

Zuzana Novakova

A New Strategy for Europe's 'Near Abroad'?

Review of the EU Neighbourhood Policy in wider context

Background

The renewal of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), published on 18 November, comes with little surprise. The policy has been in place for over a decade, revisited after each larger wave of transitional openings in the regions to Europe's East and South. Yet another renewal has been the key task entrusted to the Commissioner for Neighbourhood upon taking his mandate a year ago. With the first year of new EU leadership in place facing a series of humanitarian, security and political crises - from the echoes of Arab spring and destabilization of the Middle East and North Africa on the one hand, to Russia's aggression in the shared space of Eastern neighborhood on the other - this context represents a historical opportunity for rethinking the EU's paradigm of engagement in the region.

The last eleven years witnessed several revolutions, a coup d'état, several open wars and persisting frozen conflict. Over the last year Brussels remained relatively open to a frank debate on the failures of its neighbourhood policy in "strengthening stability, security and well-being for all"¹. A growing acknowledgement that the policy's main aim of establishing a ring of friends has not been attained, a turmoil in the regions which the EU describes as its neighbourhood, plus fundamental changes in the nature of challenges and in EU's ambition in response to the context in flux. The European Commission and European External Action Service were tasked with

1 European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper, COM(2004) 373 final, Brussels, 12.5.2004.

an uneasy dilemma: how to offer a rethink of engagement within the existing framework for relations?

The interdependence between the EU and its neighbours has never been so tangible. Nonetheless the recent events from the refugee crisis to the Paris attacks, further highlight the division lines between the member states themselves in a situation where the EU continues to reactively muddle through amid series of domestic and international crises. The renewed ENP could perhaps be best read in this context. What has surely been different this time was the procedure: the (public) consultation process, a rather unique approach to the inclusion of stakeholders' views in formulation of what is to become part of foreign policy strategy. The active engagement of European External Action Service which took a leading role in this process was also novel for post-Lisbon's Union. Both are nevertheless merely procedural innovations on the EU's side. The innovation on the level of ideas and strategy remains rather limited.

The result is a relatively unsurprising document, guided by the rhetoric of increased attention to interests on both sides of the partnership, while slightly toning down the ambitious language of fostering reforms and democracy which characterized the last renewal of the policy in the immediate aftermath of Arab Spring². Stepping up the

2 A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean, Joint Communication to European Council, European Parliament, Council, European Economic and social committee and Committee of Regions, COM(2011)200, Brussels, 8.3.2011.

security cooperation, including neighbours of the neighbours, provisions for more flexibility and ownership and

increased attention to prevention of radicalization represent the main inputs from this rethinking exercise.

Table 1: The Evolution of ENP Strategies*

	2003 WIDER EUROPE PAPER	2004 STRATEGY PAPER	2006 STRATEGY PAPER	2009 EASTERN PARTNERSHIP LAUNCH	2011 REVIEW	2015 REVIEW
Impulses and Ideas	Dealing with consequences of 2004 enlargement; and avoiding new dividing lines. 'Profiting' from Enlargement.	Applying the ideas of the Wider Europe Paper – defining the terms and scope of a new neighbourhood policy.	Strengthening the ENP' based on first review of Action Plans +focus on implementation. Non – paper expanding on the proposals on 'Strengthening the ENP' –'ENP – visa facilitation.	A 'step-change' in EU-Eastern neighbour relations. More differentiation and reward-based progress: 'more for more'. Enhances both bilateral and multilateral cooperation. (Failing) attempts to bring membership prospect into debate.	ENP reviewed in a post-Lisbon context. Greater differentiation and delivering on a 'more for more' principle. Discussion of the functioning of the UfM and EaP. Thinking about funding modalities.	Recognition of failure to attain stability and prosperity after a decade of ENP. Flexible approach with those not interested in extension of European governance model.
Innovation	Describe the ways in which the EU and neighbours can profit from enlargement. Spell out EUs role in bringing stability/ security to neighbourhood.	Detailing the membership, design and scope of ENP. Spelling out the method of ENP and rationale of bringing the Southern and Eastern states together.	Strengthen offers in specific areas: Trade and economic integration, mobility, 'people to people' and the EU's role in frozen conflicts.	New Association Agreements, new Action Plans for the East (AAs already in place with many Southern partners). DCFTAs to render ENP East more effective. Regional initiatives. Mobility / visa liberalisation prospects reaffirmed.	'3Ms': reaffirming more money, market and mobility – esp. in response to developments in the Southern dimension. Both DCFTA and Mobility partnerships offer extended to the Mediterranean partners.	More differentiation. Five focus themes: economic development & job creation; cooperation on energy; security; migration; neighbours of the neighbours. 'Ownership in partnership': potential for cooperation a la carte.

