

PART 4: EU NEIGHBOURHOOD: A RENEWED OPPORTUNITY

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SYNTHESIS

The policies devised by the European Union to deal with its neighbourhood, and in particular the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), have been characterised by a **Euro-centric vision as well as a defensive attitude**. While the Arab Spring should have led EU policy-makers to substantially revise existing policies, the 2011 ENP revision resulted in a rather formalistic exercise, failing to significantly alter the paradigm governing EU action in the region. A strategic overview of the EU's relations with its neighbours instead calls for an authentic paradigm shift making up for the diminishing attractiveness of the EU model in the region and coupled with greater strategic engagement of other powers both within the region and beyond.

1. An ever less appealing EU

As a result of the conjunction between the euro area crisis and the Arab Spring, the EU's role as a model for candidate countries as well as for its neighbours, is rapidly being eroded. The collapse of the EU as a model for third countries is, possibly, most prominent amongst ENP countries that are not presented with a membership perspective. Viewing and dealing with Eastern and Southern neighbours through the lens of the EU model has so far not brought about significant results: the EU has applied enlargement-lite principles and instruments to its relations with neighbours rather than understanding and

effectively managing the expectations of its partners, most of whom are simply not interested in entering into this kind of a relationship with Brussels.

2. The quest for a new regional paradigm

Pursuing a policy of continuity, **the EU has limited itself to reinforcing the principles upon which the ENP has always been based, first amongst which, conditionality.** However, this mechanism, whilst resulting highly successful when applied to enlargement policy, has only worked to a limited extent in the case of neighbouring countries – with the main exception being Moldova. More so, this tendency has been reinforced as the EU has seen its appeal deteriorate among neighbouring countries. Besides, while the 2011 ENP revision called for a more rigorous implementation of both positive and negative conditionality (clear benchmarks of evaluation for partners' performance are yet to be disclosed), a more general reflection on conditionality points to the mechanism's unsuitability in regulating the EU's relations with its neighbours, and particularly so with respect to the Southern Mediterranean countries affected by the Arab Spring. In principle, conditionality can be best applied to countries that have experienced a regime change, or that are going through an endogenous process of reforms. However, in these same countries the awareness that the political change has been triggered from within and not from outside is likely to generate a negative reaction towards the application of conditionality. On the contrary, where authoritarian regimes continue to have the upper hand, like in Algeria or in the Gulf countries, the EU is either unable or unwilling to use (negative) conditionality. Negative conditionality (less-for-less) can be very useful in order to punish gross human rights violations but is unlikely to be of much benefit in order to incentivise specific reform initiatives, or even prevent a democracy reversal.

3. Strategic engagement of regional and external powers in the EU neighbourhood

The EU is also facing the **emergence or re-emergence of other regional and external powers in its vicinity**, most notably Turkey, Russia, the Gulf States and China. So far, the EU has tended to either attempt to compete with

or neglect the geopolitical impact of these powers in its neighbourhood. It is time for the EU to adopt a more proactive and cooperative strategy in its neighbourhood, aimed at seizing opportunities rather than defending itself from real or perceived threats. In particular, it should develop concrete and visible joint policies engaging not only governments but also businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in a dialogue with the EU.

The Turkish accession process needs to be revitalised. Yet beyond the current stalemate, it is imperative for the EU to explore areas in the neighbourhood where the EU and Turkey respectively have a comparative advantage, identifying thus opportunities for developing fruitful joint initiatives. The most solid foundation of Turkey's influence in the Arab world is the widespread sympathy it disposes of on the Arab street. A successful modernisation and democratisation (although still in progress), undertaken by a post-Islamist party, has created in the eyes of Arab societies an image of Turkey as a source of inspiration. The EU should turn this trust capital into a complementary tool to support reform in the Arab world. Turkey can also provide a model for modernisation in more than one business sector. In turn, the EU is to take the lead with regard to the involvement of civil society.

Cooperation with Russia is certainly more difficult, as the worldview of the two actors is very different, possessing divergent and even competing ideas regarding how their common neighbourhood should develop. However non-engagement is not an option. Looming problems such as the so-called frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus may only be tackled through the involvement of all regional actors, amongst which Russia clearly plays a pivotal role. In addition, spaces for the cooperation of civil societies need to be explored. The most important task for the EU is to try to build trust with Russia, potentially by initiating joint small-scale projects in their shared neighbourhood.

4. Policy recommendations

The EU needs a new comprehensive and strategic approach for the ENP that is able to look beyond the short-term constraints imposed by the internal economic crisis and address its increasingly unstable neighbourhood more proactively. Simultaneously creating and reaping mutually beneficial

opportunities must be the guiding principle of a renewed EU strategy in the region as opposed to the mere tackling of security challenges stemming from the area.

