EU means by 'democracy' has not been made (Toornstra and Huyghebaer, 2009:7). While Europe has reached a 'consensus on development' (Council, 2006/46/01), its consensus on democracy remains unachieved. Several initiatives were taken from 2008 to 2009 during French, Czech and Swedish presidencies, but did not succeed (Meyer-Resende &Toornstra, 2009). As Sweden's ambassador for democracy in development cooperation Maria Leissner put it in 2008:

> *"time is now ripe to strive for a European consensus on democracy, in other words a cross-institutional umbrella policy document on what shape the European approach to democracy support should take"* (2009).

However, in a manuscript titled 'Democracy Revisited: Which Notion of Democracy for the EU's External Relations? published from the OPPD in European Parliament, the authors discuss what a possible EU 'consensus on democracy' should look. It argues that, the EU should keep in mind its objective of strengthening multilateralism while thinking for a democracy definition, what the world is thinking about democracy. The best way is to endorse a definition coming from the UN context reflecting the EU's multilateral approach

rather than going for a definition unilaterally. The UN General Assembly resolution 2005 on 'essential elements' of democracy has widely been agreed by almost all countries in the world including the EU members. Represented by 172 states, no country voted against it, though 15 abstained.

The EU's dilemma is that partner countries might reject any definition it may adopt. They might refuse to be judged by a standard unilaterally set by the EU. So, adopting the existing UN definition would provide further legitimacy to the EU's democracy support programs since it has been endorsed by the UN member states (Toornstra and Huyghebaer, 2009:8). Even though a formal EU definition on democracy is still missing, it is understandable that, how EU conceptualizes democracy is not far from the UN context, as listed in the Table-3.

Table-3: Essential Elements of Democracy Agreed at UNGA, 2005
Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of opinion
The right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic free elections by universal and equal suffrage and by secret ballot guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the people
A pluralistic system of political parties and organisations
Respect for the rule of law
The separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary
Transparency and accountability in public administration
Free, independent and pluralistic media
Source: Meyer-Resende, Michael. (2011).International Consensus: Essential Elements of Democracy. Report, Democracy Reporting International (DRI).

The EU's Conceptualization of Democracy Support

"The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Treaty on European Union (TEU), Article 21

1. Democracy Support as a Foreign policy Principle

The 'Council conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations' (Council, 2009/16081) informs that the 'essence' of the EU's external relations with third countries is full respect for democracy and human rights. As a platform of 28 democracies representing 500 million people, and as the world's largest donor, the EU assumes a crucial democracy building role in third countries (OPPD, 2008). Promotion of democracy, democratic governance, human rights, and rule of law is therefore a mainstreamed EU policy in its external relations. In the words of an EU official:

> *"The Union does insist on human rights and on the democratization based on the fact that it is an entity based on those values. Otherwise, why the EU tax payers' money should be spent at all in Bangladesh on supporting*

democracy? I mean, if it takes this very hardnosed realpolitik approach
then all those money you should declare wasted…" (Interview-2, 2014)

The EU has maintained democracy and human rights promotion as a foreign policy principle through the inclusion of 'essential element' clause in all negotiated bilateral agreements since the TEU in 1992 (COM, 2011/886). The 'essential element' clause entered the Bangladesh-EU relations through the third generation Co-operation Agreement signed in March 2001 replacing the previous EC-Bangladesh Commercial Cooperation Agreement of 1976 (EC, 2001/48). Mainly based on partnership and development, this 'essential element' clause in the agreement with Bangladesh underpins the philosophy that EU cares a lot about democratic values and by having that clause included in the agreement both actors affirm that they will uphold democratic principles in actions (EC, 2001/48). As Catherine Ashton, former High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated:

> *"Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are the basic values on which EU*
> *foreign policy is built. They are a silver thread running through all that we do".*
> (Council, 2010/ 9598).

