

spotlight europe

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Hello Neighbour! A new EU policy from Morocco to Azerbaijan

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The European Neighbourhood Policy seeks to have a formative influence on the geopolitical area around the EU, as does the new Mediterranean Union – which, in the rather clumsy language used in Brussels, is now called “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean.” Nicolas Sarkozy will officially unveil the plans for the new Union on 13 July. This presents an opportunity to change the nature of the EU’s relationship with the whole of its immediate neighbourhood.

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The European Union is fundamentally interested in a wide-ranging exchange of views with its numerous neighbours. This is not only a question of democratic change and stability in the immediate vicinity of the Union, but of very specific European interests. The agenda includes

- *Asylum and migration policy:* Of the 238,000 people who applied for asylum in the EU in 2005, only a small proportion came from states in the immediate neighbourhood such as Georgia or Moldova. However, the majority of the transit routes from sub-Saharan Africa or central Asia pass through neighbouring countries.
- *Environmental issues, energy policy:* Up to 90% of Russian gas and oil supplies go through Ukrainian pipelines.
- *Trade:* There is considerable economic growth in several neighbouring countries. Thus states such as Armenia and Tunisia have posted more than 6% for 2007, Georgia over 12% and Azerbaijan as much as about 25%.
- Last but not least, the EU has a vested interest in finding common approaches to the fight against *terrorism*.

Unlike other global players such as the U.S., China or India, the EU is surrounded by a wide-ranging circle of neighbours who could simply not be more different.

From Rabat to Cairo and thence to Baku, Kiev and Minsk - the cultural and political character of the EU's 18 immediate neighbours is extremely diverse. Furthermore, their interest in relations with the EU is often markedly different. It is also possible to perceive the influence of other regional players such as the Russian Federation or Iran in the immediate vicinity of the EU.

In contrast to the transformation and accession process experienced by the central and eastern European states in the 1990s, the prospect of EU membership is no longer available as a well-trying nostrum which is both seductive and capable of imposing discipline. The EU cannot promise membership to all of its neighbours - and in any case not all of them would be interested in such an assurance. Thus the EU's relations with its neighbours needs to be put on a new, different, and much more imaginative footing.

But what procedures should be used? Should they be bilateral or regional, or should everything be under one roof? And what principles should be espoused? Should there be a trade area pure and simple, a security community, or should the emphasis be on common values such as human rights and democratization?

“ENP vision and reality are very far apart.”

Hitherto the EU has deliberately decided to avoid coming out in favour of any particular procedure. What people in Brussels certainly deem to be a success has been criticized by the Financial Times (5 July 2007) as being “a mixture of confusion and evasion.” Early in 2007 only one in five EU citizens had actually heard of what is known as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In this regard ENP vision and reality are very far apart indeed.

However, in the political arena the initiative on the establishment of a Mediterranean Union launched by French President

Nicolas Sarkozy has unleashed a debate about the thrust of and instruments available to a newly defined neighbourhood policy. Despite the Irish “No” vote on the Treaty of Lisbon, hard-headed negotiations are in progress between Paris, Brussels, Berlin and Warsaw.

Weaknesses of the Current ENP Strategy

As a result of adopting the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was developed in 2003, the EU possesses a strategy for closer cooperation with those neighbouring states which do not share the prospect of membership - which is why it encompasses neither Turkey nor the states of the western Balkans. Furthermore, relations with the Russian Federation have acquired a unique status within a specially created Strategic Partnership. The ENP is the political framework within which the EU can establish bilateral relations with its immediate neighbours and intensify the work of action plans based on bilateral agreements.

