



Rethinking the European Neighbourhood Policy



PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW IS UNDERWAY

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The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been surprised by two major events in recent years: the Arab Spring and the Ukraine crisis. Both events have shown the necessity and the limits of a functional ENP. During the past decade, the ENP has achieved much progress in democratic transformation and stabilization. This, however, has not attracted attention in the broader discussion on European security. The annual progress reports of the European Commission, as well as the overview of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) from 2007-2011, show an impressive record of activities and achievements. The enormous progress in political, economic and societal reforms, especially in Moldova, Georgia and Tunisia, have been overshadowed by the worsening situations in Syria, Libya, Ukraine and Egypt, the stalemate in Belarus, and Russia's aggressive policy toward its neighbors.

The “ring of friends” that the ENP should help create seems to have been transformed into a “ring of fire.” Nevertheless, until recently the European Union has turned a blind eye to the ENP's strategic implications for European security architecture. Rethinking the ENP in strategic terms is key to achieve the goal of establishing a ring of friends or getting as close as possible to sustainable stability in the neighborhood.

A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY?

In March 2015, the European Commission launched an open consultation and review of the ENP. This is the first step of the comprehensive review, which European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has asked the new commission to undertake within the first year of its tenure. The open consultation and review is a good opportunity to bring a strategic dimension into the ENP.

During its first decade, the ENP focused on the efforts of neighboring countries to transform and stabilize their economic and political systems and has placed little emphasis on the regional security environment. Conceptual flaws and incoherent implementation weakened the ENP. “Adjusting the ENP to the changing reality on the ground, sharpening its tools, and rebuilding its credibility” should be the priority of the revision process, according to scholar Stefan Lehne in a February 2014 Carnegie Europe article.

The Office of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission have devised a comprehensive set of questions that seeks to

“explore how the ENP can become a more effective vehicle for promoting both the EU's interests and those of its partners, and a framework more conducive to developing fuller partnerships in which both sides find their aspirations better reflected,” according to a Joint Consultation Paper. The identified shortcomings, conceptual flaws, inconsistencies and lessons learned are related to the concept of the neighborhood itself and the underlying assumption that all neighboring countries seek closer integration with the EU and thus are eager to pursue internal reforms. Neither assumption is valid any longer — if they ever were.



Lt. Gen. Alexander Lentsov, second left, representing Russia in the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination, other members of the center, and employees of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe walk through the battered airport in Donetsk, Ukraine, in April 2015. The European Neighbourhood Policy could help Ukraine work toward EU membership, bolstering Ukraine's security. REUTERS

The ENP does not include all EU neighbors. Russia is a “strategic partner” and has been excluded from the ENP. Western Balkan countries have been dealt with under the auspices of the stability pact and those seeking EU membership as candidate countries under EU enlargement policy. Turkey, as a candidate country with a long history of difficult relations with the EU, is also considered under enlargement policy. Relations with other neighboring countries such as Switzerland, Norway and Liechtenstein are as fellow European Free Trade Area members. Geographic proximity



A Libyan Coast Guard boat carrying African migrants arrives at a port in Misrata in May 2015. Libya, a European Neighbourhood Policy country, is dealing with thousands of migrants, mostly Africans but also Syrians, leaving Libya every day on rickety boats for Europe. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

to the EU is more or less the only characteristic that the 16 ENP countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East and North Africa have in common.

The false assumption that all countries of the ENP are seeking closer integration with the EU stems from the inception of the ENP. The ENP and its methodology were derived from the EU's enlargement policy. But accession is not part of the ENP package. Romano Prodi, once president of the European Commission, described ENP as "everything but institutions." So the approach has been doomed to fail from the beginning because it won't work for countries that do not want closer integration or association with the EU. For those countries that do want closer integration, it has been the main source of frustration owing to lack of prospective membership, or a "golden carrot."

Future discussions should focus not only on opportunities and limits, but also strategic implications of a new ENP. Rethinking the ENP in terms of security will give the EU a chance to overcome its two main conceptual flaws and reconsider the aspects of an incoherent implementation.

It might be that an "ENP 2.0" will be less a framework and enlargement policy "light" and more a tool in the context of a broader foreign security policy. The review should aim for a more assertive, differentiated, flexible, regional, political, security-related ENP, or in other words, a more strategic neighborhood policy. This description does not intend to put everything into the new ENP, but to sharpen its profile and its tools.

How can the profile and tools be sharpened? The European perspective and the neighborhood perspective need to be distinguished. Countries that want European integration and association should be covered by a different set of programs than those who do not. The neighborhood should

be differentiated according to region — Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East and North Africa.

OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITS

The High Representative of the EU and the European Commission stated recently in a paper: "Today's neighborhood is less stable than it was ten years ago." The ENP was introduced in 2004 under the heading of "Wider Europe" to stabilize the EU neighborhood. "A ring of stable democracies" or a "ring of friends" was its aim. The ENP is the EU's primary tool to give life to Article 8 of the Treaty of the European Union, which states: "The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighboring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighborliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation."

