

Editorial

A new European Neighbourhood Policy to strengthen the European project

By Gilles ROUET*

It is now common to link the difficulties of the European project with the instability of the “European Union’s neighbours” and the repeated crises. The “Europeans” would no longer have confidence in a political project, however innovative and hopeful, at least of peace and stability, if not of economic growth.

After the beginning of its largest enlargement, twelve years ago, the EU has discovered a new Eastern Neighbourhood, the same one as the Western Neighbourhood of Russia¹. Even if the “demand of Europe” seems to remain large, for example in Belgrade, Skopje, Kiev or Tbilisi, an important part of the concerned populations express their regret not of previous political situations but of lost stability. And these people express themselves in votes, clearly, as in the last Bulgarian presidential elections, for example. And these votes cannot only be analysed in “sanction vote”.

At the same time, the populations already integrated in the EU seem to doubt, to fear their common (European) future, or even their own (national) future. The EU, by itself, would be both the cause and the consequence of identity and economic “crises”. An easy but effective speech in a rhetoric that avoids to explain the reality of integration, as in the case of the campaign for the Brexit. During the last ten years, situations of misunderstanding and incommunication have taken place between east and west of the EU, as evidenced by the “migrants/refugees” crisis. It is true that the “catch-up” expected in the East did not take place as hoped and that national policies in the West have failed to stem the increase in unemployment or the doubt about the relevance of the European project.

This context calls for a revisiting of all Community policies, and in particular, as proposed in this issue, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The ENP is thus set up to encourage and develop relations with this new Neighbourhood in 2003, however, doubting the limits of the EU’s ability to continue to expand while preserving its objectives (peace, Stability, internal prosperity). It became then necessary to “deepen” the integration of new entrants,

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¹ See the contribution of Adrian Pop, pp. 47-70.

whose situations and, perhaps most importantly, political and social histories are very different from those of the “western” countries, before to envisage a further enlargement, towards the East. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, declared in 2002: “We need a debate [...] to admit that currently we could not convince our citizens of the need to extend the EU’s borders still further east. It is a question of responsibility:

“We have to develop a blueprint for future action to deal with a problem stemming directly from the success of enlargement. What have we to offer our new neighbours? What prospects can we hold out to them? Where does Europe end?”².

These questions are still relevant!

The implementation of the ENP was thus achieved in the same period as the effective integration of former satellite countries of the USSR, and this integration has transformed relations with the other post-Soviet neighbours. It is therefore impossible to understand the ENP without considering the integration policy. The ENP is more a “small sister” than a “daughter” of enlargement. As the EU must find a guarantee of stability and security with its new neighbours, they are part of a same process. The objectives, as well as the instruments, are therefore close, but neither with the same budgetary level nor, above all, with the same perspectives, since there was no question of proposing a perspective of accession to the concerned countries. The Lisbon Treaty in 2009 confirms this approach in Article 8:

“The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation”.³

The ‘Eastern Partnership’ (EP) was launched at the Prague Summit in 2009 to “develop a more coherent and targeted policy in the East”⁴ and includes six post-Soviet countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine⁵. The objectives are political (consolidation of the rule of law, of democratic institutions and of civil society), economic (preparation of free trade

² Romano Prodi President of the European Commission, *A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability “Peace, Security And Stability International Dialogue and the Role of the EU”*, Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Jean Monnet Project, available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_eng.htm.

³ European Union, *The Treaty of Lisbon*, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3Aai0033>.

⁴ IRIS, *Le Partenariat oriental de l’Union européenne*, at http://www.iris-france.org/docs/kfm_docs/docs/actu-europe/2013-02-actu-euro-n58—partenariat-oriental-de-lue.pdf.

⁵ See the contribution of Kamala Valiyeva, pp. 11-30.

agreements), mobility (with visa-free regimes) and enhanced energetic and sectoral cooperation.

In 2015, a critical review led to a reformulation of the ENP, with a reappraisal of the objectives (downward), a strengthening of the bilateral approach, a reclassification of thematic priorities, a better geographic flexibility and the involvement of a “greater number of actors”. However, in several countries this is still a kind of ‘testing’ before integration, at the same time as from the EU’s point of view, the ENP constitutes a political model based on the Law and standards, rejecting any coercive policy and use of force.

The ENP is a structural policy in the long term, that uses tools that aim to change the structures of the countries concerned in a sustainable, if not permanent, way, for transformations in the fields of democracy, law and market economy (these instruments are similar, moreover, to those of pre-accession or integration policies). As with the enlargement policy, the ENP is based on the assumption of the attractiveness of the EU, an attractiveness that is now in question, in Turkey as in Armenia, for example, but also with the Brexit within a Member State. Moreover, the structural changes are supposed to be necessary have sometimes been viewed more as constraints than as change opportunities, especially in a crisis period.

The structural impact of the ENP has been quite weak despite the partial revision of 2011, and now the EU is confronted with competing structural powers in its neighbourhood. In a fragmented context, some of neighbours choose not to move closer to the EU, but rather to move away from it. The objective of stabilising and securing the neighbourhood has neither been achieved. Regional tensions persist and even intensify (with “frozen conflicts”) and the Ukrainian situation remains unstable. The EU has not given constructive consideration to the “neighbours of neighbours” on the one hand, and the application of the instruments of enlargement without any perspective of accession, on the other hand, in a euro-centred “centre-periphery” logic and without finding the way to develop cooperation respecting differences.

