

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) - from partnership to political association and economic integration: Case of Moldova

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Abstract

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was officially launched by the European Union (EU) in 2004, in the context of the fifth EU Enlargement. The ENP has been designed to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe by engaging neighbourhood countries of the EU into a privileged partnership with the latter.

The ENP has been developed drawing on the essence and experience of the Enlargement policy. Thus, both policies are based on and promote the same values and principles, are designed to extend the area of stability, prosperity and security in Europe, and employ similar policy methodologies and implementation mechanisms. Nevertheless, the ENP is considered to be distinct from the EU Enlargement policy. Unlike the Enlargement policy, it lacks the former ultimate incentive, which is a clear defined EU accession perspective offered to the ENP partner countries.

In the current paper we intend to show that the ENP is an evolving policy which has the same Europeanization logic as the EU, yet without a clear defined European integration perspective for its East European neighbours that want to join the EU in foreseeable future, in this case the Republic of Moldova

European Neighbourhood Policy: genesis

The fifth Enlargement of the European Union (EU)¹ was a major foreign policy success accomplished by the latter. It has raised significantly the EU profile as international actor, expanded the area of democracy, stability, prosperity and security in Europe, and has brought Europe much closer to its eventual reunification - a process that has started after the end of the Cold War. At the same time, the fifth Enlargement have advanced the EU's boundaries closer to a ring of states that are struggling with different kinds of political, economic and social problems, such as abuse of power, violation of human rights, disregard of minority rights, corruption, weak institutions and lack of accountability, prolonged transition towards an open market economy, alienation of people living in foreign societies, regional conflicts etc..

All of the afore-mentioned problems are perceived by the EU as representing main causes of current major security risks, such as extremism, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of

¹ The fifth EU Enlargement took place in two rounds: in May 2004 the EU was joined by Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Cyprus. Bulgaria and Romania adhered to the EU in January 2007.

mass destruction, regional conflicts and state failures². This new security environment has generated a significant pressure on the EU to define a policy that would ensure the stability and security in its immediate neighbourhood, thus preventing the possible risk of instability spilling over into its enlarged area³.

Enlargement, more concretely the EU membership perspective, has proved to be the most efficient foreign policy instrument used by the EU to promote political and economic reforms in the candidates countries. By doing so it has achieved a great success in enlarging the area of democracy, stability, prosperity and security based on the EU's values and legal norms⁴. On the other hand, the fifth Enlargement was coupled with a tremendous political, institutional and financial efforts made by the EU.

As a result, the EU has reached the maximum-point of its absorptive capacity and the 'enlargement fatigue' has been setting in some of the old member countries of the EU, such as France and Germany. For instance, in the aftermath of the first round of the fifth Enlargement, only half the population of the EU that was surveyed in May-June 2005 supported the idea of further enlargement, with only 33 percent of Germans and barely 32 percent of French being in favour. And only the new members that joined the EU in May 2004 were more enthusiastic⁵.

Also, there have been some fears expressed by high level European officials that the continuation of the Enlargement process could affect the coherence of the EU foreign policy and reduce the EU influence and capacity to promote desirable outcomes in neighbouring countries. For example, in the view of the former-President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, the overstretching of the EU "could water down the European political project and turn the European Union into just a free trade area on continental scale"⁶. Being under the pressure of these new circumstances, the EU has begun to search for alternative ways to advance its foreign policy agenda in neighbourhood countries⁷.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is the response the EU has given to the above-mentioned challenges. The ENP addresses countries that have a common land or maritime border with the EU. These are Mediterranean countries from North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt) and the Middle East (Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, and Syria), as well as Eastern European countries from East Europe (Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus) and the Southern Caucasus (Armenia,

² Council of the European Union (2003c) *A secure Europe in a better world* [online]. Brussels: Council of the EU. Available from: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

³ Lynch, D. (2004) *The European Neighbourhood Policy* [online]. Paris: Institute for Security Studies. Available from: http://eurojournal.org/files/dov_prague.pdf

⁴ Ferrero-Waldner, B. (2006) *European Neighbourhood Policy* [online]. Brussels: European Commission. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/speeches_en.htm

⁵ Barnes, I. and Barnes, P. (2007) Enlargement. In: Cini, M. ed. (2007) *European Union Politics*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 420-440

⁶ Prodi, R. (2002) *A Wider Europe – A proximity policy as the key to stability* [online]. Brussels: European Commission. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/speeches_en.htm

⁷ Smith, K. (2005) The outsiders: the European neighbourhood policy. *International Affairs*, 81(4): 757-773

Azerbaijan and Georgia). Thus, countries from different geographical regions, with different cultural, economic and socio-political background, and above all with different visions over their current and future relations with the EU have been placed under the same policy framework.

