

The european neighbourhood policy politics essay



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Because of the big-bang enlargement to the East, in May 2004 the European Union acquired ten new member states and simultaneously several new neighbours. At about the same time, it began to flesh out a European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to make sure that the newly enlarged Union would be surrounded by a " ring of friends".[1]Specifically, in March 2003 the Commission presented its Communication " Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", [2]followed by a Strategy Paper on the ENP in May 2004.[3]

In general, the ENP is the EU's mechanism for ensuring the maintenance of shared values beyond its borders. In other words, it provides the EU with additional tools for fostering new neighbours. It's objectives like stability, prosperity and co-operation help the EU to develop a privileged relationship with its neighbours while it also offers many other advantages to them, building upon a mutual commitment with them.

On the other hand, it must be underlined that the EU faces some daunting challenges in its relations with its neighbours. Because of this, not only the ENP's aim to bring some order to the EU's relations with its neighbours but

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also the effort to develop a privileged and mutual relationship between them, are prevented in a great extent. So, does the ENP really provide the suitable structure for dealing with the main challenges?

This essay will first present and analyse the substance of the ENP. It will then scrutinize its results and, finally it will criticize and evaluate the ENP taking into consideration the invectives that it offers and the challenges that the EU faces in its relations with its neighbours.

The substance of the ENP

The ENP framework is proposed to the 16 of EU's closest neighbours - Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. Russia has its own special relationship with the EU and it is not part of the ENP. More precisely, the ENP was developed in 2004, with the objective of avoiding new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all.[4]

The 2004 enlargement brought the EU closer to the east and as a result created an instant need to ensure that the wider neighbourhood was stable to avoid the risk of instability overflowing into the larger EU.[5]As the European Commission has noted: " Existing differences in living standards across the Union's borders with its neighbours may be accentuated as a result of faster growth in the new Member States than in their external neighbours; common challenges in fields such as the environment, public health, and the prevention of and fight against organised crime will have to

be addressed; efficient and secure border management will be essential both to protect our shared borders and to facilitate legitimate trade and passage.”[6]Moreover, the “ enlargement fatigue” was established and the EU wanted to fend off yet another round of enlargement. Hence, the ENP was launched to deal with all of these challenges.[7]

The ENP also includes the countries of the southern Mediterranean, though the dividing line between the EU and these countries was not shifted with the 2004 enlargement, and the problems posed by those borders have long been a concern. The southern Mediterranean countries were included in the ENP to balance the EU’s southern and eastern “ dimensions”, responding to concerns of southern member and non-member states.[8]

The ENP, which is primarily a bilateral policy between the EU and each partner country, is further enriched with regional and multilateral co-operation initiatives: the Eastern Partnership (launched in Prague in May 2009), the Union for the Mediterranean (the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, formerly known as the Barcelona Process, re-launched in Paris in July 2008), and the Black Sea Synergy (launched in Kiev in February 2008).[9]

The ENP is first and foremost an attempt to create good neighbours, who conform not only to EU values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development) but also the EU standards and laws in specific economic and social areas. A secondary aspect of the ENP is to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines as mentioned earlier, through a variety of means including more cross-border cooperation.[10]

Specifically, in attempting to stop the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe, the Commission has two broad approaches: firstly, to encourage and support financially the inclusion of the neighbours in European networks of all kinds such as transport, research and education, energy, environment, culture and so on and, secondly, to foster cross-border cooperation and specially concrete projects to link neighbouring regions across the EU's new border. The Commission is simplifying as well the funding of such programmes, which has been complicated.[11]

In this point, it must be mentioned that, the ENP remains distinct from the process of enlargement. However, it does not prejudice for European neighbours how their relationship with the EU may develop in future in accordance with Treaty provisions. According to the ENP framework, the EU offers "all but institutions" to the neighbours: as much it can do without actually enlarging.[12]

Plus, in early 2004 the Commission began preparing Actions Plans for the most advanced neighbours. The Action Plans are central to the ENP (12 of them were agreed) and they set out an agenda of political and economic reforms with short and medium-term priorities of 3 to 5 years. The ENP is not yet fully activated for Algeria, Belarus, Libya and Syria since those have not agreed Action Plans.[13]

The Action Plans are supposed to be differentiated according to the various neighbours' specific circumstances, and drawn up after held with each neighbour. Promoting 'joint ownership' of the plans should better ensure that the neighbours will meet the objectives set out in them. Each country

individually determines the nature and strength of its relationship with the EU.[14]In addition, other political objectives prominent in the Action Plans are cooperation in the fight against terrorism and on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and ensuring international justice through support for the International Criminal Court.[15]