2. Effective multilateralism and democracy support

The EU sees democracy support as a great stride in its commitment to "effective multilateralism" in facing global challenges. As the European Parliament's plenary sitting of the Committee of Foreign Affairs in 2015 notes, Union's foreign policy is rooted in the conviction that, a multilateral system founded on universal rules and values, with the UN at the core, shows the best way to addressing global crises, challenges and threats (EP, 2015/0023).

The EU as a global actor and largest donor (Council, 2009/2974), with its commitment to multilateral approach, takes global rules seriously. By this, it wants to share in good faith the global responsibility in addressing the concerns of peace, stability, development (COM,

2003/0526). As part of this commitment, the EU is extensively supporting UN Millennium Development Goals (COM, 2006/46/01).

Bangladesh as a least developed country (LDC) greatly enjoys the EU assistance in achieving the MDGs. The EU has extensively partnered with Bangladesh's development policies in education, health, poverty eradication, women and minority empowerment, and good governance. In achieving MDG goals in Bangladesh, EU believes democratic governance and human rights is a precondition to ensuring and sustaining them (COM, MIP/2014-2020). That position has led the EU to provide developmental, technical, electoral and political dialogue supports to democratization in Bangladesh.

3. Democracy Support for peace and stability

The EU connects democracy support with its larger goal of promoting a world of peace and stability built on a rule-based international order (Council, 2012/11855). It believes that its peace and security depends in a world governed by like-minded democratic states (Council, 2003). It is important that those like-mined democratic states to be 'as much among from low and middle income countries as from the more industrialized world' (OPPD, 2008). Thus, spreading liberal values of democracy and market economy based on good governance, rule of law, and protection of human rights will help to maintain an international society of states ordered according to EU principles and values (Schimmelfenning, 2012; Smith, 2011). One would contend that, EU's assumption of peace and stability from liberal democracy is, however, in clear contrast with how countries without liberal democracy (e.g. China, Iran) are maintaining peace and stability within and beyond.

An EU Parliament official who visited Bangladesh as part of an EU Delegation told the author how democracy support maintains peace and stability in Bangladesh (Interview-2, 2014). EU parliament sends EOM to legitimize that electoral process is transparent, fair and,

a new government rotates the power in a smooth transition. In countries (e.g. Bangladesh) with high poll-time tension and a political culture of election boycott, vote rigging, and rejection of election results, the EU's presence during election, as a normative power and as a reliable partner in development, provides legitimacy to the process and makes election results credible to all parties.

EOM process brings the government the domestic as well as international legitimacy among the society of democratic states (OPPD, 2008). The country can thus escape uncertainty and violence which is the key to good democracy and sustainable development. EOM seems to establish the EU as a 'top-down' legitimizer in Bangladesh's domestic politics. It is worth noting that, Bangladesh's domestic stability is vital for protecting EU's trade relations and economic investment.

The EU's authority and confidence as a democracy supporter is said to come from its democratic credentials and worldwide good image. It has regards itself as a unique forum of democracies with different traditions from Belgium to the UK and boasts of its international image as a normative and rule-based actor. An EU official pointed out that, EU is a specific kind of actor in international arena, a bit different from the other actors like US, Russia, India, or middle-sized power like China in the sense that-

> *"EU has economic interests but it defends them by concluding trade treaties, preferring rules over coercion unlike the US or China who openly have their national agenda; they do not pretend to hide it though. European Union, as many people have difficulty in believing this, is not behaving in this way, is not playing geopolitical games".*
> (Interview-2, 2014)

It was opined that, although member states might have such intent the Union as such does not act that way. It's relevant for Bangladesh or any country (Interview-1, 2014*)*. As the former EU Commission President Barroso said, "showing the way does not mean imposing the way" (Speech/08/197). Such benevolent approach in democracy support, however, seems

counterintuitive given that EU is an amalgamation of national states and is supposed to represent collective interests in its external policy. Kelegama, (2010 and Jain (2009) contrasts such benevolent image of the EU and shows how EU's policy conditionality to promote democracy South Asia has its limits.