Particularly in the Mediterranean, the Arab Spring has been disconnected from issues such as the Middle East peace process, reflecting a missed opportunity for the EU to re-think its approach to this and other regional issues. The potential for spillover is considerable and clinging onto old realities no longer makes sense in the new context. (*H. Amirah Fernández, Elcano & T. Behr, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute – p. 215*)

The EU should now concentrate on:

4.1. A full use of article 8 TEU

The compulsory and all-encompassing engagement of the Union in its neighbourhood, as foreseen in Article 8 TEU, should become much more prominent in political discourse, notably at the level of the Commission/HR initiatives. The Commission should produce (possibly jointly with the EEAS) a Communication highlighting the mandatory formulation of Article 8 TEU on the ENP, exposing thus the full potential of the article and informing discussion among institutional actors as to what the EU is expected to achieve through its neighbourhood competence. (*C. Hillion, SIEPS – p. 204*)

4.2. A strengthened coordination and cooperation between the ENP bodies and institutions to ensure coherence

A Commissioner for (Enlargement and) Neighbourhood that is also a deputy to High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy could be appointed in the next 2014 Commission. He/she would be assisted by the whole network of services in charge of the neighbourhood policy, including the relevant geographical Managing Directorates. (*C. Hillion, SIEPS – p. 204*)

4.3. A revision of conditionality

The prospect of the EU attempting to “shape” the emerging democracies in the Southern Mediterranean through leverage is inherently problematic and could

backfire if mismanaged. EU public diplomacy needs to become more forceful and direct, especially with countries like Jordan and Morocco which are most likely to listen. The implementation of benchmarks – concrete political and policy issues with measurable criteria the partners have to fulfil in order to become more deeply integrated with the Union – indeed represent one of the weakest achievements of the EU's policy towards the neighbours. Aiming at an effective leverage of mutually agreed principles of transparency, inclusiveness of the policy dialogue and democratic standards, the EU should not hesitate to use freezing of its funding as a stick; particularly in those partner countries lacking resources this strategy has already proved successful in a number of cases. (*L. Najšlová & V. Řiháčková, Europeum & O. Shumylo-Tapiola, Carnegie Europe – p. 225; H. Amirah Fernández, Elcano & T. Behr, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute – p. 215*)

4.4. Engaging with civil society

The economically struggling EU needs to concentrate its efforts on involvement with civil society – which is perceived by its partners to be its strongest point – focusing thus on a number of very narrowly defined objectives, notably freedom of speech. Encouraging elected leaders to engage in dialogue with non-state actors is exactly the niche in which the Union can and should do more to amplify the voice of non-state actors acting in the public interest. In its dialogue with partner governments, the EU should emphasise that support comes only for projects for which such groups have been previously consulted. (*H. Amirah Fernández, Elcano & T. Behr, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute – p. 215; L. Najšlová & V. Řiháčková, Europeum & O. Shumylo-Tapiola, Carnegie Europe – p. 225*)

4.5. Strategic cooperation with Turkey in the common neighbourhood and particularly in the Mediterranean

The EU should launch specific forms of cooperation with Turkey to achieve shared objectives in their common neighbourhood. While assertively engaging with both Brussels and Ankara to find a solution to the Cyprus problem, the EU and Turkey should strategically, and not only occasionally, converge their policies towards the region, with a special focus accorded to the post-Arab Spring Mediterranean countries (*M. Comelli, IAI – p. 197; A. Balcer, demosEUROPA*

– p. 236). The feasibility of a progressive opening of the EU-Turkey customs union to other neighbours could be investigated. The customs union is more limited than deep and comprehensive access to the EU's Single market, but as in the case of Turkey, it can more promptly play a decisive role in the economic transformation of the region and boost intra-regional trade. (*H. Amirah Fernández, Elcano & T. Behr, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute – p. 215; A. Balcer, demosEUROPA – p. 236*)

4.6. Engaging Russia

The engagement of Russia seems to be a more daunting task yet the EU has no other option. In particular, specific forms of cooperation should also be launched for the resolution of the frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. In addition, the Common Spaces dialogue should be revamped to serve as a forum for constructive exchange between officials and working groups of ministry officials from different levels of middle management; yet the official track has to be accompanied by a strengthened outreach to Russian society rather than being uniquely state-centred. The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was a small step in a good direction, but much more can be done to build confidence and create networks. Partnerships between municipalities and schools, student exchanges and trilateral projects with East European partners perhaps will not be game changers in the short-term, but are a *conditio sine qua non* for the successful implementation of EU's goals in the East. In addition, the newly forged customs union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and its potential power of attraction should lead the EU to re-evaluate its policies in the region in the light of the apathy of Eastern neighbours towards the EU. (*M. Comelli, IAI – p. 197; L. Najšlová & V. Řiháčková, Europeum & O. Shumylo-Tapiola, Carnegie Europe – p. 225*)