THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY

Mariam Dekanozishvili

The European neighborhood policy: an overview

The European Union (EU) launched the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in response to the 2004 Eastern enlargement that reshaped the EU’s borders and elicited a new policy framework for relations with the EU’s new neighbors. In 2003, the first Security Strategy drafted by the EU identified the neighborhood as a crucial zone for the EU’s security. It was in the EU’s best interest to “promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean” (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 8). As a result, a new initiative with two titles – “Wider Europe” and “New Neighborhood” – and two geographical dimensions – Eastern and Mediterranean – was born. Later, the EU abandoned the “Wider Europe” concept and pigeonholed its neighbors in the European Neighborhood Policy. The Eastern dimension includes the so-called Western Newly Independent States (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia); the Mediterranean dimension comprises Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia.

Designed to prevent the emergence of “new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors,” the ENP aimed at developing a zone of security, stability and prosperity (European Commission, 2003a). In return for concrete progress in political, economic and institutional reforms, including in aligning legislation with the EU aquis, the EU offered its neighbors “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 (four freedoms)” – albeit without the prospect of EU membership (European Commission, 2003a, p. 4). The ENP introduced “positive conditionality” that promised “everything but institutions” conditional on mutual commitment to common values: the rule of law, good governance, human rights, the promotion of good neighborly relations, principles of market economy and sustainable development. Although designed as an alternative to enlargement, the ENP was modeled on the EU’s pre-accession policy (Dannreuther, 2006; Kelley, 2006). The EU paired the principles of positive conditionality and differentiation with an emphasis on “joint ownership” and “shared values” (Schimmelfennig, 2012, pp. 18–19). The EU proposed to implement the ENP through jointly agreed Action Plans with each of its neighbors. EU-Partner Country Action Plans outlined the agenda for bilateral cooperation, set benchmarks for domestic reforms and introduced regular
monitoring and reporting mechanisms. An important element of the EU’s positive conditionality was the introduction of a new financial instrument for the ENP – the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) – which according to Gebhard (2010, p. 98), was a genuine innovation. The EU’s 2007–2013 multi-annual financial framework (MFF) allotted €11.2 billion to the ENPI, an increase of 32 percent, in real terms, compared with the amount available over the period 2000–2006 for the MEDA and TACIS programs (European Commission, 2014). The European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI), replacing the ENPI in 2014, stands at €15,433 billion (current prices), which is overall comparable with the total funding allocated under the ENPI for 2007–2013 (European Commission, 2013, p. 2).

Given the significant developments and new challenges in the EU’s neighborhood, first posed by the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, and later, the “Arab Spring,” it became essential to review the ENP. The EU responded to the changing context of the neighborhood with “more-for-more” approach, emphasizing a higher level of differentiation based on each partner country’s aspiration, needs and capacities. The EU stepped up prospective rewards for neighboring countries, including visa-free regimes, as well as Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA). At the same time, the revised ENP introduced elements of “negative conditionality”: “For countries where reform has not taken place, the EU will reconsider or even reduce funding. The EU will uphold its policy of curtailing relations with governments engaged in violations of human rights and democracy standards, including by making use of targeted sanctions and other policy measures” (European Commission, 2011, p. 3).

Since the launch of the ENP, the EU has differentiated between the two groups of neighbors participating in the neighborhood policy. The EU accentuated this differentiation with the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) under the ENP umbrella. Both initiatives aimed at enhancing results-oriented regional cooperation.

Scholars and policymakers continue to debate the success and effectiveness of the ENP. On the one hand, the EU concluded three DCFTA agreements with the Eastern partners (Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) as part of Association Agreements. In the Southern neighborhood, DCFTA negotiations are ongoing with Morocco and Tunisia, albeit with some delays. On the other hand, an “arc of instability” stretching from the EU’s eastern borders down to the Mediterranean basin undermined the European Neighborhood Policy. The ENP failed to accomplish its objectives of delivering prosperity, stability and democracy to the countries surrounding the EU (Whitman & Wolff, 2010, p. 12). The rise of ISIL in the aftermath of the “Arab Spring,” refugee crisis and an increasingly assertive Russian foreign policy toward the EU’s Eastern neighbors necessitated a fundamental rethinking of the ENP.

