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Ideas in ENP: conflicting visions and interests of ENP: the partner-countries*

Abstract: From its onset, the ENP has been subject to a diversity of conflicting visions, expectations and interests of parties involved in this novel and broad policy-framework. Originating in economic and political pragmatism, these conflicting visions and interests weigh heavily on the efficiency of the ENP implementation. Overall however, the ENP partner-countries seem to agree in one respect, i.e. a criticism towards the EU and the rationale behind the launch and the modes of the implementation of the ENP. By dwelling on the ENP partner-countries' positions and interests with regard to the ENP, the objective of this paper is to highlight that issue.

Keywords: ENP, EU, partner-countries, economic and political pragmatism, interests

Introduction

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) covers numerous countries from Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, North Africa and the Middle East which are very diverse and heterogeneous. Thereupon it results in a variety of visions and expectations towards the ENP. Some of the countries strive to achieve closer economic benefits without any readiness for EU membership, others seek to attain an accession

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to the EU which is to be accompanied by successful socio-economic reform and systemic transformation. Instead, the EU expresses its willingness to engage with selective ENP members much more on the basis of close association than on the membership. These approaches raise many problems among the ENP partners which in turn leads to the criticism of the programme and a negative opinion about the EU.

Different attitudes towards the ENP, both among the ENP partner-countries and the EU members, stem from pragmatic sources, which in consequence contributes to the lack of impetus in the entire ENP programme. As a result, there is a growing negative assessment of the outcomes of the ENP programmes among the ENP partners and political disappointment with the EU as a global actor. Additionally the widespread criticism towards the initiative is a consequence of the fact that most of the countries covered by the ENP have gone into a grave geopolitical situation, i.e. the Mediterranean partner-countries have experienced the turmoil of the Arab Spring and the Eastern neighbours have again found themselves in the orbit of particular interests of Russia, the apogee of which is the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine. Additionally many of the partners have never agreed with the proposed “neighbourhood” formula and its scope and have failed to make substantial progress in economic, social and political modernisations under the assumption of the ENP programme.

The objective of this paper is to examine the partner-countries’ various positions and interests with regard to the ENP. The paper focuses on the expectations and reservations related to the ENP in various partner-countries. To this end, in the first part of this paper the general geopolitical overview of the ENP is presented. Then, the argument turns to the partner-countries’ approaches towards the ENP. It is followed by an overview of the partner-countries’ conflicting visions of the ENP. Conclusions ensue.

1. The geopolitical overview of the ENP

The ENP partner-countries diverge in almost every aspect of their political and socio-economic stance. They differ in the level of economic development as well as historical and cultural background. This difference can also be noted in both the expectations regarding

relations with the EU and the perception of those relations. The 16 ENP countries have not very much in common, except several key features. One of them is the geographic proximity to the EU. However geographical closeness in itself is a weak argument to the importance of the mutual relations. Good neighbouring relations with the EU are a much more important factor in a strategic decision-making process taken by the partners. Most of the partners would prefer to hold individual relations with the EU than depend on the cooperation with other countries. This is particularly visible in the Mediterranean states. Due to their long-term historical and cultural relations with Western European countries, they seek to maintain individual relations with the EU based on aid programmes and development assistance. This is also true in the case of the Eastern neighbours except for those aspiring to the EU membership.

The EU approach to its neighbourhood has often been characterised as a Eurocentric attitude where the partners' interests are neglected and the needs ignored. The concept which the ENP was based on assumes that the partner-countries share the "same values and interests" as the EU member states. This conviction creates the belief that the neighbours should easily adhere to principles such as social cohesion, the rule of law, and respect of human rights.¹ It is very hard to accept, especially for the Mediterranean countries, that the driving force of their evolution and modernisation might come from outside on a "carrot and stick" policy approach. In their opinion, the method applied in the ENP shows that the ENP favours the Eastern European neighbours rather than the Southern Mediterranean.²