4. Development and democracy supports

The EU's development cooperation and democracy support in Bangladesh are considered mutually reinforcing. The Council provides conceptual and policy guidelines regarding this interdependent nature of development, democracy and human rights (Council, 2009/16081). Its conclusions underline that, poverty reduction and sustainable development is essentially subject to the progress in the protection of good governance, (all) human rights and democratization.

Accordingly, the EU's development supports in Bangladesh in achieving MDGs features an inextricable link with democratization. The analysis of the Bangladesh Country strategy Papers (conducted by the author) reveals that EU's emphasis on the role of democratic governance is incremental and consistent. The Table-2 (p.28) indicates that, as the cooperation in trade and development has increased, so has EU's emphasis on democratic governance. This increasing emphasis on democratic governance in development cooperation reflects EU's gradual mainstreaming of neoliberal ideas of liberal governance in democracy support strategy.

However, one might contend that, EU's conflation of good governance and democratization with poverty alleviation and sustainable development is promoting the governance discourse of the international financial institutions (IFIs) which are often criticized for failure in bringing 'good' in good governance. Such linking underscores a neo-liberal version of development thinking which IFIs promote since the 1990s. Many say this thinking is often

misleading because as poor countries lack adequate resources to enforce rule of law and property rights, their poor score is often over portrayed as good governmental problem by donor countries and international organizations. Moreover, the idea of good governance is considered vital for donor countries for protecting vast resources they invest in developing countries (like Bangladesh) (Chowdhury et al., 2012).

5. Local context in Bangladesh and Democracy support

The EU is aware of the context-specificity and uncertainty in democracy support in countries including Bangladesh. A general line of the EU democracy policy is to recognize the situations specific to local context (Council, 2009/16081). Asked about the EU's response to on-going democratic fragility in Bangladesh, The EU officials pointed to non-linearity and uncertainty in democratization process-

> *"No matter how much you spend for it, no matter how powerful external actor is and no matter how they come with guns, rockets, tanks to invade your country, they cannot really do much. It's up to the local people….you cannot buy democracy" (*Interview-2, 2014).

This quote illustrates the rationale for why EU normally links the task of making democracy work for citizens with the people of the country concerned, first and foremost (COM, 2006/23). Democracy needs to be in people's 'spirit', in 'content' (Havel, 2009). However, the acknowledgment of context-specificity in the EU's democracy support underlines the limitations of what EU can do and provides justification for using CSOs in shaping democratic understanding of partner countries in the name of democracy "from below" (a phenomenon known as neoliberal governmentality, Kurki (2011))

Bangladesh's CSO Members' Views on the EU Democracy Supports

The CSO members interviewed by the author expressed critical stance regarding the EU democracy support policy in Bangladesh. Hardly has anyone displayed disagreement with the EU on the need for political dialogue in Bangladesh although a sustained form of political dialogue was emphasized. The EU's supports were regarded as important contributions for democratization but argued as poor guides in understanding the complex dynamics of democratic crisis in the country. The emphasis was therefore given on political and educational perspectives through which the problem of democracy should be seen in Bangladesh. Also important is to understand the context of state-society relationship in Bangladesh.

1. State and society Relationship and democracy in Bangladesh

Bangladesh experiences a continued tension between its state and society. Understanding this tension is crucial to understanding the dynamics of democratic practices in this country and how EU's democracy support should broadly proceed. Unlike Europe where people make the state, the state in Bangladesh makes its people (Interview-3, 2014). In other words, the state has not emerged through a political evolutionary process. It has rather emerged through a colonial process where the relations between the state and its people have been that of a colonial master and its subjects, a top-down business (Interview-4, 2014). But the essence of democracy is that, people make state (Interview-3, 2014).

