Challenges for the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy and perspectives for the Euro-Mediterranean relations

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News

On the 10th of September 2015 the High Representative for EU Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, met with UN Special Envoy for the Syrian crisis Staffan de Mistura to discuss how to tackle the conflict in Syria. The crisis has developed into the world's largest humanitarian crisis with consequences for Syria itself and for the neighbouring countries, in particular Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The situation influences also the EU in the sense that a growing number of refugees from the region are trying to reach European countries – and this new challenge has emphasized the need for finding solutions based on cooperation between the EU member states.

The dramatic incidents in Greece and Italy, from where thousands of refugees are escaping towards Austria, Germany or Sweden has once again underlined that there is a lack of consensus and feeling of common responsibility among the European countries and in a year where an ambitious attempt has been launched at revising the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) it seems obvious, if not necessary, to place migration and mobility at the heart of a new ENP.

Summary

The year 2015 has, in the context of the EU, been characterized by discussions about how to develop a new ENP, which are able efficiently to tackle the problems in the southern Mediterranean, in particular the changes over the last years and the recent crisis situations in Syria, Iraq and Libya. The article argues that the ENP, launched back in 2004, has not been able to answer effectively to the challenges in the Middle East. It is therefore necessary to develop a new ENP, which at the same time is more differentiated and more focused. Furthermore it seems obvious that the ENP of 2004 (slightly revised in 2011)

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hasn't been able convincingly to provide ownership and visibility for the EU initiatives and programmes in the relevant states in Middle East – and therefore this will have to be one of the new tasks for a revised ENP. Finally the article points at the recent Syrian crisis as a field, where the EU might have a role to play, if a concerted action can be realized involving the UN. The article mentions in this respect the discussions about the EU as a foreign policy actor and thoughts about the possibility for the EU of playing a role as an international mediator, referring to the recent agreement entered with Iran on the nuclear issue.

Key Words

European Neighbourhood Policy, revision, differentiation, focus, flexibility, Syrian crisis, Iran

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Analysis:

Introduction

The ENP was created in 2004 in order, as it said in official statements related to the launching, to deepen relations, enhance cooperation and strengthen the EU's partnerships with neighbouring countries aiming at developing an area of shared stability, security and prosperity in the Mediterranean. Looking at the recent critical situation in several Arab Mediterranean countries, in particular Syria, Iraq and Libya, and the general instability in the MENA-region, it seems fair to say that the goals of 2004 have not been reached.

Blaming the ENP for the general state of flux and the increasing number of long-standing and newly emerging security challenges in the Middle East might seem unfounded, but on the other hand there is hardly doubt that the ENP, as argued by Senén Florensa "has not been able to answer effectively to the growing challenges in the Mediterranean region".[1] As stated by High Representative Federica Mogherini: "Recent developments in the region have increased the challenges we all face: from economic pressures to irregular migration and security threats. We need a strong policy to be able to tackle these issues (…) This is what the review is about if we are to have a robust

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[1] Senén Florensa, "Reviewing the European Neighbourhood," *PapersIEMed.* 18 (2015).

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political relationship between our neighbours and us."[2] The review mentioned by Mogherini is an initiative, taking its point of departure in the significant developments in the European neighbourhood since 2011 in which year the ENP was last reviewed, where a series of consultations with partners and stakeholders should take place, in late 2015 ending – ideally – with a coherent ENP, which also secures closer coordination between the ENP and EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) activities, as stated in the European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the review of the ENP.[3]

Consultations have taken place since March 2015 and within some months we will see, how a new ENP, based on input from the consultation process, will be drawn up. The introduction to the work, a *Joint Consultation Paper* entitled "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy" of 4 March 2015 with the purpose, as it said, of framing a policy debate among relevant partners and stakeholders, has presented a wide range of areas within which a clearer focus seems relevant, under these four headlines: differentiation, focus, flexibility and ownership & visibility.

The changing Middle East and the need for differentiation

The in 2010 relatively homogeneous authoritarian Arab states are not quite the same in 2015. Things have changed as a result of the Arab revolts and the differences, for instance, between Tunisia and Libya have even been deepened. And added to the differences attached to political and economic realities, however, new types of divergences have appeared which have to do with aspirations of the partners in the south. In connection with that it might be relevant (and possible) to develop new relationship formats, living up to wishes of more binding agreements. The EU consultation paper asks if there in a longer perspective might be room for a variable geometry in the agreements between the EU and its ENP partners, so that different levels of engagement will be optional.

It can of course be questioned if this is a real novelty and it also can be argued that pluralistic sets of agreements already have been a reality for several years, taking for instance Algeria as an example of a country, which, as shown by Hakim Darbouche, has

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[2] EU-Commission, "Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy: The Eu Launches a Consultation on the Future of Its Relations with Neighbouring Countries.," (Brussels: European Commission, 4 March, 2015).