The main objectives of the ENP have been strengthening good governance, democracy, rule of law, civil society and a working free market economy by providing tailored programs and initiatives within the context of individual action plans, regional, neighborhood-wide and cross-border cooperation. Financial support of 11.2 billion euros was provided from 2007 to 2014, primarily within the framework of the ENPI. The ENPI is the successor of the cooperation programs, TACIS for Eastern European countries and MEDA for the Mediterranean rim countries. It was replaced by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) in January 2014. The ENI has approved funding of 15.4 billion euros for 2014-2020.

The 16 ENP countries are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia to the south, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to the east. Individual action plans negotiated

with 12 of the 16 countries have a strong economic bias, reflecting the desire of these countries for stronger economic ties with the EU. For 11 of 16 ENP countries, the EU is the most important economic partner and for the other five — Belarus, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria — it is the second most important.

Political cooperation, which mainly supported transformation processes and political reforms, has been much more difficult. The ENP has been based on the concept of jointness, conditionality and differentiation. The EU negotiated individually with each ENP country and each was involved in drafting its joint action plan, as well as in assessments of their implementation and progress. Nevertheless, conditionality has been applied to the economic and political sections of the action plans. The concept “more for more and less for less” was introduced into the ENP revision process following the Arab Spring in 2011. Conditionality has been applied inconsistently, and a real benchmarking process has not yet been successfully implemented. From 2004 to 2014, a different speed and a different level of cooperation and integration among the 16 countries emerged, making it difficult to talk about a single neighborhood policy when it’s actually more like 16 bilateral policies.

The ENP has two regional dimensions: the southern neighborhood, or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED), formerly known as the Barcelona Process; and the eastern neighborhood, or Eastern Partnership. These multilateral cooperation initiatives have not evolved into a working regional dimension of the ENP. After the Arab Spring in 2011, the EU launched the Partnership for Democracy and Prosperity to support countries in the southern neighborhood, particularly those in North Africa. It did not materialize into a real regional approach. The same can be said for the efforts of the Eastern Partnership, with its so-called road maps — the Prague, the Chisinau and the Vilnius road maps. In both cases, the regional dimension served more as a supportive or complementary element to bilateral relationships with the EU, and they have been more multilateral clusters than true regional partnerships.

A MORE STRATEGIC ENP

The keywords for a more strategic ENP are “differentiation” and “regional focus.” Some countries are interested in a closer relationship with the EU or desire EU membership, e.g. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, while others do not. The EU should consider and establish a more differentiated framework for these two groups. Additionally, the EU should sharpen the profile of its programs to support democratic reforms, human rights, justice and security sector reforms for those countries desiring a deeper EU relationship, preparing them for closer cooperation and integration. This would entail establishing three different clusters of bilateral relationships: (1) associated countries with further integration ambitions, (2) associated countries without further integration ambitions, and (3) non-associated countries. With this differentiation, the EU can improve its application of conditionality, “more for more and less for less.”

Protracted conflicts are part of the security environment in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. The EU needs to find

a way to deal with these within the framework of the ENP or determine how to use the ENP as part of its broader foreign and security policy. This will certainly require taking a more differentiated approach towards the regional focus of the ENP. The division into southern and eastern neighborhoods should be fundamentally reconsidered. Sharpening the profile of the southern and the eastern dimensions could give them more flexibility and more regional ownership.

In particular for the Eastern Partnership, a regional stability pact with a regional strategy should be considered. This would give the countries of the Eastern Partnership the opportunity to continue internal reforms, establish closer regional cooperation and develop a working regional infrastructure. This effort requires the EU to develop a more assertive policy toward Russia, but also requires cooperation with Russia in the long term. The regional dimension of the Eastern Partnership could be sharpened by establishing two subregional dimensions: an Eastern European cluster and a Caucasian cluster. This requires bringing Turkey into the Eastern Partnership. The ENP and its Eastern Partnership are not standalone efforts, but rather part of a broader EU foreign and security policy.

The southern dimension is also a complex issue that could be dealt with in a more differentiated, more focused and more flexible way. Splitting EUROMED into a North Africa cluster and a Middle Eastern cluster will place the focus more on important regional perspectives. It supports closer cooperation with the African Union, as well as with U.S. agencies dealing with African issues, and tackles transnational security issues like illegal migration, international terrorism and illicit trafficking. Building a Middle East cluster can improve cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as with the United States, Russia and Turkey, and could make the ENP part of the EU’s broader efforts to stabilize the Middle East.

What does this strategic approach mean? Maybe it’s time for variable geometry within the ENP. A focus on regional cooperation between North Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus requires bringing in neighboring countries that are not part of the ENP, but are neighbors of neighbors. The ENP must be integrated into a comprehensive European foreign and security policy, which would separate it from the EU’s enlargement policy. In organizational terms, the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the EU Commissioners for Enlargement and Development will share responsibility for the ENP.

CONCLUSION

Strategically rethinking the ENP means making it more differentiated and more regional. This new approach can improve “ENP 2.0” functionality, allowing it to adjust to the rapidly changing environment in the EU neighborhood, sharpen its tools and reestablish its credibility. The review of the new ENP should be closely linked to the revision of European foreign and security policy that is currently taking place, and possibly can lead to a new European security strategy. Making the ENP an integral part of the EU’s overall foreign and security policy makes sense as an EU comprehensive approach. □