



The Neighbours of the EU's Neighbours: Legal, Political, Security and Socio-Economic Challenges beyond the ENP

Conference Summary, College of Europe, Bruges, 21-22 March 2013

On 21-22 March 2013, the Department of **EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies** of the College of Europe in Bruges organised, with the financial support of the European Commission, an international conference to discuss specific policy challenges in the European Union's relations with its broader neighbourhood (Sahel, Horn of Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia). This event followed up on a first conference held in November 2012, which had examined the geopolitical and diplomatic dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) using a regional approach. Its main conclusion was that the EU may want to consider drafting a 'Strategy on the Neighbours of the EU's Neighbours' (NoNs) which would focus on building bridges across the different (sub-)regions by drawing on and further developing the interfaces between them.

The concept of the 'neighbours of the EU's neighbours' was introduced by the European Commission in 2006 in a Communication on 'strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy', in which it considered in particular the possibility of developing regional cooperation activities between partner countries (to be) included in the ENP framework on the one hand and Central Asia, the Arabian Gulf and Africa on the other.¹



The **Rector of the College of Europe, Professor Paul Demaret**, welcomed the participants of the conference and outlined the College's strong interest in the ENP. **Professors Sieglinde Gstöhl and Erwan Lannon** from the Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies opened the conference by recapitulating the findings of the first conference on how to define the NoNs and by sketching how bridges between the EU's immediate and broader neighbourhood could be built. They stressed the horizontal approach of the second conference with its focus on more specific, technical and sectoral issues to be addressed across the different regions at

hand. The ensuing presentations thus focused on the following issues: political and legal challenges, security and military challenges, socio-economic challenges as well as infrastructure measures to connect the neighbours of the EU's neighbours.

¹ COM(2006)726, p. 11.



The first session was dedicated to **political and legal challenges**. It differentiated an 'inner' (ENP countries) and an 'outer ring of friends' (NoN countries) and identified the offers tabled by the EU and the expectations of its neighbours and the neighbours thereof. The session challenged a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the EU's neighbourhood and highlighted the challenges ahead in the establishment of fruitful relations with the NoNs. The use of political conditionality towards the wider neighbourhood was explored. It showed that the EU has in practice struggled to consistently apply conditionality due to strategic interests which often interfere in the 'values vs. security interests' debate. The limits inherent in the EU's conditionality policy are illustrated by the impenetrability of those countries where the Union's leverage is rendered ineffective by the Member States' national energy interests. Even when conditionality is used, the concrete objectives do not always seem clear and there is a risk of over-focusing on specific issues. This is, for instance, the case of Ukraine, where the EU is focusing on the Timoshenko case rather than aiming at a structural reform of the judiciary. It was noted that the bureaucratic embeddedness of the current solutions often hampers the ability to propose policy alternatives. Furthermore, the technocratic approach used by the EU institutions tends to obscure the political dimension of conditionality.

On mobility and migration, data concerning the rise of intra-regional and South-South migration flows have been presented as standing in stark contrast with the absence of any reference to migratory matters in the EU Sahel Strategy on Security and Development. Against the backdrop of the recent EU Global Approach to migration, it has been pointed out that Mobility Partnerships offered by the EU are not accompanied by sufficiently strong incentives for third countries.



The externalisation of border controls represents yet another challenge to building more consistency in the EU's relations with the NoNs. The instruments resorted to so far do not allow speaking of a fully-fledged externalisation of border control towards the NoNs. However, a trend can be identified whereby exploratory forms of cooperation in border management have been established between the EU and sub-Saharan countries on the one hand, and the Central Asian republics on the other. Whereas cooperation with the former is more migration-oriented, trade mainly inspires cooperation with Central Asia. With regard to migration-driven cooperation, it was pointed out that the EU has at times overlooked concerns for migrants' fundamental rights to the benefit of strategic considerations. Cooperation in the management of migratory flows with Libya is a telling example. Reiteration of such practices towards the NoNs might *de facto* result in a dual standard – and ensuing inconsistencies – in abiding with fundamental rights across the EU's borders. The panel concluded that a possible new EU policy framework targeting the NoNs needs to have an added value to that of existing frameworks, including the ENP. In this respect, suggestions were made for the EU's need to develop geopolitical partnerships in its wider neighbourhood.