The European Commission and the High Representative on Common Foreign and Security Policy jointly put forward a review of the ENP. The 2015 ENP review prioritizes stability in the neighborhood and emphasizes differentiation and greater mutual ownership (European Commission, 2015).

**Conceptualizing the ENP: rationale, principles and instruments**

The European Neighborhood Policy was designed to spread stability, security and prosperity, and prevent feelings of exclusion within the new neighbors. However, the ENP deprived these countries of EU membership carrot from the outset. Scholarly debate unfolded regarding the true rationale of the ENP between the proponents of constitutive normative power approaches (Manners, 2002, 2006, 2010) and causal, rationalist, incentive-based explanations of the ENP (Barbé and Johansson-Nogués, 2008; Del Sarto and Schumacher, 2005; Gebhard, 2010; Kelley, 2006). This section attempts to shed light on the conceptual diversity surrounding the ENP.
One of the dominant strands of the existing literature on the ENP characterizes the neighborhood policy as the EU’s interest-oriented policy embedded in securitization logic. In the post-9/11 global environment, the ENP is underpinned by the desire to provide security for EU citizens by effectively controlling external borders (Bicchi, 2010b; Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005; Pace, 2010; Schumacher, 2015); thus, the EU acts as a realist actor using norms to justify the promotion of key EU interests (Hyde-Price, 2006; Seeberg, 2009). Along these lines, Moravcsik (2010, p. 159) considers the ENP an important instrument directed by the more powerful EU member states for resolving conflicts and promoting political and economic reforms in the neighborhood. Barbé and Johansson-Nogués (2008, p. 86) view the ENP as, essentially, the EU’s border management tool; indeed, the EU provided financial and technical assistance to the ENP partners for enhancing border control capacity. As an incentive for adopting reforms, the ENP included the possibility of liberalizing the Schengen visa regime. Thus, citizens of the Republic of Moldova have been enjoying the visa-free regime to the Schengen zone since April 2014 and Georgia is expected to be granted visa liberalization in 2016.

Scholars looking at the ENP from institutional lenses emphasize path-dependent stickiness in the strategic conception and design of the ENP (Gebhard, 2010; Lavenex, 2004). They pay particular attention to the continuity between enlargement and neighborhood policy, and argue that the EU wished to apply the enlargement experience of the successful transformation of the Central and Eastern Europe to the new neighborhood. Therefore, the ENP resembles conditionality-based enlargement policy and the rhetoric of joint ownership and partnership is rather a cover-up for the absence of the accession carrot (Kelley, 2006; Smith, 2005).

On the other hand, a number of studies argue that rationalist, actor-based foreign policy approaches may not adequately capture the essential aspects of the EU external influence through the ENP. The ENP should rather be viewed as a longer-term process of socialization (Lavenex, 2008; Sasse, 2010). Instead, “Europeanization” explains the rationale behind the ENP, namely the transformation of domestic politics and policies in “target” countries in response to European policies and practices (Grabbe, 2006; Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008; Shimmelfennig, 2012; Sedelmeier & Schimmelfennig, 2005). Europeanization is a “processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared norms” (Karolewski, 2012, p. 16). Thus, the ENP serves as a litmus test for the EU’s “transformative power” or “normative power” in the neighborhood (Börzel & Van Hüllen, 2014; Pace, 2009).

Building on Manner’s “normative power” approach, some scholars interpret the EU’s Europeanization attempt as an adoption of a hierarchical logic of governance (Haukkala, 2008; Koresteleva, 2012; Pänke, 2015). Along these lines, Del Sarto and Schumacher (2005) argue that the ENP exemplifies the unequal power relations between the EU and its neighbors. The EU uses soft power for pursuing its foreign policy objective of creating a cushion of stable neighbors establishing “boundaries of normality and European-ness” (Haukkala, 2008, p. 1606). The EU claims regional normative hegemony in Europe and its immediate neighborhood expressed in the imposition of the EU’s internal mode of governance on third countries (Haukkala, 2010). In effect, governance – extension and imposition of the EU’s political, legal and economic acquis – prevails over the ENP partnership (Korosteleva, 2013, p. 12).