*Abridged and updated from Longhurst, K. (2011) Appraising the European neighbourhood policy : background, implementation and recommendations, in Romanian Journal of European Affairs, Vol. 11(3), pp.9-10.

State of play

The launch of the ENP was initially intertwined with the European Security Strategy of 2003³ with stabilization of the ‘near abroad’ as the most exigent geopolitical challenge facing the EU, envisioning “a better ring of friends” at the European external borders. A year later the ENP became an umbrella framework for bilateral and multi-lateral relations, providing a label for resource commitment, a degree of political visibility and “branding” for EU’s relations and action vis-à-vis the “neighbouring” countries. As a policy guidance for EU’s external relations the ENP has been “one of the most ambitious plans of governance export the European project has envisaged so far”⁴, perhaps too ambitious vis-à-vis its context.

Out of the 16 partner countries some neighbour Europe’s borders more than others and the scope of the policy excludes Turkey and Russia (for varying reasons). The policy design largely borrowed from experience with enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe, while drawing a clear line to the enlargement-lite. The logic derived from this experience remains pertinent in both content and form of the neighbourhood policy, while further modified in its subsequent reviews. The 2015 re-think does not seem to pose a juncture in this respect.

In terms of a review of resource allocation⁵, the past eleven years have showed that (i) economic reform and market integration proved to be the strongest aspects at the core of ENP. Enhancement of trade relations, though liberalization and gradual creation of free trade areas⁶ was understood as a stabilizing factor as an increased interdependence reduces the potential for conflict and/or as vehicle for modernization where an economic opening might lead to a political opening. The issue areas of socio-economic reform and sustainable development followed, all rather unsurprisingly, given that embarking on common market has been the biggest impetus in EU’s internal experience of the last decades. (ii) The political dimension of cooperation focused on support measures for an agenda of ‘good governance’⁷ on the one hand,

and tackling ‘common threats’ on the other. The latter is particularly related to justice and home affairs such as crime, terrorism, illegal migration, plus common environmental challenges. The ENP remained relatively limited in the issue of security and conflict management⁸. (iii) A further basket for cooperation entailed migration, mobility and people-to-people aspects with the potential to reach out to those segments of societies beyond the traditional engagement with the regime or elite levels. The ENP has witnessed a building of a space for common knowledge by supporting research, innovation, university cooperation and student exchanges; an area with considerable space for expansion.

While reaffirming commitment to the goals to foster stability, security and prosperity, the recent review introduces a potential juncture point in terms of the following:

Pragmatic flexibility. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy acknowledged the need to “switch from the idea that the European Union is at the centre, surrounded by the neighbouring countries, to the idea of a new partnership based on cooperation”⁹. An acknowledgement that the EU’s current magnetism is not sufficient to uphold a Eurocentric policy implies a more pragmatic approach. The partner countries are likely to selectively opt for cooperation in specific issue-areas or sectors of interest.

