

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

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On 4/5 November 2009 the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), Brussels, and its German member, the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP), Berlin, organised a roundtable conference on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) focusing on its Eastern dimension.

In their *welcome remarks*, **Anne Schmidt from TEPSA**, and **Katrin Böttger from the IEP**, outlined the idea and concept of the roundtable conference benefiting from TEPSA's and IEP's longstanding research activities and expertise in enlargement and neighbourhood policy issues. They were pleased that TEPSA and the IEP have succeeded in their goal of bringing together 40 representatives from the academic and the policy-making communities in order to combine scholarly and policy-relevant perspectives. In the context of a changing policy environment, Schmidt and Böttger furthermore underlined that the conference's aim was to analyse the current state of the art of the ENP and its most recent policy initiative for the Eastern dimension, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), in order to formulate policy recommendations for its improvement.

The state of the art of the ENP: Analysis and assessment of concepts and developments



Petr Kratochvíl, Viorel Ursu, Yvonne Nasshoven, Krassimir Nikolov

The first panel, chaired by **Yvonne Nasshoven from TEPSA**, discussed the concepts of ownership and conditionality as the key guiding principles of the ENP and the EaP and examined the usefulness of these concepts as well as the questions of how to successfully implement them.

The key note speaker **Petr Kratochvíl from the Institute for International Relations, Prague**, presented the current state of the art of the ENP and its Eastern dimension. Concerning the relationship between the ENP and the EaP he stressed the fact that the cognitive framework of the ENP will remain not because of the partners' needs but because of the EU's interest to create a so-called “ring of friends”. He also outlined that even though there is a rivalry between the EaP and the

Black Sea Synergy (BSS), the EaP was much more popular. In addition, there was a large overlap of activities and competition for funding so that the EaP could turn out to remain the only relevant regional initiative. Furthermore, he emphasised that the EaP will remain a “soft policy” not targeting hard security issues such as frozen conflicts. Consequently, the EU will have to explain this approach to the partners (which it has failed to do so far). The future of the EaP (and the ENP) will in the end depend on the political will of both the partners and the EU to continue this – according to Kratochvíl – potentially high quality policy initiative despite the shortcomings of its soft policy approach and the non-definition of the EU-Russia relations.

In his intervention, **Krassimir Nikolov from the Bulgarian European Community Studies Association, Sofia**, gave insights into his analysis of the joint ownership principle. He introduced the theoretical concept of foreign policy-making as either a transformative or co-operative approach. Following these categories he pointed out that the EU originally followed the more transformative approach whereas its member states were sticking to the co-operative approach. Nikolov stressed that it is a mistake to discuss the ENP through the enlargement prism since only the enlargement policy's association phase could be compared to the ENP. Furthermore, the joint ownership principle was understood differently by the EU and its partners. Whereas the former perceives it as a process-based approach it is a content-focused principle for the latter. According to Nikolov this must lead to disappointment. Although the partners can make positive experiences with the joint ownership principle in the negotiation process, it has shown shortcomings in the implementation phase. Those “constructive ambiguities” with regard to the joint ownership principle, as experienced in the ENP-context, will continue to exist with the EaP.

In his speech **Viorel Ursu from the Open Society Institute Brussels**, presented a more practical approach and looked at the principle of conditionality with regard to its usefulness in democratisation processes. He stressed the need to discuss whether the EaP can be successful without a membership

perspective keeping in mind that the enlargement policy has proven to be the most effective one and its membership perspective the most attractive. However, he questioned whether the reform process in the partner countries would be faster with the membership perspective and criticised the fact that the partner countries justified the slow-down of reforms by the lack of the accession perspective. He sees it as problematic that the ENP is a foreign policy tool and not implemented as an internal transformative policy. While he deemed the ENP a useful tool in the Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, in “passive countries” such as Belarus and Azerbaijan the effectiveness would be more difficult to achieve. Ursu stressed that the EU should stick to tougher conditionality (although adapting its approach to Belarus since the EU’s policy has failed there so far) and use visa liberalisation as an incentive, thus as a kind of “small carrot”. In his view, the ENP can contribute to democratisation processes only to a certain extent and very slowly. He pointed to the problem that partners were fooling the EU with their rhetoric which was in contrast to the real implementation status. As policy recommendations for improving the ENP Ursu advocated the development of a clear democracy acquis, visa liberalisation for people-to-people contacts, closer mentorship, and tougher conditionality.

In the subsequent exchange with the roundtable participants, the experts discussed the following issues: the compatibility of the principles of conditionality and joint ownership, the role of the EU as security provider in Georgia, the eurocentrism of the debate, the ENP’s inherent ambiguities, the role of Russia and Turkey, the need for better implementation of the existing standards, the EU’s interest in energy security, and the impact of the financial and economic crisis.

Changing the perspective: the ENP from the Eastern partner countries’ view

In the second session, the focus shifted towards the Eastern partner countries’ perception and assessment of the ENP and the EaP. Special attention was given to the Ukrainian, Moldovan and Belarusian perspectives.