In March 2003, while the ten Central and Eastern European (CEE) accession/candidate countries had received green light for joining the European Union (EU) in May 2004, the European Commission has published its Communication “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”. In the respective Communication, which was forwarded for examination to the Council of Ministers of the EU and the European Parliament, the European Commission has officially proposed a new vision for developing and reinforcing the EU relations with those neighbouring countries that currently do not have a clear perspective of joining the EU in the near future. According to this vision the EU should concentrate on sharing the benefits of Enlargement with its neighbour through building an enlarged “zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood”⁸. Subsequently, in October 2003 the European Council welcomed the progress made on this initiative and urged the Council of Ministers of the EU and the European Commission to continue their work on developing a comprehensive, balanced and proportionate approach⁹. After taking into account various reactions to the “Wider Europe” document, in May 2004 the European Commission published the final Strategy Paper on European Neighbourhood Policy which was subsequently approved by all EU member states and it is considered to be one of the essential documents of the ENP.

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): Europeanization without integration

In the view of majority of the experts, the ENP is above all a foreign policy instrument designed to strengthen security around its Eastern European and Mediterranean borders¹⁰. In this sense, the main objective of the ENP is to avoid creating new dividing lines in Europe and build a ‘ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean’ with which the EU would develop close and cooperative relations¹¹. Accordingly, the ENP is based on commitments to common values, such as democracy, rule of law, good governance, respect of human rights, principles of market economy, as well as on security commitments that are of key importance to the EU external action, including the fight against terrorism, non-

⁸ European Commission (2003) *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003) 104 final [online]. Brussels: European Commission. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf

⁹ Council of the European Union (2003b) *2533rd Meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council* [online]. Brussels: Council of the EU. Available from: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/775_97.pdf

¹⁰ Emerson, M. (2004) *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy or Placebo?* [online]. Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies. Available from: <http://www.ceps.be>

¹¹ Council of the European Union (2003c) *A secure Europe in a better world* [online]. Brussels: Council of the EU. Available from: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, efforts towards the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts and cooperation in justice and home affairs matters¹².

The ENP represents also a way out of the EU's dilemma, which is how to advance its values and interests, and share the benefits of Enlargement with neighbouring countries, but without offering them the membership perspective. In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives the ENP has provided an enhanced partnership built on an approach that has been defined by Prodi as "sharing everything but institutions"¹³. This new approach has been inspired by the European Economic Area (EEA) that brings together the EFTA countries and the EU under a single legal and economic framework. But above all, it draws significantly on the Enlargement experience by using the objectives, instruments and methodology derived from the pre-accession process. For example, the ENP's Action Plans emulate the Accession Partnerships that contain reform targets, involve a set of incentives and a strong element of conditionality¹⁴.

At the same time, we consider that one of the key features of the ENP, as the EU's foreign policy instrument, is its Europeanization dimension. In our view the ENP's Europeanization dimension can be defined as promoting political and economic transformations that involves diffusion and institutionalization of the EU's values, norms and rules into the domestic policies of the neighbourhood countries. In other words, the EU uses the ENP for extending the logic of Europeanization without the prospect of the EU membership over 16 states with a total population of 400 million people. In fact, it was for the first time that an official EU policy has proposed to its neighbours to take on considerably deeper and broader obligations to align with the EU's norms and legislation as part of an overall process of political, social and economic modernization process that does not involve further Enlargement.