Other scholars accuse the EU of “normative imperialism.” According to Browning and Joenniemi (2008, p. 521), the ENP’s geopolitical imperial blueprint has been coupled with context-dependent geostrategies in different regions. Del Sarto (2016, p. 216) echoes this argument and uses the metaphor of a “normative empire” to describe the EU’s relations with the Southern neighborhood: “throughout history, empires have sought to stabilize the periphery, to draw economic advantages from it, to export the imperial order and cultivate elites there.”
Imperial logic of normative external relations implies a specific external behavior aimed at gaining legitimacy and establishing a sense of community in the neighborhood by adopting what Zielonka (2006) calls a “civilizing mission.” This is different from a conventional goal-oriented foreign policy. Normative power of the EU is not simply about norm diffusion; nor can the unequal nature of the ENP be comprehended in terms of “normative hegemony”; the ENP is characterized by “normative imperialism” (Pänke, 2015).

Other post-structural approaches place emphasis on EU’s identity construction vis-à-vis the neighboring “others” (Pace, 2009). The EU spreads a European identity in its neighborhood by shaping “conceptions of the normal” (Manners, 2002), as well as “conceptions of the superior” (Karolewski, 2012, pp. 20–24). The former is used to legitimize the implementation of the EU’s institutional rules, norms and standards, while the latter promotes the EU self-image of a normatively superior entity (Karolewski, 2012, pp. 20–24). Horký-Hlucháň and Kratochvíl (2014, pp. 255–266) interpret the ENP as an embodiment of the “modern spatial othering” through which the EU constructs its neighborhood as an ambiguous and transitional “other” while masking the asymmetric nature of the relationship with a liberal-democratic discourse. In sum, the ENP makes the neighboring partners accept their inferior otherness, while “incentivizing” them to strive to become more Western (Horký-Hlucháň & Kratochvíl, 2014). As a result, two contending identity narratives emerge in relation to the ENP: Europe as a “Common Home” with the explicit possibility for becoming European and Europe as a “Citadel” preventing admittance to the exclusive EU club (Tonra, 2010, p. 67). So far, the ENP has been leaning toward the second narrative.

The external governance perspective also provides useful insights into the ENP. Rather than focusing on a hierarchical model of governance, the external governance approach underlines institutionalization outside of the EU, particularly the extension of EU’s legal-institutional framework beyond EU borders to non-members (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 807). The EU’s external governance ambition entails the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy. On the one hand, the ENP is designed to extend the EU’s legal boundary; while on the other hand, the EU establishes exclusionary borders to protect itself from external threats. Thus, the ENP can be conceived of as a part of the EU’s new foreign policy aimed at attracting, transforming and stabilizing the margins of the EU (Campain, 2012, p. 128).

Based on the above discussion, the ENP can be envisaged as a multilayer policy with a mixture of interest-based and normatively oriented objectives (Bauer, 2013b). Managing the growing spectrum of security issues and modernizing the EU’s neighborhood seem to be the twin goals of the ENP (Lyubashenko, 2012). The ENP is an attempt to simultaneously devise an alternative to further enlargement and to reinject the well-known instruments of conditionality and socialization into the EU’s normative agenda (Dannreuther, 2006, pp. 183–201; Kelley, 2006, pp. 29–55).

By relying on conditionality and socialization instruments in the ENP, the EU is trying to replicate the success story of the enlargement policy. However, instead of traditional conditionality, the ENP features a benchmark-based approach to evaluate progress of the neighbors in the adoption of the EU acquis (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 2). Bilateral Action Plans outline the reforms that the neighbors have committed to implement in various policy sectors.