The second session dealt with **security and military challenges** arising in the EU's wider neighbourhood. The need to counter drug and human trafficking, organised crime as well as the presence of terrorist groups in neighbouring regions seems to be poorly answered by the EU. This is illustrated by the fact that EU Delegations in relevant countries are not endowed with security expertise but rather rely on locally deployed CSDP missions and *ad hoc* projects for coping with both thematic issues as well as with armed and frozen conflicts. In the Sahel region in particular, the EU's focus on development issues overshadows security-related concerns. The security-development nexus is apparent in the field of arms proliferation, particularly with regard to small arms and light weapons. During the last twenty years, the EU has in this field shown a clear and consistent commitment towards the NoN countries. The panel concluded that, despite a lack of real leverage – and occasionally of political will – in providing for security in the NoN region, the EU should hold a greater role in the stabilisation thereof.

The third session was dedicated to **socio-economic challenges**. It offered some insights into the EU's trade relations with countries of its wider neighbourhood, which appear to be less extensive and more heterogeneous than those with ENP countries. The NoN region lacks an overarching framework with the EU. At the same time, the lack of intra-regional relations among these countries creates a 'hub-and-spoke' system of relations between the EU and the NoN region. All in all, it is unlikely that a Neighbourhood Economic Community, if ever put in place between the EU and the ENP countries, be extended in the foreseeable future to (parts of) the NoN countries. Interregional EU-NoN initiatives are also hampered by the fact that the NoNs do not form a 'region' but rather a group of regions which encompasses several regional organisations and forms of cooperation. The main challenge for the EU is thus to be able to devise a trade policy towards the NoN countries that can reconcile its strategic foreign policy interests and the economic prospects of the partner countries.



On the social side, the need for a turn of the tide in how the EU tackles education-related issues in the NoN countries has been voiced. Worrying education records in these countries reveal structural inefficiencies and the unlikeliness of them meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals. Gender balance appears especially problematic as data show clear imbalances in the level of education of

women and men. Whereas social exclusion of some groups is also a crucial issue in many of the NoN countries, terrorist groups have exploited this social divide to fuel conflict. Conflicts, in turn, do not only further damage education systems, but also hamper education through phenomena such as the recruitment of child soldiers and mercenaries or forced displacement and the consequent loss of access to education services for the affected populations. The EU has tried to respond to those challenges through instruments such as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the European Development Fund (EDF) or the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). However, these funds are hardly ever earmarked for education but rather transferred through the modality of general budget support, which allows for more ownership but does not ensure an impact



on education. An evolution in the current approach has therefore been advocated with a view to fully exploit the EU's comparative advantage in helping develop human capital and, eventually, foster stability in the NoN countries.

The last session, entitled '**connecting the neighbours' neighbours**', looked at present and prospective forms of cooperation across the outer skirts of the EU's neighbourhood in sectors such as energy, water management and infrastructures. Whilst fostering cooperation between the NoNs in the energy domain seems not to be a top priority for the EU, the Union's engagement with the NoNs attempts at striking a balance between supply concerns and attempts to influence governance in partner countries' energy sectors. In this respect, the most advanced form of cooperation has been deemed to be the one in place with Central Asia. Discussions on this matter suggested, however, that the EU's approach should duly take into account the fact that for the Central Asian republics maintaining geopolitical independence from both Russia and the EU remains of utmost importance. Concerning the Middle East, Iraq has been referred to as providing great potential for future cooperation, while Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have shown greater interest for cooperation in the renewable energies and IT sectors.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) plays a key role in sustaining regional integration and expanding EU networks in ENP countries and beyond, focusing on interconnectivity particularly in the fields of energy, transport and communication infrastructures. Concerning the NoNs, the EIB is currently financing energy and environmental protection initiatives in Central Asia and projects delivering sustainable economic, social and environmental reforms in sub-Saharan Africa. With regard to water management, evidence has shown that states cooperate rather than engage in conflict over water due to potential revenues from burden-sharing and easily identifiable costs of non-cooperation. However, the situations vary across the NoNs: whereas in the Horn of Africa the Nile Basin Initiative suggests greater attention to cooperation in water management, the latter remains highly politicised in regions such as Central Asia and the Middle East. In order to benefit from the potential of trans-boundary cooperation, a more accurate analysis of external drivers and of third parties' role is needed. Finally, the panel recognised that the EU needs to be aware that its cooperation with the resource-rich NoNs is challenged by the fact that they may choose to work with alternative investors such as China or the Gulf countries. Hence, the EU needs to increase the funding devoted to interregional cooperation, to improve synergies amongst different financial instruments, to carry out a defragmentation of its current approach to the NoNs as well as to enhance the co-ownership profile of proposed initiatives through training of and political dialogues with local actors.

In conclusion, the conference clearly demonstrated the heterogeneity of the neighbours of the EU's neighbours, the manifold challenges that have to be faced, but also the great potential for reinforced cooperation between the EU, the ENP countries and the NoN countries.