In return for concrete progress in demonstrating shared values and effective implementation of political, economic, and institutional reforms, including aligning legislation with the *Acquis Communautaire*¹⁵, the EU has pledged to offer to the

¹² European Commission (2003) *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003) 104 final [online]. Brussels: European Commission. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf

¹³ Prodi, R. (2002) *A Wider Europe – A proximity policy as the key to stability* [online]. Brussels: European Commission. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/speeches_en.htm

¹⁴ Meloni, G. (2006) *Is the same toolkit used during enlargement still applicable to the Countries of the New Neighbourhood? A problem of mismatching between objectives and instruments* [online]. Florence: European University Institute. Available from: <http://www.eui.eu/LAW/Events/ENP/Presentations.shtml>

¹⁵ *Acquis Communautaire* is a French term referring to the cumulative body of European Community laws, comprising the EC's objectives, substantive rules, policies and, in particular, the primary and secondary legislation and case law – all of which form part of the legal order of the European Union (EU). This includes all the treaties, regulations and directives passed by the European institutions, as well as judgments laid down by the European Court of Justice. The *acquis* is dynamic, constantly developing as the Community evolves, and fundamental. All Member States are bound to comply with the *acquis Communautaire*.

neighbourhood countries “the prospect of closer economic integration with the EU”¹⁶. In concrete terms this means the prospect of a stake in the EU’s Internal Market and further integration and liberalization to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. According to the European Commission’s logic, if a country has succeeded to build an open and integrated market economy functioning on the basis of rules that are compatible or harmonised with those of the EU, then it has come as close to the Union as it can be without being a member.

In the view of the European Commission the EU’s *acquis* provides the ENP partners with well established models that are needed for building functioning integrated markets and defining common standards for industrial products, services, transport, energy and telecommunications networks, environmental and consumer protection, health, labour and minimum quality requirements. In this context, it should be observed, that the EU strategy documents on the ENP do not perceive the creation of a new common market as being the final goal of the EU policy transfer¹⁷.

On the contrary, along with promises of preferential trading relations, enhanced assistance, integration into transport, energy and telecommunication networks etc., it is regarded rather as being part of the conditionality established for supporting the development of closer and more coherent relations between the EU and its Eastern European and Mediterranean neighbours, as well as for encouraging political and economic reforms in the latter. Consequently, it could be argued that the ENP represents a clear example of policy transfer through external incentives based conditionality, which engages neighbouring countries in a broad process of modernization and Europeanization that extends well beyond the European continent¹⁸.

Europeanization without integration: Moldova’s case

The Republic of Moldova has officially joined the ENP on 22 February 2005, when it signed with the EU the Moldova-EU Action Plan. In accordance with this Action Plan both parties have assumed a series of common and unilateral commitments. The implementation process of those commitments gave a new dynamic to the development of Moldova’s relations with the EU in areas such as political dialogue, democratic reforms, settlement of the Transnistrian “frozen conflict”, economic reforms and bilateral trade, justice and internal affairs, people-to-people contacts etc..

Since 2005 the EU has increased significantly its political visibility and status in Moldova. The political dialogue between the Moldovan authorities and the European Commission, the EU Council and the European Parliament has become more active.

¹⁶ European Commission (2003) *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003) 104 final [online]. Brussels: European Commission.

Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf

¹⁷ European Commission (2004) *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, COM(2004) 373 final [online]. Brussels: European Commission. Available from:

http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy/strategy_paper_en.pdf

¹⁸ Meloni, G. (2006) *Is the same toolkit used during enlargement still applicable to the Countries of the New Neighbourhood? A problem of mismatching between objectives and instruments* [online]. Florence: European University Institute. Available from: <http://www.eui.eu/LAW/Events/ENP/Presentations.shtml>

Even if the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)¹⁹ has continued to be the main framework of the political dialogue with the EU, the both parties have started to use more frequently the dialogue opportunities offered by regional cooperation initiatives like those from South-Eastern Europe, as well as by Moldova's bilateral relations with the EU member states. The intensity of political dialogue has been matched with an increased level of quality and substance of discussions referring to a whole list of Moldova's domestic issues like human rights, energy security, fighting corruption, illegal trafficking of human beings and the Transnistrian conflict, which before 2005 were superficially or incompletely addressed by the EU in its dialogue with the Moldovan authorities.

Additionally, the Moldova – EU Action Plan has given to the EU more concrete leverages to influence the reform process in Moldova, yet the efficiency of those leverages is still far from reaching the level of those leverages that the EU enjoys in the case of the EU candidate countries. In the view of many local experts, the EU can and should reinforce its leverages over reform process in Moldova by strengthening the conditionality mechanism of the ENP using the model and experience of the EU Enlargement policy.

