



Remarks for discussion for the conference:

“How to improve the European Neighbourhood Policy? Concepts, perceptions and policy recommendations for its Eastern dimension”

Brussels, 4/5 November 2009

Fondation Universitaire, rue d’Egmont 11, 1000 Brussels

A French view on European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

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This paper aims at giving a short overview of the French conception of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In this context, French Leitbilder for the future size of the European Union (EU) and French concepts for the EU’s neighbourhood are briefly described.

To understand today’s French perspective on the ENP and French positions regarding its further development, one has to look back at the 1990s. Against the background of the end of the Cold War and due to German re-unification French political actors were developing their views on European enlargement policy: and these were rather sceptical! French fears of losing influence in a growing EU and of having to give up the idea of ever closer cooperation within the then EU-15 still influence French efforts towards ENP – even nowadays. It is hardly surprising that President Sarkozy engages in finding new forms of cooperation between the EU and its neighbours. On the one hand, he wants to prevent further EU enlargements (including Turkey’s accession to the EU), on the other hand, he hopes to combine French interests with European interests and, thereby, to strengthen the French influence – especially at the Southern EU ‘borders’ but also vis-à-vis countries like Russia. That is why, in sum, a brief description of French motives for the Mediterranean Union (MU) and the Eastern Partnership will be given. In the following it will be shown that French leaders have always been highly motivated and creative in developing new concepts for the future cooperation between the Union and its neighbouring countries. Thus, the ENP – from a French point of view – can be considered an alternative way of coping with EU accession aspirants or those countries that could become aspirants one day.

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In France, the question of EU enlargement is directly linked to the French conception of its role in Europe. Since 1989, the French government has had to cope with the two following phenomena: its diminishing influence in Africa and the shift of power to Central and Eastern Europe. Both evaluations result in, as Pierre Moscovici, former Minister of Foreign Affairs puts it, France's "worldwide loss of power". The fear of not only a geopolitical but also a power shift to Eastern Europe through the EU enlargement 2004/2007 motivated former French President François Mitterrand to promote his idea of a "European Confederation" in 1990. This concept was meant to prevent any EC enlargements after the end of the Cold War. The vision of the former Eastern Block states joining the European Communities as full members was, from a French point of view, the equivalent of transforming European integration into a "large zone of liberal economic exchange". In addition, French political actors feared that Eastern countries joining the European Union would strengthen Germany's role within the Union. The French president Mitterrand and his successor Chirac finally became less critical vis-à-vis the EU's 'Eastern' enlargement – only due to close cooperation with its German partner, and only after the deepening of European integration via the Maastricht Treaty (mainly introducing a common European currency and thus, binding Germany closer to European integration), and the strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security (CFSP). Without having to accept the loss of sovereign rights, the French policy concept of deepening European integration before widening the Union was thus partly realized.

Under President Nicolas Sarkozy, France has been one of the EU member states that is opposed to a membership of Turkey in terms of political and public opinion – nevertheless its political leaders keep underlining that they will not block the accession negotiations with Turkey because of its official candidate status. In fact, the French constitution foresees a referendum for any further EU accession in the future. Thus, it will be the French population that will decide about any EU enlargements and not the political class.

In the French discourse every future EU enlargement has been directly linked to the case of Turkey for years. On the contrary, neither the EU accessions of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 nor the potential EU accessions of Balkan states have been discussed. As the majority of the French population is against an EU accession of Turkey, French political leaders have started promoting a 'third way' of Turkish-EU rapprochement. Especially Sarkozy has stressed the necessity to define the 'borders of Europe' and to find an alternative concept of EU cooperation with Turkey. He asks his European colleagues for developing other types of partnership that the EU could offer to countries like Turkey or future potential EU candidate countries like the Ukraine. Thus, Sarkozy has asked for a 'Union for the Mediterranean', a prominent proposal serving his goal of preventing Turkey from joining the EU.

It has to be underlined at this point that the ENP is no issue of major concern in the French political debate. French political actors criticise that the future development of the ENP is not influenced enough by EU governments but rather lies in the hands of the European Commission. Thus, the French initiative of a MU was considered to be a national concern brought into the EU context. Having traditional and geographic links to the Mediterranean region, it is of utmost French interest to tie the Southern region closer to the European Union. Main French concerns in the context of the ENP are the following: agreement on the borders of Europe as soon as possible, balancing EU cooperation with the Southern and the Eastern neighbourhood, dealing individually with each of the ENP countries according to its capabilities, and overcoming differences of member states' positions vis-à-vis Russia.

The objectives of the ENP are – according to French officials – the political stabilisation of the EU's neighbourhood, the fostering of its economic development as well as a diplomatic alternative offer of cooperation by the EU for ENP countries instead of a full EU membership, which has to be considered an essential last step in this context.

The MU is a French project that is supposed to integrate the Southern neighbourhood in closer cooperation ties with the Union – which seems to be necessary, as, on the contrary, the Eastern neighbouring countries are believed to be treated advantageously by ENP instruments. The latter countries are not only geographical distant to France but they are also regarded to be culturally different – much more than the countries of the Southern neighbourhood, that are closer linked to France due to close economic integration and historical reasons (colonisation in Africa). What was considered a problem of the ENP (not addressing the countries based on their individual needs but according to a general 'EU scheme') is now believed to be overcome in the MU context: the individual cooperation with each of the neighbouring countries concerned is considered to be a major advantage. It should not be forgotten that the MU was once hoped to become a form of regional or even bi-lateral cooperation only, including only those other EU member states having strong interests in Mediterranean cooperation as well, like Spain and Portugal for instance.

Although it is not regarded as being France's geographic concern, the Eastern Partnership, is not only evaluated negatively from a French point of view. On the contrary, it is considered to be a possible new model for EU cooperation with its neighbouring countries – as long as individual needs of the countries are considered.

This brief overview of the French general perspective on ENP has shown that France's political actors have always been creative in finding alternative concepts that should prevent the accession of further states to the ECs and EU. From Mitterrand's "European

confederation” to Sarkozy’s “Union for the Mediterranean” all projects were aimed at avoiding EU enlargements and thus at first helping to deepen the internal cooperation of EU member states. Today, not all French actors are against further EU enlargements, but many still hope to agree on a clear *finalité* of European integration. This also includes the ENP which is supposed to serve as a common European policy to stabilise the Union’s neighbourhood and thus, consolidate a final stage of its internal and external structure.