By extension, this is a unique opportunity to reshuffle resource allocation (in financial, diplomatic and political terms) to those interested in deeper cooperation. Ukraine, together with Georgia and Moldova will most likely belong to this group, where the drive for closer integration with the EU is closely linked with the countries narratives about European future. However, what is important to note here is that the policy remains consistent in emphasizing a clear distinction between “partnership” and accession to the EU. In the Southern stream of ENP, closer cooperation might continue with Morocco, Tunisia and possibly Jordan. For the rest, this marks an end

and transparency or “the ability of the state to provide institutions that make markets more efficient is sometimes referred to as good governance” (eg. World Bank (2002) World Development Report, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 99). Reference to ‘good governance’ does not necessarily imply the normative aim of democratic governance.

8 While the EU embarked on a few efforts through CFSP and CSDP in this area, the role of the neighbourhood policy has been at best limited, if tangible at all.

9 European Commission Press release IP/15/6121, Brussels, 18.11.2015.

3 European Security Strategy, DOC78367/2003, 12.12.2003.

4 Magen, A. (2006) ‘The shadow of Enlargement. Can the European Neighbourhood Policy Achieve Compliance?’, Columbia Journal of European Law 2, pp. 383-327.

5 Both financial allocations and the overall advancements of institutional framework for cooperation in a given issue-area.

6 For overview see ECORYS Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment of free trade between EU and Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Morocco, Tunisia.

7 ‘Good governance’ in this context refers to the agenda for efficient and effective regulatory environment as with focus on rule of law

to ENP's central idea of "proximity policy as key to stability"¹⁰. This shift has also been marked on the symbolic level by scraping the traditional annual neighbourhood reports in favour of more flexible forms of monitoring of common endeavours where and when relevant.

In terms of *partnering beyond the governments*, the cooperation with civil societies and people-to-people initiatives have been gaining visibility under the ENP in recent years. Resource allocation in this area is likely to continue to grow to support civil society actors in a push for more accountable societies on the one hand, and in involving civil society as a platform for deliberation in preventing radicalization on the other.

Re-prioritization. In a situation when everything is a priority, the general tendency is that no area ends up with high-scale prioritization. Narrowing down to five focus areas, in this respect, is a much needed upgrade. Especially bearing in mind the limited resources: only 28 percent of the EU's external budget is devoted to the neighbourhood. The ENP financial instrument has a budget of €15 billion for the period 2014-20, a sum comparable to a quarter of what is allocated for EU's administrative expenses over the same period.

The EU's re-shaped interests are particularly highlighted in the drive to *increase engagement with partners in the security sector*, in conflict prevention and within the salient need to fight terrorism and prevent radicalization domestically and internationally. Tackling irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling likewise remain under the securitized discourse. The EU's global engagement builds around a wider concept of human security¹¹, *expanding the notion beyond traditionally conceived security*. On this note the renewed strategy links causes of instability in the region to factors "outside the security domain alone", such as weak economic and social development, socio-economic exclusion and the lack of opportunity. The need to address these as potential roots of instability, particularly for young segments of population most vulnerable to radicalization, does not need more highlighting. The current turmoil in the neighbourhood only reaffirms that intrastate conflicts such as civil wars, political violence, or poverty are greater threats to humans than inter-state wars. In this line, the primacy of economic development for stabilization and employment remains the recipe of the EU as a major actor in global development assistance.

Energy cooperation belongs to the highlighted priori-

10 Prodi, R. (2002) A Wider Europe – Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability, Speech 02/619/EN.

11 See eg. CSS Analysis in Security Policy (2011) Human Security: Genesis, Debates, Trends, ETH Zurich: No. 90, 03/2011.

ties. The energy sector is no newcomer under the radar of ENP, with a range of ongoing energy-related initiatives. Nevertheless the recent years underlined the long neglected need for energy diversification. Following the repeated gas disputes with Russia and potential problems with supply through the destabilized Southern Mediterranean, the current EU leadership's ambitions for an Energy Union also represent scope for increased cooperation with neighbours.