Due to the Moldova-EU Action Plan, the Transnistrian “frozen conflict” has become one of the major issues on the agenda of the political dialog between Moldova and the EU. In accordance with the afore-mentioned document both parties have pledged to work together for supporting a viable solution to the Transnistria conflict. Subsequently, the EU started to play an increasing role in the settlement of this regional problem. It has joined the negotiations' table as observer and appointed a Special Representative for Moldova²⁰, in charge with Transnistrian issue. Also, at the request of the Moldovan and Ukrainian Governments, on 30 November 2005, the EU launched its Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM)²¹ having as main objective to work with Moldova and Ukraine to harmonise their border management standards and procedures with those prevalent in EU member states.

In the field of economic and trade relations, we have witnessed the transformation of the EU in the main trade partner of Moldova, thus, outrunning the CIS countries. After Romania joined the EU in 2007, the Moldova's exports to the Common Market of the EU have surged from 33% percent to 55% in 2008. Looking to encourage the pace of reforms undertaken by the Moldovan Government in accordance with the Moldova – EU Action Plan, the EU has increased the openness of its internal market for Moldovan products, by providing our country with more advantageous trade conditions under GSP plus regime in January 2006 and Autonomous Trade Preferences in March 2008.

¹⁹ The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed by Moldova and the EU in 1994 and entered into force in 1998. The PCA Agreement has put Moldova's relations with the EU on the course of a mere horizontal cooperation. The ENP has left Moldova's relations with the EU under the legal and institutional constraints of the PCA Agreement.

²⁰ The position of Special Representative of the EU for Moldova was in place from 2005 to 2010, when it was closed in the context of creating a new diplomatic service of the EU: European External Action Service (EEAS).

²¹ The EUBAM Mission is an advisory, technical body. It has no executive powers. Available from: <http://www.eubam.org/index.php?action=group&group=3&sid=c4ubk5v7872e0txj9q7fppmmxw6gkwim>

In the area of facilitating mobility of Moldovan citizens and managing illegal migration flows, the EU and Moldova have started an intensified dialogue. Consequently, in 2007 Moldova succeeded to negotiate and sign with the EU two important agreements in the way of obtaining gradually a visa-free travel regime for its citizens, such as: the Agreements on facilitating visa regime and readmission of persons illegally residing on the territories of both parties. Also, in June 2008 the EU has offered to Moldova a Mobility Partnership that aims at helping our country to address the economic and social causes that motivate illegal migration of Moldovan citizens to the EU, as well as to create proper conditions for circular legal migration of Moldovan qualified labour force in the EU member states.

Despite all these positive results achieved during the first four year of the ENP, the implementation of the Moldova – EU Action Plan has not been always a coherent, steadfast and continuous process. This reality has been emphasized by the European Commission in its Progress Reports on Moldova from 2006, 2008 and 2009²², as well as by the Moldovan experts in their monitoring assessments²³. Both the European Commission and local experts have drawn attention to the unsatisfactory pace and quality of reforms that the Moldovan Government have had to implement in the fields of justice, combating corruption, freedom of mass-media, or improving the business and investment climate.

According to the local experts the poor record of the Moldovan authorities in executing their reform commitments have been caused by lack of firm political will to accelerate European integration process by achieving concrete results in the troubled areas of reforms, by the superficial attitude of government officials in realizing the measures agreed in the Moldova – EU Action Plan, by the weakness of opposition parties, by the lack of a genuine democratic pluralism in the society, by the inefficiency of judicial system because of the frequent interferences of the executive power in its activity, or by the widespread corruption within governmental institutions etc.. Nevertheless, we can not ignore the fact that abovementioned negative trends were, also, partially due to the weak and unconvincing political and economic incentives of the ENP, particularly for countries like Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia that have expected that ENP will offer them a clear European integration perspective.

Europeanization through political association, economic integration and visa liberalization: Moldova's case

In December 2006, the European Commission announced new measures designed to strengthen the ENP, such as negotiation and signing of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements; strengthened economic integration and cooperation in key sectors; facilitating mobility by signing visa facilitation and readmission agreements; promoting people-to-people exchanges; building thematic dimension to the ENP; strengthening

²² ENP Action Plans and Country Reports, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

²³ Access-Info (2008), Monitoring Report “Right to Information: On Paper and In Reality”, Chisinau. Available from: <http://www.acces-info.org.md/index.php?cid=165>

political cooperation and enhancing regional cooperation²⁴. The new proposals put forward by the European Commission were welcomed by the Moldovan authorities because they met the immediate priorities of Moldova to get more access to the EU common market for Moldovan products and services, to facilitate the mobility of Moldovan citizens within the EU member countries and deepen sectoral integration and cooperation, especially, in trade, energy and transport areas. Nevertheless, the same proposals met only partially the expectations of the Moldovan authorities that wanted Moldova to be placed on the meaningful political, institutional and economic integration track into the EU.

