

The European Neighbourhood Policy

The general principle of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is to develop privileged relations and partnerships with the EU's neighbouring countries in order to strengthen stability and prosperity for all concerned. The ENP is based on a set of bilateral Action Plans between the EU and each neighbouring state. These aim to guarantee both economic and political engagement.

I. States covered by the ENP

In principle, any state that shares a land or sea border with an EU Member State has the possibility of participating in an ENP Action Plan. However, in the case of Russia, there is a separate Strategic Partnership.

The ENP is separate from the enlargement process and therefore does not apply to EU candidate countries, including those that are only 'potential candidates'. Hence, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo are not among the states covered by the ENP.

The third countries covered by the ENP are Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

II. The various areas covered by the ENP

- *Migration and movement of persons*

The EU policy towards its neighbours is to encourage and facilitate legal movement of persons between EU territory and the territory of states covered by the neighbourhood policy while ensuring stricter controls to combat illegal migration. The European Union has therefore simplified the visa system for people from these neighbouring states, pending further visa liberalisation.

- *Governance, political and legal institutions*

A system of cooperation has been established between the EU and the ENP countries to assist the latter to develop democratic institutions and independent judiciaries, as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance with EU criteria but also with the criteria laid down in the Barcelona Process as regards the EU's southern neighbourhood countries. The fight against corruption and fraud is also an important element of the ENP.

- *Economy and social issues*

Another objective of the ENP is to assist in the economic and social development of neighbouring countries. Strengthening economic governance, increasing growth and reducing unemployment, public deficits, inflation and trade deficits in these countries are among the objectives of the ENP.

- *Sector cooperation*

The ENP also enables the development of partnerships in fields as diverse as the environment, energy, health, food security, transport and telecommunications, as well as education and training.

- *Regional and local development*

The European Neighbourhood Policy groups ENP countries into two main areas: the Euro-Mediterranean region and the Eastern Europe region. The partnership with the countries to the south of Europe will therefore take account of the various existing processes, including the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean. In the case of the partnership with Eastern Europe, this was strengthened by the launch of the Eastern Partnership in May 2009. So the ENP is differentiated in its application across these two areas. In the south, the priorities are the environment, justice and home affairs, trade and socio-economic development. In the east, the priorities are people-to-people issues, nuclear safety, justice and also economic and trade cooperation.

III. Taking stock of the ENP

On 12 May 2010 the European Commission published a Communication in which it conducted a first assessment of the Neighbourhood Policy for the period 2004-2009. In this Communication the Commission noted at the outset the attractiveness of this policy, given that the majority of the countries bordering the EU had signed Association Agreements with the European Union, although in most cases these Agreements had replaced existing bilateral agreements. The Commission noted that, for its part, the European Union had fulfilled most of its commitments, including simplifying the visa system for neighbourhood policy countries and giving financial aid for the development of neighbouring countries through instruments such as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for co-financing economic, political, social and sectoral policies, with a budget of more than EUR 11 billion for the period 2007-2013 and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Lastly, the neighbourhood policy has served as a framework for developing new types of partnership such as the Union for the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy, although, for the moment, the Commission's assessment of this is fairly mixed.

Progress in the field of human rights and the operation of judicial and electoral systems has not fully materialised in most of the partner states. In effect, respect for the values of the European Union is an essential condition, especially if countries are to continue receiving

assistance in the form of co-financing for projects provided through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

On 25 May 2011, the Commission issued a new Communication exploring approaches for improving the ENP. The Commission specifically recommends that, when concluding bilateral agreements with ENP states, all EU Member states should align their position with the ENP objectives. The Commission also recommends a greater level of differentiation between countries in order for each Association Agreement to be as effective as possible. However, respect for the values of the European Union, in particular human rights, should always be a condition for maintaining these agreements. The Commission also announced the creation of a European Endowment for Democracy for the benefit of NGOs and trade unions in neighbouring countries; a strengthening of the role of the EU in conflict resolution; encouragement of micro-credit and direct investment by EU SMEs; negotiation for the establishment of a deeper free trade area; efforts to make access to visas easier; and a strengthened role for the Union for the Mediterranean in undertaking concrete projects, among other measures.

IV. The ALDE position

The ALDE Group welcomed the recent Commission Communication, which was all the more necessary since the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. The strengthening of this partnership and an unshakeable stance on the issue of respect for human rights are among the measures the ALDE Group passionately supports.

According to Guy Verhofstadt, the Chair of the ALDE Group, *'The real challenge will be to convince the Member States to fully support these proposals, especially in relation to market access and mobility. The Council should go one step further and cancel the debts of these emerging democracies in order to give them a real chance to kick-start their economies.'*

However, in the opinion of the ALDE Group, the Commission should go even further. Indeed, according to Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Freie Demokratische Partei MEP and ALDE shadow rapporteur on the Eastern Neighbourhood, *'So far, the proposal is vague and its relation to other instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights remains undefined. Finally, the European Parliament must be fully involved in the process of setting up such an endowment.'*

For Guy Verhofstadt, *'The situation in these countries, as we have already witnessed, can change quickly and dramatically. Expectations for change are high so the European Commission should re-evaluate their policies for this region regularly – every four months – and look at increasing this funding should other emerging democracies in the region need our support in the future.'*