The People's aspiration has historically been devalued. Their priorities have been defined by the state and its politico-military-bureaucratic elites in both pre and post-independence Bangladesh. To account for this 'state-society-people' relationship, an author has framed it as "state against the nation" (kamal, 2009) pointing, among other things, to colonial style governance with centralized bureaucracy and crude indifference to democratic aspiration.

People do not foster the state, because it's imposed from above. Nation-building has never been the expression of people. Political parties compete for power, neither for rights nor for people (Interview-5, 2014). Thus, the People in Bangladesh see the state as opponent in the pursuit of their democratic and human rights. Understanding this state-society relationship is vital in understanding the state of democracy in Bangladesh (Interview-3, 2014).

2. Equal importance of political process with technical process in democratization

The democratic situation in Bangladesh indicates that past democratizing interventions were necessary but insufficient in reality. Since the 1990s, foreign actors, EU included, framed the problem in Bangladesh as that of lack of development, good governance, human rights, women empowerment and so on. While those assumptions were not ungrounded, in creating an overarching democratic condition where government-citizens affairs would be founded on democratic principles, they have proved peripheral. A newspaper communist and journalist based in Dhaka noted that, one indicator of ineffectiveness of previous governance and democratic reform programs was the January 11, 2007 military-backed caretaker government (CTG) came through a "quiet coup" (Economist, 2007). It is known as Bangladesh's '1/11'.

The CTG came to power following an electoral deadlock between major political parties. The country was said to be on "the brink of social and political collapse" (Lewis, 2011:96). The government imposed state of emergency, suspended civil liberties and as a means of obtaining popular legitimacy, promised three popular agendas: tackling corruption and violence, reshaping political parties, and reforming electoral institutions. (Devine, 2007) The regime of 1/11 was supported by the international community including the EU and local CSO actors in the country (Crisis Group, 2008).

As interviews show, EU-sponsored reform programs in the aftermath of 1/11 have been counterproductive. The EU and other donor countries supported the CTG government for

almost two years in the programs of corruption eradication and reform of the Election Commission and electoral system. The support of this undemocratic regime by the EU (EP, 2007) and other donor countries not only questions the efficacy of their democracy supports, but also indicates that donor-backed previous interventions in the realm of good governance, development, democracy failed to bear any fruit in real terms (Interview-4, 2014). The CSO members emphasized more on issues related to '1/11' because of its lasting legacy in subsequent political developments in the country. The following two points (a & b) elaborate how the EU supported governmental and electoral reforms produced undesired outcomes in the country.

a. *Anti-corruption (good governance) support to the CTG and political crisis*

The anti-corruption move by the regime demolished grassroots foundation of two main political parties. The move was supported by the international community including the EU and by people, until the illusion eroded at some point (Crisis group, 2008). It was meant against business leaders and top political figures including former (and present) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and (present main opposition leader) Khaleda Zia, the leaders of two main political parties, a phenomenon widely known as 'minus-two formula' (BBC, 2007). These two women are at the top of patron-client relationship in politics. Their removal would mean that the entire pyramid of political command and control would collapse and the vacuum would be filled up by gangsters at local and national level (Interview-4; Interview-3, 2014).

Moreover, removing corruption was thought utmost necessity of the country for establishing democracy (Johnson, 2007). However, the army chief was even seen critical of 'Westminster type of parliamentary democracy' in Bangladesh and revealed his conviction not to return to an 'elective democracy' (BBC, 2007). The extreme clampdown on two main political parties, BNP and AL, put them in clear political crisis. AL managed to revive it as a political party

following its electoral victory in 2008. BNP fell in total political disarray and has never recovered since then. The implication is that, corruption still 'threatens to implode Bangladesh' (Quibria, 2015) and the ruling AL has turned increasingly authoritarian and intimidating in the wake of weak BNP-led opposition party. This negative development has seriously undermined the support of reforms by the EU and other donor countries. (Interview-6; 4; & 5, 2014).