The results of ENP are, of course, linked to exogenous causes and political upheavals in recent years, but also to these ambiguities: the ENP has not succeeded in meeting both EU objectives, expectations and aspirations of the concerned countries. Moreover, the reforms within these countries have not followed the path envisaged by the EU towards democratisation. The democratic “transition” has not taken place as the analysis in terms of “transition” is an illusion, both because it is impossible to foresee the realisation of a political “ideal” while taking into account the political, social, cultural and economic realities and because the trajectories of transformation are not linear. Not only the hoped democratic transformation has not taken place, but in several countries, such as Azerbaijan, the authoritarian systems were rather strengthened. It was not until 2011, following the condemnation of Yulia Tymoshenko, that the EU

considered introducing a conditionality principle for the ratification of the Association Agreement with Ukraine (decided in 2012). However, no conditionality principle for Azerbaijan, for example, has been decided, related to the political situation!⁶

In the Eastern neighbourhood, the civil society often regretted its marginalisation, criticising, as in Ukraine or in Moldova, the exclusivity of the dialogue between the EU and the governments, and denouncing the weakness of relations with non-governmental organisations, especially for the supervision of the use of European funds, even though the latter could be beneficiaries. The ENP has mainly encouraged the setting up of "technical" structures and standardisation, with a view to the realisation of economic agreements, without real political transformations legitimised by civilian actors⁷. The objectives of prosperity (economical?), stability and security followed by the EU in the framework of the EP have determined the instruments and the methods used, without really taking into account the contexts (especially for the neighbours of the neighbours) and political aspirations of populations.

After this mixed review, four thematic platforms have been set up within the framework of the EP: democracy, good governance and stability, economic integration and convergence with EU policies, energy security and interpersonal contacts.

Overall, several questions remain open: Whether or not to maintain a unitary framework for the ENP? How to avoid the ambiguity with enlargement and which perspectives for membership to offer to neighbouring countries? What is the relationship between the ENP, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)? What is the relevance of the current instruments in relation to the renewed objectives (association agreements, comprehensive and in-depth free trade agreements, conditionality and how to take into account the "neighbours of neighbours"? For the objective of democratisation, it is necessary to try to involve a greater number of actors, in particular in the coordination of cooperation.

At present, at the eastern of the EU, two regional integration projects are now in competition: the European Union and its neighbourhood, on the one hand, a part of the former Soviet space, possibly to be extended to other parts of Asia, on the other.⁸ The stakes of the democratisation must be taken into account in a renewed geopolitical analysis. The EU has encouraged the neighbouring countries to transform politically and when Eurocentric reforming governments have been set up in the East, rivalries and even conflicts with Russia emerge as

⁶ About EU's rule of law promotion, see the contribution of Martin Mendelski. pp. 111-144.

⁷ About the SME in Moldavia, see the contribution of Kerry Longhurst, pp. 145-164.

⁸ See the contribution of Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova, pp. 31-46 and the contribution of Pablo Podarera Rivera and Anna Garashchuk, pp. 91-110.

consequences⁹. How can we envisage the future by establishing a new logic of cooperation with the EP States in a framework of normalised relations with Russia?

Several scenarios are possible. First, an open conflict with Russia. At present, the Minsk agreements prevail for the EU which asks for its application. But with the reactivation of frozen conflicts, a possible collapse of Ukraine or a more extensive integration of Belarus, the EP would have little chance of subsisting. This partnership may also fade if the EU decides to reduce its support for reforms, to favour a status quo with Russia which would clearly encourage the countries concerned to return to the Russian influence and would be in contradiction with the Treaty of Lisbon.

But a new and closer cooperation could be proposed to the EP countries to favour a gradual rapprochement of East and West in an approach that will be no longer driven by the “centre-periphery” model which encourages “peripheries” to choose a “centre” and only one, but in a non-exclusive logic. In such approach, the concerned countries could pursue relations with Russia while moving closer to the EU¹⁰. The latter scenario can only be envisaged if the current ambiguities are resolved: bilateralism or regional approach? Enlargement or association? Euro-Atlantic or Eurasian integration?

The EP can only continue within a renewed framework and with more sustainable involvement of civil societies, on condition that the relationship between the EU and Russia is normalised, by putting in place, as suggested by Federica Mogherini in March 2016, “the possibility of selective engagement with Russia on issues of interest to the EU” which also needs “to engage in people-to-people contacts and support Russian civil society”¹¹, without concessions on the application of the Minsk agreements. It is also a question of envisaging relations between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union.

The review of the ENP and of its current evolution shows us, also, that our “neighbours” question us about ourselves, our identities, and our collective project¹². The ENP is one of the elements of the European project and concerns all EU citizens, not just those at one of its borders. We need to try to re-legitimise the political powers, to listen to the arguments and the explanations from East to West, including those from civil societies in EP, to abandon the “centre-periphery” model internally and externally: the EU is an original and powerful political configuration that must be organised in relation to the other political

⁹ See the contribution of Vasif Huseynov, pp. 71-90.

¹⁰ See the contribution of Aram Terzyan, pp. 165-184.

¹¹ Conseil de l'Union européenne (2016), *Résultats de la session du Conseil 3457e session du Conseil Affaires étrangères*, available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7042-2016-INIT/fr/pdf>.

¹² See the contribution de Elena-Alexandre Gorgos, Elena-Madalina Vatamanescu and Andreia Gabriela Andrei, pp. 185-206.

entities. The ENP is a citizens' project, above all. It must be defined together, within the framework of connections between public spaces, taking into account the resilience of societies, the disenchantment, the regrets, but also the hopes.