Since the setting up of the ENP, its ambivalent character (lack of specific goals, clear design and strategy) has opened up the possibility for partner countries to shape the policy. According to **Iryna Solonenko from the International Renaissance Foundation, Kiev** Ukraine is one of the neighbouring countries that strongly contributed to the evolution of the ENP. Ukraine’s efforts can be explained against the background of its rather negative attitude towards the ENP considering it to be a substitute to enlargement policy. For instance, following the Orange Revolution, the EU-Ukraine Action Plan was complemented by a “list of additional measures”. The application of these additional incentives has later been extended to other ENP countries in the European Commission’s Communication of December 2006 on strengthening the ENP. In the same line, tools and instruments used in the ENP have evolved inter alia due to the development of the EU-Ukraine relationship. New tools such as conditionality, monitoring and socialisation channels were offered first to Ukraine and then to other Eastern partner countries.



Giselle Bosse, Iulian Groza,
Katrin Böttger, Iryna Solonenko

In contrast to Ukraine that takes up a rather critical stance on ENP, Moldovan perceptions are more positive. As **Iulian Groza from the Mission of the Republic of Moldova to the European Communities** put it, the ENP is perceived as a stepping stone towards European integration due to which Moldova has fostered significant internal reforms. The EaP with its bilateral and multilateral dimension, is considered to be a first big step forward and the first attempt to develop a comprehensive EU policy towards the Eastern neighbours. However, Moldovan political actors regret the fact that the EaP lacks clear-cut goals and actions to motivate partner countries and that the budget is too small to address ambitious projects.

In her intervention, **Giselle Bosse from the University of Maastricht** stressed the fact that in the last years, Belarusian perceptions and assessments of the EU’s policies towards its Eastern neighbours have undergone a significant evolution. During 2003 and 2008, there had been a consensus among Belarusian government officials that the EU has no right to impose conditions on their country. Disappointed about the exclusion from the ENP, they criticised the fact that the ENP merely represents the EU’s interests and not those of the partner countries. Nevertheless, Belarusian officials approved the fact that the EU considers Belarus to be a peaceful buffer zone. For the future, they expected equal treatment and claimed that EU-Belarus relations should be more predictable. The EaP is perceived as an attractive offer to Belarus. Belarusian political actors welcome the initiative for its flexible character and priority areas of cooperation, such as energy and people-to-people contacts. At the same time they hope that Russia will be included in projects of the EaP more often.

Conclusions: From analysis and assessment to policy advice

During the concluding session, the previous discussion on the usefulness and effectiveness of ENP policy concepts and instruments as well as the perceptions of the partner countries were summarised and synthesised in the form of concrete policy recommendations. Practitioners from the European Institutions working on ENP and Eastern Partnership discussed these issues with the expert audience.



Egidio Canciani, Hannes Swoboda, Michele Comelli, Elmar Brok, Sieglinde Gstöhl

Referring to the future prospects of the ENP and the EaP, **Sieglinde Gstöhl from the College of Europe** underlined the fact that the crucial question concerns the political will of the leaders in each of the states addressed in order to tackle the necessary domestic reforms. Gstöhl recommended the setting up of clear monitoring procedures and benchmarks, and more short-term rewards. Secondly, she demanded enough time for both sides to deliver the necessary incentives, such as visa facilitation by the EU. In addition, Gstöhl pleaded for a stronger focus on conflict resolution as the top priority of the EU's foreign policy as well as a stronger involvement of Russia. In the context of the future development of the EaP she hoped for more multilateral cooperation.

The second speaker of the panel, **Elmar Brok, MEP (EPP)**, looked favourably upon the fact that the EaP creates new forms of cooperation which can more realistically be successful than all efforts that were made before in the context of the ENP. Like Gstöhl he called for, on the one hand, more incentives by the EU to support domestic reforms in the neighbouring countries. On the other hand, he underlined that those countries could only be closer connected to the internal market if they accepted the whole EU acquis. Brok warned against any “overstretching” of the EU by further enlargements and therefore praised the EaP as a good alternative. In sum, he pleaded for a step-by-step-approach that should make short-term reform results more visible for the population in the neighbouring countries concerned.

His colleague **Hannes Swoboda, MEP (S&D)**, followed the same line of argument: the EU's neighbouring countries, located both at its Southern and its Eastern borders, should be brought closer to the Union without allowing them to become full members. It would be in the EU's interest to create “rings of friends”, like the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) or a Black Sea Union. Considering the case of Turkey, Swoboda underlined that it would take more than ten years before Turkey could become a full EU-member. In the meantime, it could therefore be useful to include Turkey in such a “ring of friends”. Swoboda evaluated the ENP – as well as the EaP – as useful tools to improve the EU's cooperation with those countries that could not become members of the Union. He hoped for more instruments to address each state on a case-by-case basis while at the same time guaranteeing the same firm commitments to all states concerned.

The last speaker of the panel, **Egidio Canciani from the European Commission** pointed out that efforts on both sides of the border would be necessary – thus, by the EU itself as well as by the neighbouring countries. Shared values and principles should remain at the heart of the ENP. Canciani considered a balanced approach of bi- and multilateral cooperation for furthering the cooperation in the context of EaP and UfM indispensable. In a geographical sense, another balance would be necessary: The panellist raised the question why the Eastern neighbouring countries were more pressed by the EU to reform their internal governing structures than the partners in the UfM.

The organizers linked the roundtable format to the idea of having short **written inputs** by all participants - thereby benefiting from the participating experts from academia and practice. These papers were distributed to all participants in advance and are now accessible on TEPSA's and IEP's websites.