On 3 December 2008, the European Commission published its Communication to the European Parliament and the EU Council on the Eastern Partnership²⁵. The document announced the EU's intention to endorse new measures and institutional mechanisms designed to adjust the Eastern dimension of the ENP to the new realities that were unfolding in the region, particularly after the Russian-Georgian war from August 2008. In its Communication, the European Commission formulated a series of ambitious proposals for the ENP's Eastern European partners, which actually extend the political and institutional limits of the ENP. For Moldova the most relevant proposals included in the Eastern Partnership have been the perspective to establish new contractual relations with the EU in the form of an Association Agreement that would deepen Moldovan-European political cooperation, especially in the framework of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy. Secondly, Moldova would set up a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU that entails binding legal harmonisation with the EU's legislation and standards in the trade related fields. Thirdly, Moldova would be assisted to meet the security and legal requirements necessary for establishing a visa-free travel regime with the EU. Fourthly, Moldova energy system will be integrated within the EU energy market.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was officially launched on 7 May 2009 and since then it became a major for the new Moldovan government established by the four-party Alliance for European Integration. The EaP is considered a valuable tool for promoting Moldova's bilateral agenda in relations with the EU, and is perceived as a step forward towards joining the EU. The main expectations with regard to the EaP are: signing the Association Agreement; liberalizing the visa regime with the EU; and establishing a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU. Building efficient institutional capacities essential for implementing the future Association Agreement is also a key objective for the current Moldovan authorities.

The Moldovan political elite expected that the EaP would provide Moldova with a clear European perspective. Instead, the EaP has set up new far-reaching objectives, but only within the legal and political framework established by the ENP. Therefore, all the main political parties, as well as the majority of civil society experts, are of the opinion that the

²⁴ European Commission (2006), "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy", Brussels, 4 December 2006, COM(2006)726 final. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

²⁵ European Commission (2008), Eastern partnership: Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/index_en.htm

EaP has failed to overcome the key structural weaknesses of the ENP. Nevertheless, there is a clear understanding that the EaP has brought new opportunities for deepening partnership relations between the EU and Eastern European states, in particular for those states that are ready and able to fulfill the political, institutional, legislative, economic, and social commitments necessary to translate this desire into concrete actions, such as:

1. *political association* with EU by negotiating with Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus the Association Agreements that will create close political connections between the signatory parties;
2. *economic integration* of partner states with the EU through establishing with them Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, something that will entail mandatory harmonization of the internal regulatory framework with the Acquis Communautaire in trade-related fields;
3. *liberalization of visa regime* with the EU by launching visa liberalization dialogues that will outline the mandatory legal, institutional and political reforms necessary for achieving this objective;
4. *energy integration* by harmonizing legal, institutional and technical framework of partner countries with the EU;
5. *developing institutional capacities* vital for achieving political association, economic integration, visa liberalization and energy integration with the EU.

Over the first year of the EaP, Moldova has achieved significant results in advancing its relations with the EU in all main areas defined by the EaP's objectives. Thus, it has succeeded to launch negotiations on the future Association Agreement with the EU. Until now the parties have had seven rounds of negotiations and have closed provisionally a series of important chapters, including political dialogue and security cooperation. Moldova have started de visa liberalization dialogue with the EU that entails the implementation of far-reaching reforms in accordance with the EU standards in the sectors of enhancing border security, management of migration, reforming ministry of interior, insuring independence of judiciary, strengthening security of travel documents, enhancing public order, combating corruption, protection of fundamental human rights etc.. On 17 March 2010, Moldova signed the Energy Community accession protocol that entails the integration of Moldova's electrical energy network into the EU's electrical network and market. In April 2010, the EU launched a high level advisory group composed of nine advisors who are assisting the Moldovan authorities in developing and implementing sectoral policies compliant with EU standards and practices. The European Commission has launched a Comprehensive Institution Building Program for Moldova in the amount of €41 million that will assist the Moldovan government in preparing national institutions for the implementation of the Association Agreement. Moldova has started the dialogue on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, yet official negotiations on that matter are planned to start on December 2011. Moreover, by the end of 2011, Moldova and the EU are set to sign the Agreement on European Common Aviation Area (ECAA) that will require the harmonization of Moldova's legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire.