Furthermore, from January 2007 the European Neighbourhood Policy and Strategic Partnership with Russian Federation are financed through a single instrument – the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). It is designed to target sustainable development and approximation to EU policies and standards – supporting the agreed priorities in the ENP Action Plans, as well as Strategic Partnership with Russia. In detail, it encourages economic integration and political cooperation between the EU and the neighbours, promotes sustainable development and poverty reduction, and addresses security and stability challenges posed by geographical proximity to the EU.[16]

The results of the ENP

The ENP has shown that it offers a solid basis for strengthening ties between the EU and its neighbours. It has opened the policy to all eastern and southern neighbours who share EU's commitments to democracy, open society and economic prosperity. And, as countries go further down the reform path more possibilities (more financial support, integration with the EU's internal market, participation in the EU's policies and programmes) for closer cooperation with the EU open up to them.[17]

Since the ENP policy was proposed, good progress has been made on developing and implementing the main instruments of the ENP – the presentation of 12 Country Reports, the adoption of 12 ENP Action Plans, implementation and monitoring through relevant subcommittees, adoption of a new instrument (Neighbourhood Investment Facility -NIF) to better provide assistance to these countries in support of the objectives agreed in the Action Plans.[18]

The NIF was established at the end of 2007 and it is a significant source of funding for the neighbourhood. The Facility funds projects of common interest focussing mainly on energy, environment and transport. A Governance Facility has been set up too. It provides additional support to countries that have made most progress in implementing governance reforms.[19]

Moreover, for the Financial Framework 2007-2013, about €12 billion in EU funding are available to support partner's reforms, an increase of 32% in real terms as compared to 2000-2006 Financial Framework. Until 31 December 2006, EU assistance to the countries of the ENP and to Russia was provided under various geographical programmes including TACIS (for eastern neighbours and Russia) and MEDA (for southern Mediterranean neighbours), as well as thematic programmes such as European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).[20]

Additionally, new forms of technical assistance have been extended to ENP partners. A large number of twinning and Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) arrangements, is in place with countries

across the neighbourhood.[21]Neighbourhood countries joined also the EU's programmes and agencies like the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.[22]

Furthermore, it must be stated that, to the east the reforming government of Moldova is being rewarded with generous aid. In the meantime, the EU has frozen assets and restricted visas for Belarus's leaders after they rigged elections and suppressed protests.[23]A border monitoring mission was also in place along the Moldovan-Ukraine border to help address the frozen conflict in Transnistria while an agreement on easier visa procedures for Ukrainian citizens and others was in the works.[24]

In May 2011 the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission suggested a new policy response to a changing EU neighbourhood based on " more for more, less for less", a mutual accountability and a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law and involving a much higher level of differentiation.[25]New policy's items are money, market access, and mobility. This approach has been authorized as well by the European Parliament and the European Council.[26]

The Economist justified the new policy as follows: " Policies should be better tailored for each neighbour. Europe cannot change geography, so it will have to deal with countries on its rim, democratic or autocratic. But in its circle of neighbours, it must always demonstrate that its best friends are the democrats".[27]Along this line, the EU responded to the Arab Spring and sent an obvious message of unity and support to the people of the southern

Mediterranean. Moreover, it responded to EU eastern neighbour's efforts towards closer political association and deeper economic integration.[28]

The evaluation of the ENP

Undoubtedly, the ENP should be seen as one of innovative efforts undertaken so far in the history of the European Communities' external relations. This exposes it to a great deal of controversy – in a vast diversity of opinions thereupon. Indeed, the ENP has been evaluated in most different ways, from very critical in which it is seen as an ineffective project, to statements saying that this is one of the EU's foreign policy that really works correctly.

If we take into account the aforementioned results of the ENP, we realize that it does promote good relations between the enlarged EU and its neighbours. It definitely has an interest in promoting prosperity, stability and security among its neighbours by working with them to support their transition. But what about the group of people who support that the ENP is an ineffective project? Why do they strongly believe it?

Those who believe that the ENP is an inadequate policy claim that the EU has to deal with three serious challenges: that of confronting the ghost of enlargement, which haunts EU relations with its neighbours, the challenge of influencing positively the serious problems distressing several of those neighbours and, that of building a neighbourhood with some degree of cohesiveness.[29]

The unavoidable consequences of admitting some countries to full membership of the EU and excluding others produce " insiders" and "

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outsiders". This dimension inside the ENP, make awkward bedfellows, especially given that east European countries are reluctantly seen as potential member states while the Mediterranean countries have not been considered appropriate for EU membership.[30]The hope of EU membership is a major incentive for reform amongst members.