Conditionality strategies are applied through grants and other funds, subject to monitoring and sanctioning (Karolewski, 2012, p. 23). Yet, unlike enlargement, the biggest carrot the ENP could offer is the visa-free regime and the prospect of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

The socialization process works mostly through political dialogue and transgovernmental functional cooperation in specific policy domains. Joint problem-solving contributes to
the transfer of the European rules and standards to the ENP countries, thereby promoting democratic governance (Freyburg, Lavenex, Schimmelfennig, Skripka, & Wetzel, 2009). Socialization strategies are focused on the process of rule and identity transfer and constitute an important element of external governance (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009). The notion of identity transfer implies EU’s projection of its “institutional identity” consisting of rules, norms and procedures, and adaptation to EU’s institutional standards, regarded as the appropriate ones, in the neighboring countries. However, in the ENP, identity transfer is not supported by a genuine identity offer (Karolewski, 2012, p. 26). By promoting notions such as the circle of friends, rather than formulating a definitive membership perspective, the EU’s offer to neighbors involves far fewer pledges to solidarity, common history and togetherness.

Evaluating the success of the ENP

Despite more than a decade of its existence, the ENP still remains vague in terms of its success. If we are to judge the success of the ENP against its declared objective of creating a stable and secure “ring of friends” in the neighborhood, the result is definitely not enviable. Although modeled on enlargement policy, the EU failed to reproduce the success in promoting effective and legitimate governance in its Eastern and Southern neighbors (Börzel, 2011; Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008). The crisis in Ukraine, Syria’s civil war, and multiple security challenges, be it terrorism or the European refugee crisis, have clearly demonstrated the downward trajectory of the EU’s influence in the neighborhood (Juncos & Whitman, 2015).

Given the number and variety of ENP objectives – such as creating stable, secure and prosperous neighborhoods, diffusing EU norms and values, promoting political, economic and social reforms in the neighboring countries, and constructing EU’s own identity – makes evaluating the ENP a difficult task. The absence of clearly articulated benchmarks only complicates the ENP assessment. In addition, the ENP is an ongoing project that has already undergone several revisions. Thus, instead of reaching premature conclusions regarding the ENP success and (in)effectiveness with respect to its overarching objectives, examining shortcomings of the ENP design may prove more insightful.

Early studies were skeptical of the EU’s success in fostering domestic change in the neighboring countries (Kelley, 2006; Smith, 2005). From the outset, focus on the lack of credible incentives and the ENP’s ambiguity over the finality of the EU’s borders outweighed any other debate (Haukkala & Moshes, 2004; Schimmelfennig, 2005). The reluctance of the member states to deal with the strategic finality of relations with their neighbors gave rise to feelings of exclusion and diminished the impact of the ENP in bringing about reforms (Smith, 2005; Whitman & Wolff, 2010). Persistent “constructive ambiguity” in the EU’s discourse over its ultimate borders confined the neighboring countries to non-membership despite Article 49 of the TEU that does not rule out accession of any “European” country (Schumacher, 2015). Without prospective membership, the ENP could not be expected to offer sufficient incentives to mitigate costly domestic reforms in the EU’s neighbors (Kelley, 2006; Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008; Schimmelfennig, 2012). Besides, the normative power of the EU would not be as effective in inducing reforms in the ENP partners as it had been in the candidate countries (Haukkala, 2008). Thus, the transformative power of the EU in ENP countries was diminished due to the perception of the ENP instruments and incentives as a second-class (and poor) substitute to full membership (Emerson, 2004; Missiroli, 2010). While some of the Eastern neighbors might still harbor hopes of eventual membership, the EU has made it explicit that the Mediterranean neighbors could only hope for enhanced access without accession. Tassinari (2005, p. 6) nicely captured the ENP’s niche:
Neighborhood is a category where the EU’s ability to exert influence is weaker and Europe’s power “structuration” becomes more fuzzy, a sort of intermediate category between inside and outside, where internal and external security interdependence tends to become one. It is not inside, but not firmly outside either, especially in security terms due to its vicinity.