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): What's next?

After 7 years of implementation, the ENP is still far from achieving its strategic objective, which is *to create an area of security and prosperity around it*. In the last three years, several developments have questioned the efficiency and capabilities of the ENP, both on its Eastern and Southern dimensions. Among negative evolutions we can mention the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, expansion of authoritarian drifts in most the Eastern Partnership countries, flagrant violation of fundamental human rights in Belarus, the violent suppression of peaceful protests in Minsk in December 2010, the worsening of economic and democratic conditions in states from North Africa and the Middle East, which led eventually to the outbreak of civil war and popular uprisings in Libya, etc... These and other negative trends have determined the EU to start the ENP reevaluation.

On 25 May 2011, aiming to revitalize once more the ENP, the European Commission officially presented its new approach, which, like the previous one, aims to strengthen individual and regional partnerships between the EU and neighboring countries, yet this time based on the principle *“more funds for more reforms”*. The new approach was baptized by the European Commission officials as representing *“an ambitious new European Neighborhood Policy”*. According to Baroness Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Affairs of the EU, the new approach is a partnership among nations to support and develop a deep democracy and economic prosperity in the EU neighborhood. At the same time, Stefan Fule, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, believes that the new approach involves a greater degree of differentiation, which will ensure that each state develops its own links with the EU as much as their aspirations, needs and capabilities allow it.

New notions the same substance

The new ENP approach comes with several terminology innovations, such notions as *“building deep and sustainable democracy”* or support inclusive economic development”. Paradoxically or not, even if these terms sound innovative, their content is not new to Moldova or even to the Eastern Partnership in general. Thus, if until now by democracy we understood free and fair elections, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, independence of the judiciary, fighting corruption, democratic control of armed and security forces, from now on all of these will be called *“deep democracy”*. If until now by economic and social sustainable development we understood development of small and medium enterprises, creating new jobs, improving the investment climate, investment promotion, agricultural and rural development, removing regional economic disparities, improving macro-economic policies, improved social policy dialogue, etc., from now on all of this will be called *“inclusive economic development”*. New forms, yet the content remains the same.

European aspiration without clear perspectives

We are also promised that the new approach will further strengthen the Eastern Partnership. Thus, parties will negotiate and implement the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements, continue the democratization process and facilitation and liberalization of visa regimes, enhance sector cooperation, bring closer to citizens the benefits of the Eastern Partnership, reinforce the partnership civil

society and social partners, etc... Reiteration of these assurances stated clearly or implicitly in 2009, is essential for the countries of Eastern Europe, but not enough. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, countries with strong European aspirations have expected that the ENP's reevaluation will bring a convincing outline, even if a distant one, of their chances to materialize those aspirations. Despite these high expectations, it did not happen. Instead, the European Commission has underlined that *"The values on which the European Union is built – namely freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law – are also at the heart of the process of political association and economic integration which the Eastern Partnership offers. These are the same values that are enshrined in article 2 of the European Union Treaty and on which articles 8 and 49 are based"*²⁶. Or, to Article 49 of the European Union Treaty *"Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union"*²⁷.

"More for more" versus "everything but institutions"

The European Commission assures us that the new approach brings a greater level of differentiation, which will ensure that each state develops its links with the EU as far as its own aspirations, needs and capacities allow. We do not exclude this assumption, however, it is not clear at all how Kiev, Chisinau and Tbilisi could capitalize fully and entirely their European aspirations by following "more for more" principle, if the new ENP approach remains faithful to the underlying motto of the former European Commission President Romano Prodi: "everything but institutions". In fact, as long as Prodi's motto will be the fundamental principle of the ENP, the new approach should be titled: "more for more, yet still no institutions". Moreover, the formula "more reforms for more funds" is by no means new, it was from the beginning an inherent truism of the differentiation principle stated by the ENP in 2004 and then restated by the Eastern Partnership in 2009. The difference is that, this time around, this apparently new magic modus operandi has been explicit formulated.