The above mentioned approach is different from the position represented by the Eastern partners. Nevertheless, there are growing disparities even among the countries with geographical proximity. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) encompasses three South-Caucasus states plus Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. Admittedly, most of them strive to build a closer and substantive relationship with the EU, how-

1 Sz. Jagiełło, *A European Neighborhood Policy: A Decade Later*, "Eyes on Europe", 18 November 2014, <http://www.eyes-on-europe.eu/the-european-neighborhood-policy-enp-a-decade-later/>

2 R. A. Del Sarto, T. Schumacher, *From EMP to ENP: What's at Stake with the European Neighborhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean*, "European Foreign Affairs Review", 2005, no. 10, p. 17-18.

ever, the ENP does not match the most ambitious interests of these states.³ The EU has not sent a clear message about eventual accession of these countries, which makes them feel uncertain and confused. Georgia clearly considers the ENP as a path towards the European integration while Moldova and Ukraine have slightly changed the positions in the course of time. Armenia has developed a rather pragmatic approach with a clear focus on economic cooperation. Azerbaijan has also much more limited expectations towards the ENP as the country attaches greater importance to the cooperation with Russia and Central Asian neighbours.⁴

However, countries with a perspective of future membership perceive the EU's promises as too little. An incentive of accession would be a much more powerful force to reform than a blurred perspective on EU's enlargement dispensed in symbolic doses.⁵ While certain member states, namely from Central Europe, believe that Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova should be given a perspective for future membership, a number of other states, mainly from the "old" Europe, are sceptical and reserved. For instance, a country like Moldova is very much interested in a closer cooperation with the Union as it is very much dependent on its financial assistance as well as trade relations and considers the EU as a main destination of its job seekers. Other states from the Eastern Partnership do not share the same attitude as Moldova. For Azerbaijan, the EU is one of its many trading partners and Armenia has recently opted for Euro-Asian customs union with Russia.

When it comes to the ENP's Eastern dimension, Russia has the biggest impact on the neighbouring countries. Despite the fact that Moscow is not a formal partner-country within the ENP framework, its foreign policy has very much influenced Eastern partners' interests and their political position. Russia's attitude towards the ENP and its Eastern dimension has very quickly appeared very hostile and aggressive. All partner-countries with the most advanced institutional relation-

3 S. Lehne, *Time to Reset the European Neighborhood Policy*, Carnegie Europe, February 2014, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/publications/?fa=54420>, p. 7.

4 L. Delcour, *Bringing South Caucasus Closer to Europe – Achievements and Challenges in ENP Implementation*, "Natolin Research Papers", 03/2011, p. 11.

5 Ibidem.

ships with the EU have been the subject to Russian threats, political and economic sanctions. Russia has asserted pressure on the countries to withdraw from the cooperation with the EU and to choose the Euro-Asian customs union under its leadership. When the EU completed the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DFCTA) with Ukraine, Russia decided to react and convinced Kiev to shift the course of its policy. The Russian steps led to mass proceedings in the Ukrainian Eastern territory and the previous military accession of Crimea to Russia led to the destabilisation of the Ukrainian Eastern regions, not to mention the intimidation of the other states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus.

The ENP partner-countries have been very much influenced by the developments in North Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, especially in countries which were not included in the ENP. For example, the coercive operations undertaken by the ISIS in Iraq have had negative repercussions on Syria and Jordan; countries that anyway have always perceived the ENP as a programme which puts tough requirements in terms of reforms and modernisation and offers too little in return.⁶ Each of the partner-countries both from the Southern and Eastern partnership prefers developing its relations with the EU on a bilateral basis rather than jointly with others. Unfortunately most of the partner-countries have so far made little progress in reforms, modernisation and integration with the EU. Since the inception of the ENP in 2004, no substantial progress has been achieved with regard to their democratisation, free market or civil society development. Overall, the majority of the countries concerned were disappointed with the ENP objectives. The EU's propositions and recommendations matched neither their needs nor political and economic circumstances. Most of the countries have not been prepared to bear the cost of modernisation, especially when they faced deteriorating economic and social conditions. Overall, the EU's power of attraction in the region has dwindled affecting the ENP's efficiency. That is further influenced by the fact that several other actors have been involved in the region, including the US, Turkey, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Their engagement with the developments