The ENP principles and instruments enshrined in the ENP Strategy Paper and later in the Action Plans have also come under considerable criticism. From the beginning, the EU has underlined the importance of joint ownership of the process (based on awareness of shared values and common interests, as well as mutually agreed Action Plan priorities tailored to each partner’s geographic location, their political and economic circumstances, and aspirations) (European Commission, 2004, p. 8).

By adding principles of joint ownership and differentiation, the EU attempted to adjust the enlargement policy to the ENP. However, as some critics argue, these principles are at odds with the main principle of conditionality borrowed from the enlargement experience – demanding reforms in exchange for the membership carrot (Ghazaryan, 2010, p. 237). Furthermore, the European Commission did not follow the principle of joint ownership throughout the policy formulation. There was little consultation with the ENP partners regarding the content of the Action Plans, which mostly reflected the EU’s own pre-determined goals, interests and values (Bicchi, 2006; Ghazaryan, 2010; Tonra, 2010, p. 56–66). Thus, the ENP undermined the idea of partnership in favor of the traditional governance method based on the top-down transfer of EU rules. ENP’s one-sidedness invited scholarly criticism (see Bechev & Nicolaïdis, 2010; Delcour, 2008, 2011; Korosteleva, 2012; Pace, 2009). Del Sarto and Schumacher (2011) contend that the ENP reflects EU’s center-periphery approach toward its Southern neighbors. The Eurocentric approach, devoid of real partnership and deliberation, reinforces the EU’s image of a norm imposer and relegates the EU’s neighbors to the role of consenting norm takers (Grabbe, 2006; Horký-Hluchán & Kratochvíl, 2014). Bearing in mind the well-known argument that political transformation should be home-grown, imposed Europeanization through asymmetric conditionality of the ENP undermines the EU legitimacy and external governance (Tocci, 2006; Korosteleva, 2012).

The ENP was criticized for placing Eastern and Mediterranean partners in the same basket without giving due regard to the principle of differentiation. The neighbors had no real reason to perceive themselves as a group due to very different political, cultural and historical legacies (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). The ENP Action Plans with Southern and Eastern neighbors followed a common template with standardized sets of priorities. They resembled long wish lists of short-term and medium-term reforms and lacked clearly stated criteria for measuring the progress of ENP partners. The absence of a clear and fair conditionality mechanism diluted the proposed “more for more” approach based on the idea that greater reforms toward democracy, human rights and rule of law would be rewarded with more access to funding, simplified visa regimes and more trade liberalization (Barbé & Johansson-Nogués, 2008).

More recently, major criticism of the ENP has been leveled at the EU’s democratization efforts in its neighborhood. According to Del Sarto and Schumacher (2011), the ENP lacks analytical depth with regard to concepts and processes of democratization. The EU’s democracy promotion in its Southern periphery has proved counterproductive. Autocratic regimes perceived the arbitrary benchmarks of the ENP as an indication that they could “get away with” repressive policies. The ENP literature often refers to the inconsistency of ENP objectives when examining the EU’s attempts to promote democracy. The EU’s neighborhood policies
seem to be caught in a trade-off between the EU’s two goals of democratization (reform) and stability (Bicchi, 2010a; Biscop, 2010; Pace, 2010). According to Tocci (2006, p. 11), “In both neighborhoods, the securitization of possession goals such as energy, migration, borders, terrorism and organized crime in the 21st century has come to trump the pursuit of more diffuse and long-term aims such as democracy and human rights.” Similarly, Bauer (2013a) argues that in the Southern neighborhood the ENP signified a reorientation of EU foreign policy goals from a “normative long-term democratization to a strategic short-term stabilization of the authoritarian systems” (p. 60). Since the Arab Spring, the democratization agenda has been downgraded (Tömmel, 2013). The EU’s pursuit of twin but conflicting goals of effective and democratic governance in the ENP partners is a clear reflection of the EU’s democratization vs. stabilization dilemma. While the ENP conceives effective and democratic governance as complementary objectives, the democratization of (semi-)authoritarian countries entails the risk of their destabilization. Thus, effective and democratic governance turn into conflicting goals: “The lower the level of political liberalization and the higher the instability of a country, the more ineffective the EU is in asserting a democratic reform agenda in the ENP Action Plans, clearly favoring stability over change” (Börzel & Hüllen, 2014, p. 1044).