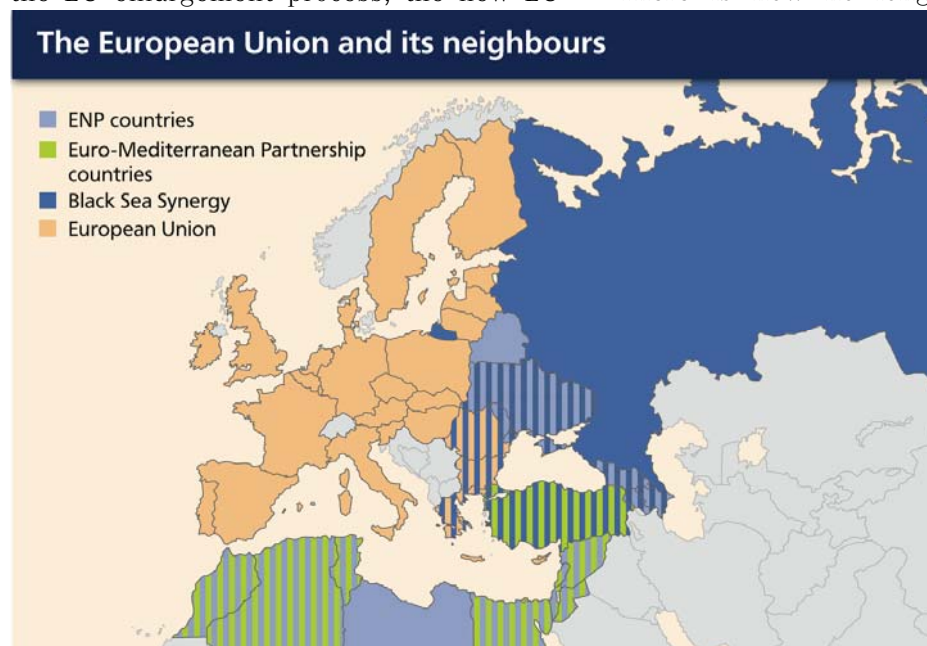
The EU member states are investing quite a lot of money in the common neighbourhood policy. In the EU budget for the years 2007 to 2013 €12 billion have been earmarked for this policy area - 32 per cent more than in the preceding budgetary period. On top of this there are €12 billion available from the European Investment Bank during the same period - some of which will also be going to Russia.

However, in many cases the incentives offered to the EU's neighbours have had little or no effect. Since April 2008 only Morocco, Ukraine, Moldova and Israel have made some progress in their relations with the EU. A comprehensive free trade agreement is currently being negotiated with Ukraine; in the case of the Republic of Moldova the existing partnership agreement is due to be expanded; and the Euro-

pean Commission is working on a advanced status for Israel and Morocco.

In the case of neighbouring states such as Ukraine or Moldova, which make no secret of their membership ambitions, the ENP does not meet local expectations. Both countries are decidedly unenthusiastic about suggestions which are tantamount to a permanent alternative to EU membership, and are looking forward to a qualitative upgrading of their relations with the EU.

Accession is a contentious issue within the EU. Whereas Germany and France continue to emphasize that the ENP does not involve the prospect of membership and should be construed as being distinct from the EU enlargement process, the new EU



member states, and Poland in particular, argue that the eastern dimension of the ENP constitutes the first step to more enlargement. They make a clear distinction between European neighbours and the neighbours of Europe. The former should “join the club“ in the medium or in the long term, the latter (as they see it) should not.

II

A Roundabout Way of Renewing the ENP?

On 13 July all 27 EU heads of state and government will meet in Paris with the political leaders of the southern and eastern Mediterranean states. The French plans were initially rather different, and envisaged a Mediterranean Union under French leadership, an exclusive club of littoral states which excluded all those EU member states which do not have a Mediterranean coastline.

This displeased many of the partners in the EU, and the plan had to be revised. There is now no longer any talk of a

“Mediterranean Union.” The concept has been integrated into a new version of the Barcelona Process, which has been in existence for more than ten years. All the EU member states will now play a part in the new Union. The dispute itself may have been resolved, but the question

of defining the policies which ought in future to be pursued has not.

The first task of the newly created “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” is to upgrade the ageing Barcelona Process in political terms. It was actually supposed to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) by the year 2010 with the help of a common free trade zone: a common area of peace, security and prosperity.

However, the process quickly lost momentum, for the demands and expectations on both sides of the Mediterranean were far too dissimilar. Thus the north refused to accede to the wishes of the southern countries for free market access for agricultural products, freedom of movement for labour, and development aid and technology transfer which are not linked to political demands such as respect for human rights or democratization. Furthermore, the Barcelona Process increasingly came under fire as a result of the Middle East conflict.

The messages sent out to the EU's Arab neighbours continued to be contradictory. Was EU aid designed to make a contribution to social and economic transformation? Were democratization projects initiated with government departments and non-governmental organizations designed to stabilize the Arab regimes, to reform them - or indeed to topple them?

Another weakness of the Barcelona Process was the fact that the mistrust of southern Mediterranean governments of each other made it difficult to promote a spirit of regional cooperation. Here in particular there was no sense of joint responsibility for the Process. The French proposals are designed to change all this.

Yet certain objections are already beginning to be raised on the southern rim of the Mediterranean. Thus the Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi has rejected Sarkozy's Union with the words: "We do not belong to Brussels."

It remains to be seen if, after getting off to a difficult start, the Union for the Mediterranean will be able to gain momentum. Much would have been achieved if an open transmediterranean dialogue and forum were to emerge, and if few (though effective) projects in the areas of education, environment, energy and agriculture could be implemented in a transparent manner.

III

A Union for the Black Sea?