The 1/11 government sowed the seeds of present political crisis and violence in the country (Interview-4; 5, 2014). The CTG system was initiated in 1990s to oversee election and stop fraud that marred voting. However 1//11 government ruled for two years. It gave the ruling Awami League' Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a political ground to abolish the system labelling it as 'undemocratic' (BBC, 2011).

The AL abolished the system in 2011 in a unilateral move using parliament majority despite protests by all other political parties and widespread public support for the system. BNP threatened to boycott the parliament election under ruling party in fear of rigged election and boycotted the 5 January, 2014 election paving the way for an 'under-represented' government. The EU had to halt its EOM to Bangladesh with the EU parliament passing a critical resolution on election in Bangladesh (EP, 2014/B7-0037).

Weakened BNP repeatedly attempted to organize political campaign against the constitutional amendment. It protested one-party national election through political protests but failed because of its inability to organize the party within and because of increasing arrests and suppression by law enforcement agencies. The government has increasingly shrunk the space for the media (Daily Star, 25/02/2015) and civil society (Daily Star, 20/02/2014).Thus, the political problem that followed from the CTG policies still haunts the country; no one knows where it is heading (Rahman, 2015).

b. *The inefficacy of electoral reforms*

An important agenda of the interim government supported by EU is the electoral reform. The EU provided major funding for the Election Commission (EU Delegation, 2012). One criticism for this program is too much focus on technical aspect rather than on political process (Crisis Group, 2008). The Election Commission today is the most partisan in history, accused of excessive electoral irregularities and lack of credibility (Interview-4; 5, 2014). All recent national and local elections were marred with violence and vote-rigging (Daily Star, 26/05/2015). The Last 27 January 2015 mayoral election was so full with massive rigging that, opposition parties felt no need to stay in the race at all but to boycott it (Paul, 2015; Guardian, 2015). In the absence of accountability from the Commission, the data collected to overhaul the electoral roll and provide photographed voter ID cards may give the government room for tracking citizens to supress anti-government protests (Interview-4, 2014). This subsequent partisanship of the Commission and lack of public trust on it have seriously undermined the EU's assistance to the CTG's electoral reform programs.

 It is against the aforesaid contexts, the importance of a political process has been emphasized over the technical aspect. A renowned civil society member put it this way,

> *if political parties' behavior and attitude are unchanged, state institutions*
> *are doomed to be used as state machinery to supress any organized*
> *opposition against those who are in power (*Interview-5, 2014).

The EU plays a dialogue promoting role in Bangladesh and it has been well-appreciated by interviewees. However its development assistance and other democracy promoting measures would see more success in Bangladesh if differences among two main political parties are minimized through a sustained mediated dialogue by the EU or by the international community. The EU as the largest export destination for Bangladesh possesses enormous weight in persuading political parties, and in mediating any negotiation or dialogue. EU's assistance would see more effect if it directly works with political parties and their supporters

with the aim of promoting a culture of mutual dialogue, social talks, social debate, through supporting public debate (Interview-5, 2014).

Following violent situations in the country in the aftermath of 2014 controversial national election, some prominent civil society members have talked about a 'national charter' in the form of a social contract as a social institutional restraint mechanism. It would constitute rule-based national politics based on mutual renunciation of violence, as a tactic of political bullying, and commitment of good conduct in politics based on mutual respect to the country's best interest (Daily Star, 09/02/2015). A similar call was heard during the interim government in 2008 (Daily Star, 14/05/2008), as part of its agenda of 'reshaping political parties', but too much preoccupation with technical aspect in democratic transition and excessive coercive measures against top politicians more likely overshadowed the call and destroyed the trust on the process.