Within burgeoning academic and policy literature on the ENP, there is a strand that considers ENP failures be rooted in problems of capability and implementation. The implementation pitfalls of the EU’s declared objectives are often blamed on the lack of internal coherence (Delcour, 2010; Youngs, 2009). Tulmets (2008) offers a distinction between internal and external coherence of the EU policy. Internal coherence refers to the problems of coordination and compatibility in the policy conception and formulation stage between various EU policies or actors. For example, the emergence of the Mediterranean Union and the Eastern Partnership demonstrates differences in the preferences of various member states regarding their relations with the countries in the neighborhood (Whitman & Wolff, 2010, p. 14). External coherence, on the other hand, relates to the output dimension – the EU’s capacity to use its policy instruments to generate reforms in the neighborhood. Yet, the ENP experience has shown an uneven use of policy tools (Delcour, 2010). The ENP implementation problems in fostering comprehensive regulatory change also derive from its failure to include civil society, business and private regulators (Langbein, 2014).

Proponents of the external governance approach are more optimistic about the EU’s ability in inducing neighboring countries to adopt sector-specific democratic governance provisions. The governance approach focuses on changes in rules and practices within individual policy fields (Freyburg et al., 2009). Informed by an institutionalist perspective, the supporters of the governance model suggest that effective transfer of norms depends on two elements: first, the degree of legal specification of democratic governance elements in the EU sectoral acquis, and second, the institutionalization of transgovernmental networks (Freyburg et al., 2009; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009). Cooperation in various policy fields intensifies horizontal ties between the public administrations of the EU and partner countries and shapes positive attitudes of state officials toward democratic governance (Lavenex, 2008).

Some scholars attribute the pitfalls of the EU’s democratization efforts to the partners’ domestic structures, namely restricted administrative capacity for rule absorption and reform implementation (Ágh, 2010; Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2009, Freyburg et al., 2009; Lavenex, 2008). Based on the analysis of the Ukrainian and Moldovan cases, Sasse (2010) underlines the importance of the domestic political context in framing the ENP (p. 200).

In a nutshell, the ENP is neither an enlargement policy nor a foreign policy. In the absence of the prospect of EU membership, the ENP “conditionality-lite” is less likely to replicate the success of the enlargement policy (Missiroli, 2010, p. 262); therefore, a consensus has formed
that for the notion of “partnership” to be effective, the EU must revisit conditionality and offer credible incentives to its partners (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 3). Weak external incentives and high domestic costs, coupled with the ENP’s stability vs. democratization trade-off, make democracy promotion in the partner countries a more challenging task.

The ENP reloaded

Since its launch, there have been several attempts to reload the ENP. These attempts were as much the result of changing external circumstances as they were a consequence of pre-existing structural deficiencies.

The first revision of the ENP took place in 2007 when the European Commission in its Communication “A Strong European Neighborhood Policy” recommended the pursuance of further differentiation, joint ownership and regional cooperation in order to make the ENP more partnership-based and appealing for the neighbors (European Commission, 2007). However, the Commission focused more on implementation methods and measures (DCFTAs, mobility, sectoral reforms), while the conceptual clarification of partnership remained vague: It was still not clear whether the ENP was in essence a “reform-for-partnership,” or “partnership-for-reform” (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 6).