However, the initiative for an improvement of relations with the Mediterranean states has already had one noticeable effect. This is the fact that the question of rethinking the way in which the EU deals with its immediate neighbours, an issue which has existed in latent form for a number of years, has arrived in the political sphere and is now being discussed quite openly. In addition to the Mediterranean, the Black Sea area and the EU's eastern neighbours are at the centre of new initiatives.

As far as the European Union is concerned, the Black Sea region is on the one hand a bottleneck for energy supplies, and on the other the focal point of a number of different cultures and zones of influence. Conflicts which have been put on ice and difficult transformation processes are characteristic of parts of the region. In contrast to the southern Mediterranean states, a large part of the Black Sea region is European in character.

Ten states are generally considered to belong to the Black Sea region in the wider sense: the three EU member states Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, the three large littoral states Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, the three southern Caucasian states Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the small state of Moldova.

Apart from the EU member states and accession candidates there are two clearly distinct groups. On the one hand there are Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, which, at least in rhetorical terms, have embarked on reforms and have membership aspirations. However, a broad societal and political consensus for what amounts to Europeanization exists only in Georgia and Moldova. Armenia and Azerbaijan are integrated into the ENP, albeit sceptical about espousing Europeanization.

The diverse nature of the region and the dissimilar ambitions of the individual states are reflected in the traditional EU approach to the Black Sea area. A distinction needs to be made between three different policies, even though each of them favours a bilateral approach. Turkey, as an accession candidate, is covered by the EU's enlargement policy. Negotiations concerning the form and content of a strategic partnership with Russia are cur-

Black Sea Synergy, which was officially inaugurated at a ministerial meeting in Kiev in February 2008, is the first EU initiative to look at the region as a whole and incorporates both Russia and Turkey in their capacity as regional powers. The goal of Black Sea Synergy is to strengthen regional cooperation both within the region and between the region and the EU. Its task is to improve the coordination between common elements of the bilateral

Development of the ENP

until 2006

- 11 MARCH 2003 **Strategy by the EU Commission** designed to promote closer cooperation with the EU's neighbours
- 12 MAY 2004 Strategy Paper on the **European Neighbourhood Policy**
- 4. DEC. 2006 EU Commission Communication on strengthening the **European Neighbourhood Policy**

2007

- 1. JAN. Launch of the **European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**, replacing the previous financing system MEDA (for southern neighbours) and TACIS (for the EU's eastern neighbours and Russia)
- 1. APR. Presentation of the **Black Sea Synergy** by the EU Commission
- 5. DEC. EU Commission Communication entitled a **Strong European Neighbourhood Policy**

2008

- 14 MARCH Adoption at the EU's Spring Summit in Brussels of the compromise proposed by Germany and France for the **Union for the Mediterranean**
- 20 MAY The EU Commission presents its concept for the **Union for the Mediterranean**
- 23 MAY Proposal for an **Eastern Partnership Initiative**
- 19 - 20 JUNE An EU summit will set the course of a **future policy on the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe**
- 13 JULY Expected: Establishment of the **Union for the Mediterranean in Paris**

rently under way. The other littoral states (insofar as they are not members of the EU) are covered by the ENP and its bilateral action plans.

ENP action plans, though it does not seek to turn them into a multilateral network.

Whereas reactions to the initiative of the French president and the proposed foundation of a Union for the Mediterranean were initially not forthcoming in the region itself, there was a clearly discernible increase in activity in Brussels. On 23 April 2008 the MEPs Hannes Swoboda and Jan Marinus Wiersma issued a [joint call](#) for a Union for the Black Sea which takes its bearings from the model of the Union for the Mediterranean. The European Parliament is already discussing the proposals - it has been referred to in the draft reports by [Jacek Saryusz-Wolski](#) on the Council's annual report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and by [Elmar Brok](#) on the European Commission's Strategy Paper on Enlargement.

The MEPs call for deeper relations with the Black Sea states which should go a great deal further than the existing approaches and offer a framework for closer multilateral cooperation. They suggest that solution strategies for the environment, migration and security issues

should be jointly devised and implemented. Such a Union for the Black Sea would be managed by a flexible institutional structure. The prospect of EU mem-

bership for states with European ambitions should be maintained in order to strengthen the trend towards Europeanization in the region.

The MEPs believe that it is absolutely essential to incorporate Russia and Turkey on an equal footing. As part of both the Union for the Mediterranean and the Union for the Black Sea Turkey would have a central role to play. This would give it a hitherto non-existent opportunity to influence the shape of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Some Turkish [commentators](#) consider the idea to be of interest.

IV

And What About the East?

The proposed “Union for the Mediterranean” caused the greatest stir among the new member states of the EU, and not among the Mediterranean littoral states. In Poland and Lithuania in particular, which, since joining the EU, have repeatedly emphasized the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the view quickly spread that the proposals could impede the nascent eastern policy of the EU.