3. Importance of Education in democratization

In reading democracy crisis in Bangladesh, lack of democratic education has been emphasized. Moreover, the role of CSOs in Bangladesh' democratization remains the subject of debate. CSOs' activities failed to address the lack of civic education and often produced unintended ideological clash that affected the democracy in the country. The following points (a&b) highlight how that happens.

a.   *Role of civil society and democratic crisis in Bangladesh*

The respondents exhibited positive impression about EU's works with CSOs in democratizing Bangladesh but were critical of their performance in the country's democratization process. EU provides tangible supports to local CSOs in democracy building for the protection of human rights and promotion of political representation and participation (COM, 2014/4865). This policy of CSO supports in the country is a demand of time

especially when the role and space of CSOs are gradually eroding. However, a notable CSO member who is affiliated with multiple non-governmental organizations expressed frustration over the role Bangladesh's CSOs play in the realm of politics. Their actions are limited to organizing seminar and symposiums. Any statement and programs that seem confrontational with the government are avoided (Interview-5, 2014). They are also politically aligned supporting like-mined political parties (Interview-4, 2014).

While it is good that CSOs are vocal with civil rights, equal emphasis should also be given on 'civic education' making people aware of their social and political responsibilities. It doesn't happen because CSO are more fund-focused, moved more by fund than by spirit of democracy and human rights (Interview-5; 4, 2014). NGO section of CSOs are said to have been promoting consumerism, rather than civic and political awareness (Interview-6, 2014). Consequently, Bangladesh is going to be a society of people more tended towards economy-driven democracy, where consumption matters more than participation (democracy) (Interview-5, 2014).

b. *Ideological conflict and violence as hindrance to democratization*

A notable civil society member and university teacher sought to link the country's on-going political crisis with the conflict between Bengali ultra-nationalists and militant Islamists (Interview-3, 2014). This conflict has both temporal and ideational dimension. Since 1990s, three factors-emergence of NGO develomentalism, rise of Islamic militancy and Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP)- have greatly affected the socio-economic-political trajectory of Bangladesh. With the IFIs-driven structural adjustment policy and associated policy conditionality of market liberalization and privatization, Bangladesh has rapidly experienced the impact of globalization. Globalization came with new ideas, cultures, values and meanings to Bangladeshi conservative Muslim society. It has created 'clash of ideas' between

those who embrace it and those who reject it. This clash of ideas has reflected in how various political groups tend to define the future trajectory of the country.

The emergence of NGO developmentalism has been linked with the revival of Bengali ultra-nationalist groups and the rise of militant Islam (Interview-3, 2014). Since the 1990s, NGOs have been massively funded by international donors for reforming and developing primary education sector in rural Bangladesh. Donor-funded secular modern education project was in contrast with traditional and religious education. As Karim (2004) says, the twin policy of secular and religious education introduced strife between Westernized and Indianized NGO elites and Middle East-funded religious groups. This has generated extreme hatred and intolerance between people of two differing ideologies. Violence has thus been an expression of hatred and intolerance; democracy has been unstable.

Therefore, while civic education is necessary, a good education policy has been opined as an utmost necessity to educate people as part of democratization process. The author was told by a CSO member that, the conflict between Bengali ultra-nationalist and militant Islam could be minimized through a good education policy that would smooth democratic transition, because education has important elements of minimizing differences and promoting tolerance and co-existence among various ideas and thoughts. The EU, which is already a partner in (primary) education development in Bangladesh (Daily Star, 5/6/2015; COM, 2013), can keep this into consideration while making country strategy for Bangladesh. Thus, the lack of democracy needs to be seen from an educational perspective and emphasis be put on providing citizens with civic education and education of moderation (Interview-3; 6, 2014).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Given the EU's evolving democracy supports and increasing democratic crisis in Bangladesh, this thesis aimed to evaluate the EU's existing policy and provide recommendations by understanding the EU's concept and local CSO members' views about the EU's democracy supports in Bangladesh. As a framework of research, it adopted an interpretive methodology with constructivist ontology and epistemology. Based on the secondary and primary data sources, the thesis argues that EU's concept of democracy supports has neoliberal underpinnings maintaining a link between development and good governance and democratization.