6 Sz. Jagiełło, *A European Neighborhood Policy*.

in the region reduces the relative power of the EU. Last but not least, the credibility of the EU's involvement in the region as hence the efficiency of the ENP, have been undermined by the perception that the EU had lost its interest in the ENP owing to the Eurozone crisis.

2. The ENP in crisis

The ENP was established in 2004 with the aim of helping selected countries from Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Northern Africa to enhance political and economic cooperation with the EU. It was conceived just after the EU enlargement in 2004 to avoid pressure on putting new borders between the countries which found themselves 'in' and 'out' of the club. The EU decided to set the tone for the long-standing dialogue by deepening institutional relations and giving greater emphasis to bilateral cooperation with each neighbouring country. The EU's offer was based on two pillars. First, it is the EU political and economic engagement pledged to increase funds within the ENP programmes. Second, it was to be a platform for better economic and political cooperation between the EU as a whole and the partner-countries. The aim was to establish a mechanism that would enable the EU to pursue common European positions and policies towards the neighbouring regions.

The main objective of the ENP was to avoid new barriers after the EU expansion in 2004 and 2007. The whole enlarged EU had an interest to promote stability and good political and economic relations with its neighbouring countries. However, some of the neighbours wanted to aspire to the EU membership, which rendered EU response to the issue. The subsequent enlargement of the EU was not at stake, however, some other incentives seemed to be vital. It was the EU power that attracted the partners. Additionally, the partnership was built on the principle of "joint ownership", which entailed substantial engagement both of the EU and the partner-country in determining objectives and tasks of the policy. The key point was the EU appeal and credibility that let the partners think about their changes and modernisation.

The ENP partners differ in almost every respect, from their level of social and economic development to security and political situation. They also differ in their approach to the outcomes of the ENP

and the matter it pursues. The general line runs between the partner-countries which are very keen on future membership and these which do not aspire to become EU members. The first group gathers states which primarily belong to the EaP with several exceptions. The second group of countries does not expect the enlargement of the EU but they rely on closer economic and political relationships with European members based on greater financial assistance and open access to the European market. From the Europeans, they expect to open up the market for their goods and greater access to labour.

Both the Southern and Eastern partners perceive each other as rivals as they strive to meet the ENP requirements, particularly with regard to receiving financial assistance. The EU's Mediterranean partners would prefer to be in a different initiative than together with their counterparts from Eastern Europe. Drawing on a tradition of closer economic relations with the EU, the Mediterranean neighbours do not like to share the same cooperation platform with their Eastern neighbours. In their view, a single inclusive approach to both of them may not be applied simultaneously.

3. The Southern Mediterranean perspective

3. The Southern Mediterranean partner-countries perceive the ENP with an undisguised reserve. They had reproached the Europeans for not organising consultations with the Southern partners before the ENP was launched. They felt overlooked because the project was designed especially for Central and Eastern Europe and then it was extended to the South Mediterranean countries at the last minute.⁷ First of all they object to the ENP instrument which speaks of sharing European values and expresses the approach based on the European hegemony. The conditionality underpinning the ENP appears to Southern partners as a mechanism which makes the impolite pupil set back on the right bank. The post-colonial stigma in-

7 L. Boumghar, *The Algerian Position on the European Neighborhood Policy*, "Geographical Overview" Institut National d'Études de Stratégie Globale (INESG), Algiers, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2013, <http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/anuari/iemed-2013/Boumghar%20Algeria%20ENP%20EN.pdf>, p. 1-3.

fluences the current South-North relations and makes the Southern partners very much responsive to relations with European counterparts. It correlates strictly to their sensitivity in relation to sovereignty and interference. Despite the critics, Mediterranean partners have accepted an argument of conditionality, which means that when human rights are violated, the Association Agreement with a partner-country may be suspended.

