

Political Conditionality in the Mediterranean
Challenges for a Renewed European Neighbourhood Policy



DOI-Kurzanalysen
Ausgabe Januar 2015

Deutsche Orient-Stiftung/German Orient-Foundation
-Deutsches Orient-Institut/German Orient-Institute-

gegründet / founded by NUMOV 1960

Lucas Rasche
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I. Introduction

On 1st November 2014, Federica Mogherini officially took office as the European Union's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.¹ Among the most immediate challenges that will characterise her term in office is the mandate "to assess the impact of changes in the global environment, and to report to the [European] Council in the course of 2015 on the challenges and opportunities arising for the Union".²

As part of the EU's pursuit to redefine its position in world politics, this analysis suggests that Ms Mogherini's report should mainly concentrate on a thorough review of the EU's approach to its own neighbourhood, since it is the place where it can expect to assert the most influence. With regard to the European periphery, however, "today's troubles are calling into question many of the core assumptions of EU foreign policy".³ The new High Representative thus faces a situation of unique opportunity to reinvigorate what has long been perceived as the Union's most comprehensive foreign affairs tool – namely the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Despite the tensions arising in many parts of the EU's eastern neighbourhood, it is Europe's southern vicinity that has undergone a period of comprehensive change. By focussing on the Mediterranean neighbourhood, countries from Morocco to Syria are significantly challenged in their domestic control, challenged by dysfunctional statehood and a lack of good governance.

When launching the ENP, the EU initially en-

visioned turning its neighbourhood into a "ring of friends".⁴ Yet, the European Union's southern neighbourhood is pervaded by instability, authoritarianism, sectarianism and conflict. The current situation consequently hints at a failure of the ENP and raises concerns about the EU's chosen approach to deal with its neighbouring states.⁵ In order for Ms Mogherini to head a renewed and efficient foreign policy, it is therefore necessary to consider the underlying assumptions and prerogatives that have shaped the ENP so far and that have eventually contributed to the ENP's ill success.

This analysis aims to contribute to the task by assessing the core elements that have steered the European Neighbourhood Policy since its initiation. It claims that while the concept of political conditionality has become the ENP's defining principle, it has simultaneously contributed a significant part to the EU's current need to readjust its neighbourhood policy.

II. The European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood Policy is the EU's main foreign policy tool to navigate its relations with the countries both to its eastern and southern periphery. Launched in 2004, as the EU prepared to accept membership of ten new Member States, the ENP attempted to prevent a disengaged neighbourhood and to maintain a sphere of European influence. With regard to the countries in the south, the ENP entails collaboration with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Algeria, while Libya and Syria currently remain outside of most policy structures. In

¹ Ms Mogherini officially serves as High Representative of the European Union on Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Union.

² The European Council, *Conclusion EUCO 217/13*, 2013, p. 4.

³ Levy, *Rebooting EU Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 1.

⁴ The European Commission, *Wider Europe*, 2003, p. 4.

⁵ Tocci, *The Neighbourhood Policy is Dead*, 2014, p. 3.

line with the European Security Strategy (ESS), which was launched in 2003, the ENP attempts to provide a holistic foreign policy approach towards the Mediterranean countries.

In doing so, the ENP is often argued to represent an alternative to traditional geopolitics.⁶ Instead of focussing on immediate and ad-hoc decisions, the ENP should emphasise the importance of long-term and in-depth relations to the partnering countries. The underlying idea was to nurture the emergence of a general affinity towards the EU by contributing to the economic and political development of neighbouring countries. In addition to market integration, the ENP was hence created as a tool to facilitate the promotion of democratic reforms and the rule of law. As outlined in a 2003 statement of the European Commission, the ENP was introduced as an instrument “to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood – a ring of friends”.⁷

Along with the ESS, the European Neighbourhood Policy thus combines traditional foreign policy concerns on security with a progressive attempt to promote good governance.⁸ The Commission reiterated this interest by stressing that “it is the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed”.⁹ Through the negotiation of bilateral action plans and the incorporation of the North African and Middle Eastern countries into the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the aim of creating an area of shared prosperity and conflict prevention was attempted. By integrating the European-Mediterranean Partnership into a wider policy framework, the ENP aimed to foster a stable and well-governed neighbourhood.

The EU hence envisaged intertwining regional proximity with political stability, using the ENP

as a means to translate this attempt into specific policies towards the countries of the Mediterranean.