Its supports strategy in Bangladesh endorses neoliberal assumptions of developmental, good governmental, electoral and technical reforms. Its belief is that liberal democracy would ensure not only EU's, but also global peace and stability. Its support for democracy in Bangladesh reflects its commitment to effective multilateralism, sharing the global responsibility in addressing global concerns of peace, stability and development. Spreading liberal democracy is one good means to that end.

The CSO members interviewed by the author displayed critical perception of the EU's democracy supports in Bangladesh. EU's development assistance, governance support, electoral and technical support to Election Commission all are deemed as making big contribution to the country. However, they view that, the idea of the EU's democracy supports should go beyond (neoliberal view of) developmental, good governmental, civil societal, technical and electoral supports and see the democratic crisis in Bangladesh from political and educational perspective.

What the EU can do in democratizing Bangladesh is limited unless the change comes from within. However, as the EU tends to provide supports in this area, it can further consider

some areas of involvement in democracy support. It can invest its efforts in minimizing political differences between parties through sustained political debate since the parliament always remains dysfunctional as a space for debate between the government and the opposition. Local initiatives for such debate have seen frequent stumbling blocks. The EU, as the largest donor for the country, possesses enormous weight in making political parties be socialized with a culture of political dialogue and debate, be it closed-door or open to the media and public. Working directly with political parties and their supporters might be a part of that effort.

Moreover, political parties' behavior and attitude in how they regard popular will is a matter of concern. In accordance with CSO's proposal for a social contract, political parties can be encouraged to agree on a 'national charter' as a white paper for mutual renunciation of violence, hate politics, and full respect of democracy and human rights. Last but not least is to use education as a means of promoting democracy. Apart from people's representation by political parties, people's participation has been less emphasized. Their democratic awareness depends on their belief, values, norms and culture. Education has the potential to shape these with democratic aspiration in people's minds. The EU can emphasize on civic education more in EU country strategies. Democratization would see better result if people foster democracy in their spirit, in their content. That might follow from a good education policy in the country, even though the EU has little to do in this regard.

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Appendix

Interview List

Interviews	Interviewee	Affiliation	Interview Place	Date
Interview-1	Timothy Watson Boden	Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD)	Brussels, European Parliament	July 1, 2014
Interview-2	Michayl Christov	Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD)	Brussels, European Parliament	July 1, 2014
Interview-3	Nasrin Khandoker	Assistant professor,	Budapest, Central European	June 17, 2014.

		Department of Anthropology - Jahangirnagar University. Dhaka, Bangladesh	University.	
Interview-4	Faruk Wasif	Renowned columnist and Journalist	Prothom-alo Office, Dhaka	August 25, 2014
Interview-5	Abdullah al Mamun	Manusher Jonno Foundation and TV presenter	Dhanmondi, Dhaka	August 28, 2014
Interview-6	Anonymous	Associate Professor, Dhaka University & renowed civil society member	Hatirpool, Dhaka	September 5, 2013.

Interview Questionnaire

For the EU officials:

1. How you would situate the democracy and its support by the EU in broader EU foreign policy perspective?
2. When it comes to the non-EU developing country like Bangladesh, what kind of democracy does the EU expect in the country?
3. Why does the EU involve in promoting and in major instances materially supporting Bangladesh in democratization?
4. Despite the involvement of international community including the EU in last decades in mediating and assisting democratization, Bangladesh's democratic progress has been marred by unprecedented violence and breakdown of democratic institutions in recent years. Given that, how does the EU see the on-going democratic crisis in the country?
5. How does the EU recognize and accommodate the local specificities and uniqueness when it promotes democracy in Bangladesh?

For the CSO Members in Bangladesh:

1. what kind of democracy does Bangladesh need?
2. How do you think democracy support in general, and by the EU in particular?
3. Bangladesh's democratic progress has been marred by unprecedented violence and breakdown of democratic institutions in recent years. How would you assess the situation? How would you see the democratization activities in relation to that?
4. What are missing elements of democracy in the country?