Although the initiative seems to be needed and fills some gap in mutual relations, the Southern partners have expressed serious reservation concerning the merit of the ENP, which assumes European financial assistance and deepening economic cooperation to be proportional to the progress made in areas such as human rights, rule of law and civil society's development. Instead, the partners would prefer the EU to consider the problems like management of migration or signing a readmission agreement than to deal with domestic issues related to democratisation processes. In the view of the Southern partners, democratic changes are the results of internal demand that should be handled domestically without any international pressure.⁸

Reservation towards the ENP is reflected by the long-lasting process of establishing a free trade area between the EU and the Mediterranean countries. The latter see the initiative as imbalanced due to their inferior economic position and the mono-export oriented markets. The asymmetry stems from the fact that the EU is the main commercial partner for most Southern Mediterranean countries, whilst the importance of partners covered by the FTA is much smaller for the Europeans. After the years of implementation, many concerns have arisen around the FTA which are related to misallocation of resources and trade diversion, fiscal unsustainability of tariff cuts, rising unemployment associated with eventual deindustrialisation in the short.⁹

Prior to the 2004 enlargement, the EU had an institutional framework for closer economic and political cooperation with Mediterranean countries which was known as the Barcelona Process. The initiative

8 Ibidem.

9 A. Lorca, G. Escribano, *The Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area: From Competition to Integration*, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/CAFRAD/UNPAN013747.pdf>, p. 9.

was set up in 1995 with a very ambitious targets of democratisation, security and economic growth for the Mediterranean countries together with an unrealistic objective like making peace in the Middle East. After a few years, it became clear that it was a yawning gap between the ambitious objectives of the political programme and the huge obstacles that stood on the way to reaching them. On the other hand, the accession of Central and East European countries in 2004 and 2007 has shifted external frontiers of the EU far to the East, which intensified the interest of the EU in that area. The idea of that time was to combine two dimensions of the EU external policy which resulted in establishing a new policy framework covering both East neighbours and the Southern Mediterranean partners. On the one hand, the Europeans asserted the partner-countries they were going to share “everything but institutions,”¹⁰ which meant that they were to be treated almost as members. On the other hand, a number of visions and interests of each member state of the EU have almost precluded the EU from pursuing coherent policy within the ENP.

4. The Eastern perception of the ENP

• The partner-countries from Eastern Europe are also disappointed with the Eastern policy of the EU. In their general opinion, the EU does not meet their expectations concerning both the economic relations and accession’s aspirations. Taking into account deteriorating economic conditions, they are not very much willing to bear significant costs of transformation and integration with the EU, particularly when the ultimate goal of such a relationship has not been clearly defined.¹¹ Despite declarations about “co-ownership” of the ENP initiative, the partner-countries do not perceive the EU model of mutual relations as their own project and actions taken by the EU under the ENP are not agreed jointly with the partner-countries. Therefore,

10 R. Prodi, *A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability*, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm, declared “we will share everything but institutions”.

11 R. Sadowski, *Partnership in Times of Crisis. Challenges for the Eastern European Countries’ Integration with Europe*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warszawa 2013, p. 9.

the general positions towards the initiative depend mostly on the current political and economic situation in the regions as well as the short-term interest of governments and local politicians.¹²

Countries covered by the EaP initiative do not share the same vision of relations with the EU as their Western partners. There are two groups of countries for which cooperation with the EU means different objectives to be met. For instance, interests of Belarus and Azerbaijan are focused on economic cooperation with the EU, which means better access to European market and technology transfer. They treat their relations with the EU instrumentally by balancing between the EU and Russia. They count on substantial benefits and instead they have done no progress in economic and political liberalisation. Belarus is engaged in issues that do not endanger the power of the ruling regime, such as border security, while avoiding cooperation in potentially dangerous areas, such as closer political relations or economic integration. In Azerbaijan current political establishment is much more committed in relation with Russia than with the EU. Nevertheless, mutual relations are based mainly on energy cooperation, which is seen as a priority for the EU. Belarus and Azerbaijan are engaged in economic integration with Russia within the framework of a customs union.