Attractive incentives with long term perspectives

Also, the ENP countries have been promised that the EU political and economic support will be dependent on progresses made by them in strengthening democracy and respect for the rule of law. This principle is not new for the Eastern Partnership states. Those who are well informed about the essence of the ENP and its Eastern Partnership know very well that. The conditionality "reforms versus assistance" is a basic principle of both initiatives. It is true that this principle was not applied strictly even by the EU, which being especially concerned with ensuring security and stability around it, or has been often tempted to turn a blind eye to undemocratic deviations taking place in the ENP countries. At the same time, effective application of the conditionality principle enshrined in the ENP requires both a powerful set of incentives and clearly defined concrete quantitative, qualitative and time benchmarks. However, the new approach of the ENP reiterates the same set of strategic incentives granted by the Eastern Partnership in 2009:

²⁶ European Commission (2011), "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood", Brussels. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

²⁷ Consolidated version of the Treaty of the European Union, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/treaty-of-lisbon.aspx?lang=en>

political association, economic integration, deep and comprehensive free trade areas and visa liberalization. Undoubtedly, such reiteration is valuable. However, we have expected from Brussels something more, namely: tangible and predictable perspectives for visa liberalization with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Instead, the European Commission has preferred to comfort them with long-term perspectives, which have a demoralizing impact on ordinary citizens, thus undermining the EU's image in the ENP states. Besides, the new approach does not give us the certainty that the monitoring and reporting procedures will change very much soon.

Greater involvement in solving “frozen conflict”, yet no real leverages of influence

Under the new ENP vision, the EU will improve its involvement in the resolution of long term conflicts in its neighborhood, particularly by exploiting the tools offered by the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, promoting joint actions on security issues in the international organizations, supporting measures that promote confidence in the secessionist territories, supporting international efforts and structures related to the resolution of these conflicts, supporting the implementation of political settlements, etc.. In case of Moldova, these general offers/promises are not new. On the contrary, they have been applied since 2005. Thanks to them, the EU has increased tremendously its presence in the Transnistrian settlement process. Unfortunately, the increased visibility of the EU in the Transnistrian region has not materialized yet in real leverages of influence on the Transnistrian administration. Instead, in order to make its messages heard and listened by Tiraspol, Brussels has to rely on Moscow as a communication relay. EU still hesitates to assume and exercise a similar role played by Russia in the Transnistrian settlement. Regrettably, the new ENP approach does not give us certainty that the situation will change greatly in this regard in the nearest future. Nevertheless, there is a new element to be fully exploited by the Moldovan government, namely: EU's readiness to develop with relevant international organizations and key partners post-conflict reconstruction scenarios that could influence considerably the resolution of regional conflicts, including the Transnistrian one, by formulating convincingly the tangible benefits of the future peaceful settlements.

Conclusions

It is obvious that the European Neighbourhood Policy has undergone qualitative changes since its inception. It has evolved from partnership to political association, from trade facilitation to economic integration, from visa facilitation to visa liberalization, from energy cooperation to energy integration, from legislative approximation to legislative harmonization, from monitoring regional crises to direct involvement in their resolution (for instance Transnistrian conflict) etc.. All these changes increased the similarities between the ENP, particularly its Eastern Partnership, and the Enlargement policy of the EU. It is too early and quite difficult to predict the next steps of the ENP, yet it is clear that it is more than a policy. It has in fact become a process that evolves and which depends greatly on the efforts of its member countries, especially on those that are determined to join the EU.

Nevertheless, there are still structural deficiencies that challenge the “new, innovative and ambitious” label of the recently re-evaluated European Neighborhood Policy. The

new approach did not overcome the greatest ENP's weakness, which is the absence of inspiring long-term vision that would motivate not only the political elites, but also the societies in all member states of the Eastern Partnership. This inspiring motivation is needed to engage them fully and permanently on the path of reforms that would get us closer to and gradually integrate into the EU. In fact, as long as the reform process will depend only on the enthusiasm and commitment of the political elites, democratic transformation process in Eastern Europe will never be irreversible. The new EU member states from Central Europe know very well this truth. They also underwent through this difficult process of transition to democracy and functioning market economy. Yet, in comparison with the Eastern Partnership states of the ENP, they were bestowed with a strong motivating factor, a beacon that helped them to face all internal and external challenges on their way to modernity, on their way to the EU.