Geographical scope. Over the last year, much of the public debates in Brussels echoed the need to rethink the idea of neighbourhood per se: to unbundle the Eastern and the Southern streams from the straightjacket of one ENP umbrella, to ditch the concept of neighbours of the EU as such or to take the wider geopolitical realities into account¹². The renewed policy's call for "including the neighbours of the neighbours" is perhaps a step in the direction of a minimum common denominator in this respect.

Prospects

Despite the new focus on the potential for enhanced cooperation on security sector reform, conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and anti-radicalization, the renewed neighbourhood policy confirms EU's traditionally *multidimensional view of security*, where "soft measures" play an indispensable role in fostering stability and security. The *economic and socio-economic development* remains among the core aims of the policy, now more directly linked to curbing radicalization: as means for social inclusion and containing the youth bulk characterizing the demography in many partner countries. *People-to-people* contacts and *support for civil society* gain further prominence. While non-state actors remain primary actors of warfare in the recent decade, the key to conflict transformation and prevention increasingly remains in deliberation within and between societies.

If European leaders wished to reset the strategy of EU's engagement in the regions at its Eastern and Southern border, a new policy initiative would have been the case. Instead, a rethink within the existing policy framework was commissioned. Independently from whether such

12 See eg. Balfour, R. (2014) Not the European Neighbourhood Policy. Some iconoclastic tips to start rethinking the EU's relations with its neighbours, Brussels: European Policy Centre; Lehne, S. (2014) Time to Reset the European Neighborhood Policy, Brussels: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Emerson, M. (2015) Radical Reshaping Required, Response to the Joint Consultation Paper, 'Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy', Brussels: CEPS; Witney, N. and Dennison, S. (2015) Europe's Neighbourhood: Crisis as the New Normal, London: European Council On Foreign Relations.

review itself goes far enough in substance¹³ as to respond to changing global circumstances, the conversion of renewed ENP from a paper exercise to practice remains an open-ended process. It is likely to be further shaped in light of the ongoing review of “EU global strategy”¹⁴ pioneered by the EEAS on the one hand, and due to the persisting weaknesses of Common Foreign and Security Policy on the other. As every crisis situation in the neighbourhood reminds us yet again, a solid and unitary CFSP worthy of its name remains beyond any foreseeable horizon. The series of the EU’s internal economic, financial, social and political crises left the Union weak and divided vis-à-vis the continuous turmoil in the neighbourhood.

13 Leight, M. (2015) *New Policies Urgently Needed for EU Neighbourhood*, Brussels: The German Marshall Fund.

14 Strategic Review - The European Union in a changing global environment, ongoing review of EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy: <http://europa.eu/globalstrategy>.

For Ukraine, the negotiations in 2016 will show what the country can make out of this renewed framework. There is one point that needs highlighting in this respect: while maintaining much of the framework developed back in 2003, the ENP has proven better suited for stable countries led by governments aiming to improve relations with the EU; in other words, the ENP continues to lack instruments which could adequately de-escalate conflicts. Ukraine faces war on two fronts: the obvious hybrid war in the East of the country and a less obvious struggle against its own dysfunctionality and endemic levels of corruption, for now remaining in the shadow of the former¹⁵. While the first one might be destined to a frozen conflict status at some stage, the second is yet to be fully fought. In this respect next year is likely to define what additional input the current renewal in framework for relations between Ukraine and the EU can deliver in practice.

15 See eg. Kobzova, J. and Popescu, N. (2015) *Ukraine’s other war*, Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies.

About the author:

Zuzana NOVAKOVA is a Visiting Researcher at Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. She is a junior researcher at International Institute of Social Studies in the Hague and works for the *European Political Science Review* journal published by Cambridge University Press. Her research focuses on policy responses to transitions in the “European neighbourhood”, EU external relations and Eastern partnership.

East European Security Research Initiative (EESRI) is a discussion, analytical and information-sharing international platform aimed at uniting efforts of the experts and researchers from various countries to find effective ways for strengthening security in the Eastern Europe as the most vulnerable region of the contemporary Europe.

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