2.1. Europe and the Mediterranean Puzzle

Ten years after the EU launched its neighbourhood project, the countries along the Mediterranean, however, could not be more distant to the Union and its self-declared goal of enhancing a prosperous region.¹⁰ Focussing on the EU's southern neighbourhood, the apparent challenges in the region can be distinguished into two broader categories.

The first category concerns domestic difficulties. The EU faces both “state failure and dysfunctional democracy in North Africa”, where the demand for more inclusive governments has been supplanted by a predominant winner-takes-all approach.¹¹ While Egypt is witnessing the return of military authoritarianism, disembodying into an increasingly divided society, the situation in Libya has already turned into a civil war between competing militia forces. Disillusioned oppositional forces also constitute a security threat to Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, where “clear cut, predictable alliances are giving way to volatile conditions”.¹²

The second category addresses the potential spill-over of regional conflicts into the countries covered by the ENP. Regarding the “non-state spoilers, empowered by poor governance and weak statehood” that threaten to blur boundaries and contribute to a rising number of ungoverned territories, the current insurgency by the self-declared Islamic State (IS) is not only a threat to Syria and Iraq, but also to Lebanon and Jordan.¹³

The instability of many Mediterranean regimes thus makes them increasingly vul-

⁶ Lehne, *Time to Reset the European Neighbourhood Policy*, 2014, p. 3.

⁷ The European Commission, *Communication*, 2003, p. 4.

⁸ Whitman & Wolff, *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective*, 2010, p. 73.

⁹ The European Commission, *Communication*, 2003, p. 7.

¹⁰ Lehne, *Time to Reset the European Neighbourhood Policy*, 2014, p. 4.

¹¹ Leigh, *A New Strategy for Europe's Neighbourhood*, 2014, p. 1.

¹² Kausch, *Rethinking Relationships to Europe's South*, 2014, p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

nerable to outside influences. This is evident in the violent conflict in the Sahel region impacting the North African countries, but also in the present dispute over regional hegemony, mainly fought between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, encouraging the emergence of proxy wars along political, sectarian or economic lines.

While both categories contribute to a destabilisation of the region, the EU itself cannot be perceived as immune to the inherent repercussions. An uncertain political environment, increasing numbers of refugees arriving in Europe and the potential threat of jihadists returning to the EU contribute to a complex challenge for European foreign policy.

Perceiving the ENP as Europe's intended strategy to provide stability, prosperity and good governance in its southern neighbourhood, it appears that the region continues to provide a puzzle to European policy makers. To solve this puzzle, it is crucial to understand the core assumptions and principles driving the ENP, and how these contributed to the EU's inability to steer the region towards good governance.

III. A Framework for European Foreign Policy: the Concept of Political Conditionality

The European Union's foreign policy remains a domain that is largely dominated by its Member States. Yet, the EU places great emphasis on the export of its democratic values and principles. In order to actualise this, a prevailing theme in the EU's foreign policy practice is the concept of political conditionality. Though the enforcement of conditionality is not new to foreign policy, the EU has come to embody this approach.¹⁴ It is therefore necessary to first elaborate on the concept of po-

litical conditionality and subsequently assess how it gained prominence in the Union's neighbourhood policy.

When discussing political conditionality as a means to enforce foreign policy objectives, a practice that rests on the linkage between a "perceived benefit for another state [...] to the fulfilment of conditions relating to the protection of human rights and the advancement of democratic principles" is meant.¹⁵ To develop and uphold such values therefore becomes a condition for cooperation. Political conditionality thus describes a policy practice by which financial assistance is not merely tied to economic development, but also to political prerogatives. A decisive aspect for the effectiveness of this approach is the congruency between a partnering country's "inclination to implement the agreed reforms and [...] the incentives delivered".¹⁶ To enforce political conditionality as part of the EU's foreign policy is consequently informed by the assumption that the EU constitutes a model of political and economic organisation that partnering states should aim to match.¹⁷

This approach has become a ubiquitous theme on the EU's foreign policy agenda. It acquired salience in much of the Union's enlargement process, in which the EU "anchored the political transformation of Central Europe to the prospect of joining the EU".¹⁸ The arguable success of the European enlargement process has subsequently nurtured the perception that political conditionality was the Union's most powerful foreign policy tool. As a matter of fact, "the ENP drew many of its tools directly from the experience of the enlargement process", which contributed to a strengthening of political conditionality towards the Mediterranean countries. Yet, the EU is often blamed for the lax adherence to its own policy paradigm.