The second group of the countries consists of Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Armenia. Their priority in relations with the UE is accession. The problem is that the EU does not guarantee them membership in the nearest future, which consequently leads to weakening of the partner's engagement in the process of integration. Therefore, due to the changing circumstances some of them lose their pro-European enthusiasm. Additionally, financial crisis in the Eurozone has shown the ENP partners that the European model of development is not the only option available for them. A competitive project has arisen under the leadership of Russia which offers deeper economic and political cooperation under the Eurasian union.

The dilemma of having good relations with Russia while at the same time pursuing cooperation with the EU is one of the biggest challenges that Eastern partner-countries are facing. The vast majority of those countries seek to develop good relations with Western Europe, while

12 Ibidem, p. 28.

at the same time they maintain good relations with Russia. That is, they seem to benefit both from the EU and Moscow. Due to their close economic and political ties with Russia they are afraid of the deterioration of their mutual relations, which may result in economic and political sanctions. The exception is Georgia and Moldova whose politicians have occasionally expressed their independence from Russian influences. Nevertheless, they are also forced to pursue cautious policy towards Russia.

The lack of clearly defined policy objectives under the ENP has led to the situation in which politicians from the partner-countries treat the EU instrumentally and near-sightedly. Political leaders have often used their relations with the EU to strengthen their political position and to get short-term economic gains. According to R. Sadowski, the widening discrepancy between the objective of integration and the timeframes of possible accession makes the politicians from the partner-countries less interested in achieving the final goal which is the integration with the EU. Moreover, additional costs associated with introducing economic and social reforms do not encourage them to take this kind of actions.¹³

Conclusions: Conflicting visions towards the ENP

From the very outset, the ENP has been accompanied by a number of visions and conflicting interests among the partner-countries. The perception of the ENP both from the Southern and Eastern wing is not homogenous. The diversity of perceptions is determined by different interests of the partner-countries. What is common to those perceptions is a common criticism against the way of the ENP's implementation. It is about the effectiveness of the European approach towards its neighbours which refers to interpretations and misinterpretations of the EU motives for launching and conducting its policies in the partner-countries.

However, the partners from the Southern and the Eastern dimension view the ENP differently. The Southern partner-countries perceive the EU activities in the region as a hurdle that hinders their manoeu-

¹³ Ibidem, p. 32.

vres, while the Eastern partners consider the European engagement as insufficient which may not give them a guarantee for EU accession.¹⁴ The way the ENP is seen by the partner-countries varies considerably. In the Mediterranean countries, except for Israel, EU membership is not taken into account, while the EU involvement in domestic affairs is perceived negatively. In most cases (i.e. Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan and Syria) European concern of domestic affairs is strongly criticised not only by the governments, but also by the representatives of civil society.¹⁵ By contrast, partners from the Eastern Partnership initiative criticise the EU for deficient engagement within the ENP and the lack of a key message about the EU's eastward enlargement. Those attitudes prevail especially in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. The most difficult partner-countries to qualify are the Palestinian Authority and Belarus. Israel is another exception. It has good long-standing political and economic relations with the EU. However, for the reason of security and geopolitical situation its rapprochement with the EU is quite difficult.

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14 A. Bendick, *The ENP. Visibility and Perception in the Partner Countries*, “Working Paper”, Research Unit EU External Relations, StiftungWissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 23 April, 2008, p. 4.

15 *Ibidem*, p. 11.

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