[3] EU-Parliament, "Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. European Parliament Resolution of 9 July 2015 on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy," (Brussels: European Parliament, 9 July, 2015).

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been reluctant to get too closely involved in the EU's ENP-project.[4] Another issue related to this is, if (or to what degree) the EU has committed itself to contribute to regional integration. A more explicit variable geometry than already is the case would possibly affect such an ambition in a negative direction. It should be remembered, of course, that the basic structural idea of the ENP is to establish make bilateral agreements between itself and the individual partner states and not (explicitly) to work for regional integration in the Mediterranean region.

A new Middle East and a more focused ENP

A higher level of differentiation can be supplemented by more focus in the cooperation and this is, as mentioned, also an ambition on behalf of the EU in connection with the consultations and the further development of the ENP. The first ENP Action Plans – if looked at closely – were characterized by a certain level of copy and paste. The more or less identical wording of parts of the plans made it clear that they, rather than being working documents, were declarations of intent. More than 10 years after the signing of the first ENP agreements this is hardly feasible anymore – and therefore the intention of going for more focus seems more than justified.

Two recent items of relevance on the Euro-Mediterranean agenda are of course migration and mobility. The issues furthermore involve significant security-dimensions. But in order to be dealt with in a constructive way, the measures will have to be developed on the basis of the specific conditions given in the different contexts. Tackling people smuggling and illegal migration is a common challenge, within which we find commonalities of interest between the states affected both at the sending and the receiving side. Obviously, however, there are differences between traditional emigration states like Morocco and Egypt and states like Jordan or Lebanon, where the state's own citizens are rarely to be found among the migrants, but where migration nevertheless is an important phenomenon.

Under all circumstances it seems likely that migration and mobility will continue to be important also in new ENP agreements.[5] The development over the last years, with ISIL (or since June 2014: IS) entering the political and military scene, adds to the migratory movements in the Levant region, and at the same time to emphasizing the security dimension of the situation in the Mediterranean. Long-distance migration, in which the

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[4] Hakim Darbouche, "Decoding Algeria's Enp Policy: Differentiation by Other Means?," *Mediterranean Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008).
[5] Suzana Carp and Tobias Schumacher, "From Survival to Revival: The Riga Summit 2015 and the Revised Enp," *Egmont, Security Policy Brief* 65 (2015).

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North African states become parts of transnational movements from for instance Eritrea or Somalia, underlines the need for migration policies as shared undertakings between the EU and the southern Mediterranean partners.

Flexibility, ownership and visibility in a coming ENP

The recent critical conditions in several of the Mediterranean states calls for a strengthening of the EU's capabilities, so that the EU can "engage more effectively and respond more flexibly to developments in partner countries affected by conflict situations" as it says in the EU Commissions' joint consultation paper. Probably it is more easily said than done. The EU will have to increase the budget for its activities with the southern partners and if it is able consistently to apply its revised ENP since 2011, with the 'more for more' approach it might be able to increase its credibility among the partner countries.

If the resources at the disposal are increased significantly it will be a good idea, through training and capacity-building of the local administrations in the receiving countries, to secure that the allocated means are managed in the most efficient ways. [6] One of the problems for the ENP has been a lacking sense of ownership with the partners and a not too strong visibility of the ENP programmes and funds. The EU's Mobility Partnerships could be a valuable asset for the EU in attracting interest for its activities. A more open European labour market and options for studying in Europe is obviously a field, which has a high potential for creating interest for the EU in the Arab states.

Perspectives

Added to the bilateral activities the EU could furthermore actively contribute to the UN initiatives. It has recently been discussed between Mogherini and the UN Special Envoy for the Syrian crisis Staffan de Mistura to establish working groups in order to analyze the situation in Syria and also to establish an international contact group, which – in the context of the UN – could lay the ground for a concerted action in Syria. In connection with that they also discussed the new regional perspectives that can be opened by the agreement on the Iran nuclear programme and by the increasing consensus gathered around the necessity of effectively countering the threat posed by the IS in Syria and Iraq (and Libya). The EU might, as suggested by Pol Morillas, have a potential for func-

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[6] Federica Bicchi, "The Politics of Foreign Aid and the European Neighbourhood Policy Post-Arab Spring: 'More for More' or Less of the Same?," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 3 (2014).

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tioning as a mediator in international and regional conflicts, *in casu* between the parties in the UN, where especially the disagreements between the permanent members of the UNSC, have blocked for further international involvements in Syria.

The need for a revision of the ENP is obvious and apparently the consultations, which have taken place during 2015, have been comprehensive and often highly interesting. At this stage nothing final can be said about where we are heading, but according to rumours the discussions in the different relevant circles affiliated with the different EU political centres have been intense. This, of course, gives no guarantee that a differentiated, focused and efficient ENP will come out of the work.

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