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) – a joint Polish-Swedish initiative – emerged as an attempt to revamp the ENP in light of its diminished appeal, and later, of the new geopolitical realities in the EU’s Eastern neighborhood highlighted by the Russo-Georgian armed conflict of 2008. EaP was also a response to the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) for fifteen neighbors to the EU’s south in North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans region. The emergence of the UfM and EaP underscored the existing internal divisions in the EU over the resources and priorities (Missiroli, 2010). The EaP was envisaged as a region-focused and tailored approach for each partner’s needs and capacity. EaP entailed differentiated incentives to allow for enhanced cooperation, such as Association Agreements and visa liberalization, for “front-runners” (European Commission, 2008). EaP also stepped up its efforts in dealing with “frozen conflicts” – unresolved conflicts in post-Soviet countries with no significant progress toward a settlement and a continued possibility of renewal of active armed violence (i.e., Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) – EaP increased financial assistance under the ENPI, and put more weight on civil society to promote reforms (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 8).

However, there is more continuity than change in the EU’s modus operandi with its neighbors. EaP remains weak with regard to incentives and does not overcome the ENP deficiencies in transforming the EU’s Eastern neighbors (Boonstra & Shapovalova, 2010, p. 12). More crucially, the conceptual ambiguity regarding the notion of partnership still persists. In the absence of an adequate response to the needs and interests of the partners, the policy is unlikely to find legitimation in the neighborhood (Korosteleva, 2011). From a purely functional standpoint, the ENP/EaP is advancing its economic mission as evidenced by DCFTAs and Association Agreements with the frontrunners – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. As a security and democratization instrument, EaP does not deserve high marks: political leaders of Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan are unwilling to sign up to Brussels’s political conditionality (Bechev, 2015).

The UfM initiative has been criticized for abandoning the multilateral approach and separating the Mediterranean policy from the Middle East conflict (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2011). By linking progress to positive conditionality, the UfM imposed a competitive system on the partners. However, the relationship between the ENP and UfM remained unclear and signified a decline in the EU’s democracy promotion ambition. The UfM focus fell on technical
cooperation in a limited set of policy sectors, such as environment, technological innovation and energy (Tömmel, 2013).

In light of the Arab Spring and scant results of the ENP in the Southern neighborhood, the revision of the ENP was perceived as an overdue process (Barbé & Johansson-Nogués, 2008; Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2011). It became clear that a one-size-fits-all approach was no longer feasible and that reforms required domestic ownership. As a result, a “more-for-more” approach and mutual responsibility formed the essential elements of the Commission’s and High Representative’s joint communication “New Response to a Changing Neighborhood” (European Commission, 2011). The communication, originally envisioned to adapt internally to the Lisbon Treaty and externally to Arab uprisings, made it clear that the EU remained concerned about the negative spill-overs from unstable and insecure neighbors. Securitizing logic underpinned the discourse and policymaking regarding its Southern neighborhood (European Commission, 2011; Schumacher, 2015). Inclusion of few security-related stipulations in the revised ENP on conflict resolution and post-conflict action mirrored advances in the Common Security and Defense Policy in the Lisbon Treaty and the EU’s self-presentation as a more capable international actor (Schumacher, 2015).

The revised ENP advocated higher level of differentiation in accordance with the aspirations, needs and capacities of each partner. To encourage building of “deep and sustainable democracy,” the EU promised to increase financial support through the newly established Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF). At the same time, the EU also introduced the use of negative conditionality. It promised to punish the violators of democratic principles by revoking funds and assistance (Tömmel, 2013).

In light of the ENP revisions and updates, scholarly focus has shifted to examining policy continuity and evaluating the effectiveness of the reloaded ENP (Bauer, 2013b; Gillespie, 2013; Schumacher, 2015). Tömmel (2013, p. 25) contends that the revised ENP entails little substantive innovation: “Policy priorities and measures are rather ‘old wine’, while implementation methods and particular conditionality comes about as a ‘new wineskin’, linked firmly to democracy promotion.” Policy continuity in the revised ENP is mainly induced by the internal constraints that the EU faces in policy formation and implementation. The external factors, such as the global financial crisis and its impact on the Eurozone countries, can also change the opportunity structure for the EU’s willingness and ability to act in the neighborhood (Whitman & Juncos, 2012, 2014). According to Schumacher (2015), there is not much novel about the means of the revised ENP through which the EU intends to build “deep democracy.” The idea of DCFTAs, presented as a new tool for advancing economic development in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, originated back in 2006. Moreover, DCFTAs do not envisage full access to European agricultural markets due to the protectionist attitudes of member states concerned about competition from the Southern neighbors (Schumacher, 2015).