¹⁴ Balfour, *EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring*, 2012, p. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ Kausch, *The End of the (Southern) Neighbourhood*, 2013, p. 13.

¹⁷ Achrainer, *Mittelmeer-Politik auf Abwegen*, 2014, p. 4.

¹⁸ Balfour, *EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring*, 2012, p. 15.

An introduction of minimal and mostly insignificant reforms by some Arab leaders is often argued to be instrumentalised in order to prove the effectiveness of the ENP and to legitimise the continuance of “business as usual”.¹⁹ Despite the temporary return of a predominant security-informed paradigm in European foreign policy, due to the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), the popular uprisings in many Arab countries since 2011 and the successive toppling of local regimes brought the concept of political conditionality back to the fore.²⁰

3.1. Old Wine in New Bottles – A European Response to the Arab Spring

In an initial reaction to the toppling of regimes in both Tunisia and Egypt, the European Commission outlined its position on the changing situation in its neighbourhood through releasing two major documents in 2011: *A new Response to a Changing Neighbourhood* and *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*.²¹

While placing increased emphasis on a coherent use of the EU’s “positive instruments” together with “persuasive and declaratory diplomacy” and the strengthening of multilateral institution, the EU also engaged with a number of new actors that emerged in the context of the uprisings, such as the Libyan Transitional National Council.²² The acknowledgement of, and cooperation with, an increasing number of social movements indeed represents a major turn in the EU’s approach of supporting democratic reform processes. Both documents further attempt the facilitation of “deep democracy”, reinvigorating the EU’s

ideal of the well-governed neighbourhood.²³ Through the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and the Civil Society Facility (CSF), a more coherent and consistent effort to support democratic movements and reforms has further been made.²⁴

The simultaneous support of civil society and governmental reform underlines the twofold approach entailed in the renewed ENP. On the one hand, non-governmental actors are strengthened in their ambition to enhance local and regional projects, mainly through financial assistance. On the other hand, so-called *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements* (DCFTA), as well as partnerships on mobility and security, should provide additional incentives for governmental reform.²⁵ A major aspect of the renewed ENP is thus the EU’s commitment to reward successful reform with more money, market access and mobility – commonly referred to as the 3Ms.²⁶ Advanced trade cooperation and financial assistance are consequently tied to the partnering government’s readiness to pass democratic reforms, contributing to the ENP’s *more for more* character.

Hence, the EU clearly reinforced its reliance on the conditionality principle as the ENP’s main tool to induce reform. Both Commission statements stress the need for a more differentiated approach, tailored to both the nature of conflict and the willingness to push forward democratic reforms. A commitment to “common values”, in combination with mutual accountability, further underpins the inherent conditional nature of the ENP.²⁷ In order to make use of the political momentum in the region, the EU declared its ambition to support

¹⁹ Khader, *The European Union and the Arab World*, 2013, p. 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²¹ The European Commission, *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity*, 2011, The European Commission, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, 2011.

²² Balfour, *EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring*, 2012, p. 11.

²³ The European Commission, *The European Commission, A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, 2011, p. 3.

²⁴ The European Commission, *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity*, 2011, p. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ Levy, *Rebooting EU Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 2.

²⁷ The European Commission, *The European Commission, A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, 2011, p. 8.

the states that “go further and faster with reforms”, reiterating the incentive-based approach of the ENP.²⁸

In light of this, the popular uprisings in many Mediterranean countries appear to have reassured European policy makers of the adequacy of political conditionality and therefore contributed to its reinvigorated prominence in European foreign policy.

IV. Political Conditionality in the Mediterranean Neighbourhood

The previous discussion consequently strengthened the initial claim that the concept of political conditionality has become the ENP’s coining principle and most important foreign policy tool. It now needs to be assessed how the concept contributed to the ENP’s ill success. The subsequent section will do so in focussing on three major elements and their impact on delivering political conditionality: (1) the leverage generated by the ENP’s incentive-based approach, (2) the dichotomy between the European Commission and the Member States in foreign policy practice, and (3) the EU’s theoretical conception of its neighbourhood.

4.1. Incentives as Leverage

Whether the ENP’s approach proves effective essentially rests upon the degree to which the delivered incentives can trigger a willingness to reform in the partnering countries, and consequently constitute enough leverage to employ political conditionality. This implies that the policies employed by the EU need to be of relevance for the receiving countries.

