



## Towards a new neighbourhood policy

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On 4th March, the Commissioner for neighbourhood policy and enlargement negotiations, Johannes Hahn, and the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, have released a joint consultation paper on a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

To begin with, some questions arise: **to what extent should the ENP be revised? Should the existing policy be amended or radically reformed? Should the new ENP be a geopolitical and security project, an essentially economic partnership, or a framework for sectoral cooperation?** A number of factors dramatically push for a reform.

First, since the launch of the ENP in 2004, the neighbourhood has profoundly changed. Not only have some neighbours been shaken by serious turmoil, but also **the general trend seems to be a growing diversification**. This is evident between the Eastern and Southern dimensions of the ENP, but also within them: some neighbours seek to deepen their relations with the European Union (EU), whereas others are less (or not at all) interested. The resulting emergence of **“multiple neighbourhoods”** requiring a tailor-made approach may lead to question the opportunity itself of an overarching neighbourhood policy.

Secondly, the main objective of the ENP, namely **the creation of a “ring of friends” and of an area of stability, security and prosperity at the EU periphery, is far from being achieved**. In contrast, what has emerged on the EU’s borders is rather an “arc of instability” (N. Tocci). Similarly, the focus on the promotion of a “deep and sustainable democracy” in the 2011 review (following the Arab spring) has been largely at odds with events.

Moreover, EU’s approach has been so far marked by **an overestimation of the EU’s transformative power**, which stemmed mostly from the success of the enlargement policy during the early 2000s. However, what distinguished the 2004 enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries from the current ENP was a nearly unanimous consensus of these countries’ elites and societies, as well as the absence of any external (i.e. Russia’s) opposition.

Finally, the **EU is often blamed for not having sufficiently considered that its neighbours have some neighbours too**. It is therefore manifest that any review of the ENP will have to include a thorough consideration of the perceptions of the “neighbours of the neighbours”, and of the way to find a *modus vivendi* with competing projects such as Russia-led Eurasian Union.

These issues have been exacerbated by an underlying ambiguity concerning ENP’s relation with enlargement: **is the ENP a step towards EU membership or a substitute for it?** This relation has never been clarified by the EU, not least because of the absence of internal consensus.

These factors, combined with important external dynamics, caused the ENP to fail both to achieve the objectives of the EU and to meet the expectations of the neighbours.

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The consultation paper contains around **seventy questions dealing with multiple aspects** (e.g. geographical scope, neighbours of the neighbours, tools and objectives of the policy), **but also more fundamental issues** (“Should the ENP be maintained? Should a single framework continue to cover both East and South?”).

The document identifies **four priority areas**: *differentiation, focus, flexibility, and ownership/visibility*.

Concerning *differentiation*, the document acknowledges the “increasing divergences in the aspirations of partner countries”, and asks whether it is possible to foresee “some kind of variable geometry, with different

kinds of relationships for those partners that choose different levels of engagement”. However, it must be noted that the notion of differentiation was already present in the first Commission’s paper about the ENP and was then reiterated in almost every communication concerning this policy. Thus, **differentiation is not necessarily an innovation** and much will depend on how this principle will be implemented.

During an intervention in the European Parliament, Hahn raised the issue of exploring new ways to interact with the neighbours of the neighbours, without however “giving them a veto right” on a country’s decision to cooperate with the EU, and underlined the need for confidence-building efforts. Moreover, Mogherini argued that cooperating with the neighbours of the neighbours is important first and foremost to ensure that EU’s neighbours are not obliged to choose between two competing projects.

About *focus*, the paper underlines the need for the cooperation agenda to be truly shared by the EU and its partners. In this respect, Hahn expressed his will **to shift from the current model, whereby the EU seeks to cover a wide range of sectors with all the neighbours, to more tailored partnerships** reflecting the neighbours’ aspirations and capabilities. Thus, the document identifies some sectors of common interest, namely the promotion of trade and economic development, improving connectivity (notably in the fields of sustainable transport and energy), the fight against security threats (arising from conflict situations, organised crime and terrorism), governance challenges, migration, environment, and engagement with young people. However, Hahn clarified that the focus on common interests will not mean for the Union to leave aside the promotion of its values.

With regard to *flexibility* – that is, the ability to respond to changing situations and crises – Hahn highlighted that **if the EU wants to play an important international role it has to be a proactive player in its neighbourhood**.

Finally, *ownership/visibility* is identified as a key element. In this respect, the paper states that “substantial efforts are needed [...] to improve both the ownership of this policy by partner countries and [...] communication of its objectives and results both within the EU and in the partner countries”. Accordingly, **Mogherini advocated for “switching from an approach based on evaluation to an approach based on partnership and cooperation among equals”**. Like differentiation, ownership is not an entirely new concept for the ENP, since it appears already in the 2004 Strategy Paper.

Moreover, the issue of the ENP-enlargement relation is briefly mentioned in the paper, which reiterates that **enlargement policy “remains distinct from the ENP”**.

To conclude, the consultation aims at involving a wide range of actors (member States, Parliaments, academia, think tanks, business community, international organisations, civil society) in the ENP review. This process will be ongoing until the end of June. The Commission will then analyse the contributions received and present its own proposal during the autumn. In the meantime, the ENP review has been discussed with the Southern neighbours during a meeting in Barcelona (13th April) and with the Eastern neighbours during the Riga summit (22nd May).

*For further information:*

Joint consultation paper “Towards a new Neighborhood Policy”:

<http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/consultation/consultation.pdf>