As it has already been mentioned Europe's neighbourhood policy remains distinct from the process of enlargement as it offers countries " everything but institutions". And this does not mean as stated earlier that neighbourhood countries have no chance of being official members of the EU. For instance, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine could be considered as candidates for EU membership at some point in the future. All have experienced a democratization process and have moved away from the direct political influence of the Russian Federation.[31]

Nevertheless, these states represent a low priority on the enlargement agenda because of the likely impact on the EU's budget, the poor state of their economies, and the need to strengthen political reforms at home before considering accession. So, there is a large development gap between the EU and some potential members, which makes meeting membership conditions increasingly difficult. Thus, the EU is becoming more diverse.[32]

The second challenge facing the EU is how to deal with " countries of concern". Generally speaking, the challenges facing EU's neighbours often go beyond their borders. It is a fact that, the partner countries are faced with poverty, unemployment, mixed economic performance, corruption, weak governance and frozen conflicts in certain regions.[33]

Countries of concern include Belarus and Libya, but several other neighbours like Syria are also problematic mainly because of their lack of respect for human rights and democratic principles and, because of security concerns. Even more, the list of sites of conflict in the Middle East is tragically long. In this point, someone could wonder if the ENP gives the EU more leverage or more possibilities to exercise influence in these cases than it had before.[34]

For fostering fundamental reform in the neighbours, Action Plans should provide a real incentive for reform. The truth is that, clear benchmarks linked to clear benefits are being absent in Action Plans. There has to be a real effort so that Action Plans lend a serious concentration to the ENP and enable the focus to be on specific, measurable and time-bound objectives. [35]

The third challenge for the EU is how to connect the dissimilar countries and regions included in the ENP. " The ENP is a policy based on strengthening the bilateral links between the EU and each neighbour - a policy for neighbours rather than a neighbourhood policy. And while there is an undeniable need for reform in the neighbours, there is also an undeniable need for all the neighbours to cooperate with one another". In relation to this statement, we realize that strengthening the multilateral and/or regional elements in the ENP would help to tackle not just the cross-border problems that affect the EU but also those that affect all of the neighbours.[36]

Additionally, some analysts consider that the new policy to a changing EU neighbourhood after the emergence of the Arab Spring, based on more economic benefits for more democracy with the new policy's items (money,

market access, and mobility) is not bold enough to make an important difference.[37]Regarding money, at times of austerity there is no more for foreign-policy aims while concerning markets, many north African countries already enjoy free trade in industrial goods, and the southern Europeans want to restrict some agricultural products. As for mobility, with anti-immigrant parties gaining ground, few governments are ready to open up to north Africans.[38]

There is little doubt that the Arab awakening was a priority for European foreign policy in 2011. Europe used a collection of instruments, including active diplomacy, special envoys, sanctions and military action. However, its technocratic response fell dramatically short of " Marshall Plan" for which some initially called.[39]Plus, the Arab Spring has shed light on the close personal and business ties between governing elites in EU member states and their Mediterranean counterparts. For example, France's Foreign Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie was forced to resign due to public outrage over her links to the ousted Ben Ali regime in Tunisia.[40]In 2008, the EU tried to negotiate an association agreement with Libya and earmarked €60mIn in ENPI funds to the country over the 2011-2013 period.[41]

To sum up, in the south the promotion of democracy and the rule of law has been an illusion. Arab neighbours have no the ambition of " returning" back to Europe while eastern neighbours, know that the EU is not ready to expand beyond the Balkans. Without the lure of membership, the EU struggles to find effective foreign-policy.

Conclusions

The ENP is a useful policy promoting stability, prosperity, welfare and security in the post 2004 era between the EU and its neighbours. But is the ENP sufficient to deal with the aforesaid challenges? This challenge is undoubtedly enormous and requires more ambitious policy response. Not only should the ghost of enlargement be vanished but also the serious problems distressing several of the neighbours. Furthermore, the EU should try hard through the ENP to build a neighbourhood with some degree of cohesiveness.

As we all know, on 12 October 2012 the Nobel Prize Committee decided to award the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union for over six decades' contribution to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. Although the EU is at present undergoing serious economic difficulties and considerable social unrest the award served as a reminder that the EU had largely brought peace to a continent which tore itself apart in two world wars in which tens of millions died. According to this, the EU should focus on what it sees as the EU's most important result: the successful struggle for peace and reconciliation and for democracy and human rights.

No one would disagree that one way for the EU to enforce its struggles for achieving the aforementioned goals, is through the ENP. It is an ambitious policy, which has the potential to make an enormous difference to the prosperity and stability of both the EU and its neighbours. So, the EU has to strengthen the ENP in order to provide concrete and credible incentives for reform. Hence, a strong ENP has to be set out. The vision contained in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-european-neighbourhood-policy-politics-essay/>

ENP - the real and mutual relation of EU to its nearest friends and vice versa
- should be a reality for the stability and wealth of both.