The Swedish-Polish Eastern Partnership initiative presented at the meeting of the EU foreign ministers in Brussels on 26 May 2008 is concerned to draw eastern neighbours more closely towards the EU. It seeks to include Ukraine, Moldova and, when the time is ripe, Belarus, and the Caucasian countries Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Polish interests in particular are easy to understand – closer cooperation, so the thinking goes, will make energy supplies from the region far more predictable. Furthermore, the Polish government has succeeded in persuading Swedish diplomats to support the idea of an Eastern European Union and thus to overcome the threat of division between old and new member

states. The matter was clinched when the Polish government helped to convince Lithuania to give up its opposition to the EU mandate for negotiations with Russia. On 26 May the EU foreign ministers accepted the Polish proposals for an “Eastern Partnership.”

What the Polish-Swedish proposals for an “Eastern Partnership” will look like in practice remains to be seen. On 20 June the European Council called on the Commission to present proposals on how to deal with the modalities of the “eastern partnership” by the time of the spring summit in 2009. In any case this initiative is of more use to Ukraine and other neighbouring states to the east than unrealistic demands for early membership of the EU.

V

Four orientation points

The debate about new ways of interacting with the EU’s immediate neighbours, which was set in motion by Nicolas Sarkozy’s initiative, is now in full swing. It will be one of the tasks of the French EU Presidency and then of the ensuing Czech EU Presidency to promote the development of a comprehensive EU neighbourhood concept that is capable of dealing with the challenges of the future. At the meeting on 20 June 2008 the Council gave its assent to the proposals, and both the “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” and the “Eastern Partnership” have been included in its conclusions.

The new regional concepts could certainly be a success. If they were to receive a light-weight institutional framework and the appropriate instruments, they could bring about what the ENP has hitherto failed to achieve.

However, before the new concepts can be implemented, European policymakers will have to grapple with and resolve four questions. If they do not, the current de-

bate will once again produce nothing but patchwork - new Unions, institutions, processes, instruments, and plans. Their differing goals will continue to be contradictory.

First. The advantages of the ENP should not be overlooked. New multilateral instruments should not impede or overlap bilateral EU relations with individual states, especially with those who can and want to make progress more quickly in the area of reform. In the absence of the prospect of membership, the EU lacks the central instrument of positive conditionality. What forms of conditionality can the EU utilize in order to keep up the pressure to adapt to European norms? Regional initiatives set up with undue haste cannot compensate for this deficiency.

Second. The EU must have a clear idea of what it is actually prepared to contribute in its relations with the various regions. Thus with regard to the Mediterranean it would have to resolve the issue of opening the European market for agricultural products from the Mediterranean littoral states. This would make a practical and effective contribution to the stabilization and development of many neighbouring countries. It would be of some importance to discuss educational projects and specific migration agreements. Georgia and Ukraine need to know to what extent the EU will represent their interests when dealing with Russia, which is inclined to intervene in their internal affairs.

Third. The initiatives for closer cooperation with the Mediterranean states, with the EU's eastern neighbours and perhaps with the Black Sea littoral states can only be successful if they are part and parcel of the EU community process. Regional initiatives can only make sense and be advantageous to the neighbouring states and the EU if all the EU member states are jointly responsible for them. Regional groups and those seeking to influence non-EU countries, especially when they are under the control of certain EU member

states acting without reference to the others, could easily lead the Union from one existential crisis to the next. The whole idea of a common foreign policy would turn out to have been a miserable failure on the EU's own doorstep.

Fourth. Russia and Turkey must be persuaded to play an active role. Regional initiatives will only make sense if from the very beginning the two important actors to the east and the southeast of the Union form part of the various concepts on an equal footing - this applies to Russia with regard to the Eastern Partnership, to Turkey with regard to the Union for the Mediterranean, and to both in the case of a Black Sea initiative which transcends the current Black Sea Synergy.

In this way Russia and Turkey, acting in concert with the EU and other partners in the various regions, could help to define both goals and strategy. At the same time the EU would know that these two actors were participating in regional cooperation networks.

“Coherence as guiding principle”

However, the basic precondition for unrestricted participation is the unambiguous recognition of the sovereignty of all the states involved. Thus a Russian policy of this kind towards Ukraine and Georgia must be in place when cooperation begins, and not when it is completed. Similarly, Turkey will have to redefine its policy towards the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and come out in favour of constructive conflict resolution.

Coherence will be the guiding principle of a new neighbourhood policy. This does not necessarily imply a single and self-contained form. However, debates about definition, spaces and time frames should finally be a thing of the past. Positive results in one region with one neighbour will quickly rub off on other partners elsewhere.

For further reading:

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