Despite substantial financial support (over 15 billion Euros made available through the ENI in the EU’s 2014–2020 multi-annual financial framework) and some positive developments regarding reforms to promote the rule of law and increased accountability in the neighborhood (e.g., Tunisia), the EU continues to face security threats of terrorism, rising extremism, refugee flows and protracted conflicts in its southern and eastern borderlands.

The ongoing revision of the ENP: challenges and prospects ahead

The ENP was tailored for a stable environment, but events were soon to challenge its compatibility with the situation in several partner countries. Indeed, soon after the ENP revision

236
The European neighborhood policy

was agreed in 2011, European security was jeopardized by ISIL from the South and Russia’s assertive foreign policy in Ukraine from the East. These developments, culminating in the terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015, strengthened observations that the EU lacked both a credible diplomatic and economic strategy to respond to the new regional context (Juncos & Whitman, 2015).

The urgency of strengthening the EU’s foreign policy and effectively engaging in the neighboring regions has led the EU to launch the review of the ENP in 2015. The crisis-driven push resulted in a shift in the ENP focus, away from political and economic transformation of neighbors toward a cooperation framework aimed at stabilization of the neighborhood. “In the next three to five years, the most urgent challenge in many parts of the neighborhood is stabilization. The EU’s approach will seek to comprehensively address sources of instability across sectors. Poverty, inequality, a perceived sense of injustice, corruption, weak economic and social development and lack of opportunity, particularly for young people, can be roots of instability, increasing vulnerability to radicalization” (European Commission, 2015, pp. 3–4).

The review has been closely coordinated with the broader work on the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy issued in June 2016 (European Union, 2016). In line with the Global Strategy, the revised ENP entails stepping up of cooperation with partners on security-related matters, including conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and anti-radicalization policies. The revised ENP also underscores the importance of developing new ways of working with the “neighbors of the neighbors” (European Commission, 2015, p. 18). The EU’s absence of a strategy for Russia, beyond hoping for indigenous economic and political reform, proved to be a major weakness in the EU’s approach toward its neighborhood (Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2009, pp. 868–869). The revised ENP will be a litmus test for the EU’s actorness and leadership in the region. Bechev (2015) argues that the current state of affairs suggests that the EU–Russia contest in the common neighborhood is expected to resume in the new dimension of narratives and discursive projections.

The success of the latest ENP will depend on the ability of the EU to coordinate the ENP with other EU policies (e.g., CFSP) and Community tools. And empowerment of civil society in the neighborhood will be the key to successful reforms (Langbein, 2014). Accordingly, it has been suggested that the EU should try to Europeanize societal actors on different levels with different incentives and different modes of outreach (Karolewski, 2012, p. 27). More concrete and sector-specific rewards will increase the likelihood of convergence in the neighborhood (Langbein, 2014). Hence, refusing or delaying such rewards (e.g., visa liberalization) to those partners that are committed to implementing demanding democratic reforms might undermine the EU’s credibility. As Pänke (2015) argues, the EU needs to adopt a more flexible, transparent and pragmatic state-like foreign policy, treating its neighbors as neighbors and not as inferior subjects. The EU can only be a credible and legitimate player if the notion of partnership regains its due place in the equation (Korosteleva, 2012). Future research should, therefore, focus on the analysis of the neighbors’ perspectives as well.

***

To what extent is the re-launched ENP an adequate response to the EU’s neighborhood challenges in the post-Brexit environment? Does the new ENP have a potential to change the practices and expectations of the neighbors, and the neighbors of the neighbors? Is the revised ENP equipped with proper instruments to contribute to stability and promote democracy in the neighborhood? These are the relevant questions for scholars as well as policymakers interested in the ENP.
References


The European neighborhood policy


The European neighborhood policy