Although all Maghreb countries mainly export their goods to the European Union, only Tunisia and Morocco indicate an actual eco-

nomical export dependence on the EU.²⁹ Nevertheless, their relevance as transit states for fossil fuel transportation from the region allocates a strategic importance to these countries in the EU’s energy considerations. Algeria and Libya are both able to balance their dependence on exports to the EU with the Union’s reliance on their oil and gas supplies. With regard to Egypt, the country’s recent initiatives to expand into the Central Asian and other markets significantly reduces its need for exports to the EU.³⁰

Part of what the EU offers the partnering countries is a limited opening of its common market, should the country in question pursue reform in an envisioned manner. While this is certainly an incentive for equally developed economies, sectors of relevance for the Mediterranean countries, such as the EU’s agricultural industry, remain sealed due to a prevailing reluctance of the EU’s southern Member States. The EU also requires a simultaneous opening of the partnering country’s economy, exposing it to an increased competition through European businesses. An assimilation with the European economy would further require an unpopular policy of lowering state subsidies and a thinning of public sector employment, while enough provisions to guarantee employment in the private sector can often not be provided.³¹

The overburdened job market in many of the Mediterranean countries is further unlikely to benefit from the EU’s offer on mobility partnerships. The EU’s initiative to ease visa policies for certain types of professions that are demanded in the EU’s Member States is much more probable to worsen the conditions in the partnering economies, contributing to an already present brain drain from the region.³² The relaxation of restrictions on migration is therefore significantly one-sided,

²⁸ The European Commission, *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity*, 2011, p. 5.

²⁹ Kausch, *The End of the (Southern) Neighbourhood*, 2013, p. 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³¹ Achraimer, *Mittelmeer-Politik auf Abwegen*, 2014, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p.4.

further stressing the job market in the respective partnering countries. While the aspect of enhanced legal migration is thus falling short to provide an adequate incentive, the EU's initial commitment for a comprehensive mobility partnership raises doubts elsewhere. Namely, the European border control agency Frontex and its increasingly stringent measures against refugees from North Africa shed a negative light on the aspect of enhanced mobility.³³

Yet, partnering countries do not have the ability to hold the EU accountable for a supposed non-adherence to the ENP guidelines. In fact, the ENP is only conditional to the extent that the EU can apply assertive measures on third countries, while the respective partnering country is unable to enforce mutual accountability.³⁴

At this point, it can already be observed that the inherent strengthening of the conditional nature within the 2011 ENP review entails a number of problems. The application of positive conditionality, rewarding reform in specific fields of cooperation, appears to draw on an inadequate assessment of the sectors that could potentially trigger reform in the partnering countries. Consequently, the incentives offered by the EU encounter only a limited need or benefit which would eventually enhance reform in the respective sector. Since the EU has adopted this incentive-based approach from its former enlargement policies, the assumption that to offer an inducement for reform would inevitably contribute to the latter, prevails.

However, this logic is short-sighted when regarding the fact that the final incentive of EU membership, stemming from the enlargement

process, is absent in the ENP. While the prospect of becoming a part of the European Union has generally steered reform in the applicant states' economic and political sector, it has simultaneously served governments to legitimise unpopular policies. Yet, the "absence of the final carrot" hollows out the ENP's leverage, neither providing enough incentive or legitimacy for substantial reform nor placing the EU in a position to threaten with the stick.³⁵

The ENP's lack of convincing tools to tie the Mediterranean countries closer to the Union is further evident when considering the development of political alignment in these countries since the ENP's launch in 2004. Morocco remains the country being most affirmative of EU policies, also being the only North African country that has ever submitted a request for EU membership – though being rejected in 1987.

While Tunisia is associated to have considerably close links to the EU, this is largely due to the fact that the country's successful democratic opening has recently placed it in a position of becoming the EU's flagship partner in the region. However, Algeria and Libya have been reluctant to join the ENP or agree on the negotiation of country-specific actions plans.³⁶ Whereas Egypt's core ally will remain to be the United States, the EU's economic and political impact on the countries of the Fertile Crescent, namely Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, is marginal.³⁷

In light of this, the EU's intention to establish political and economic ties with its southern neighbourhood by triggering reform through an incentive-based policy essentially lacks the adequate leverage to conduct a conditional policy.

³³ Frontex is the EU's border control agency, established in 2004 in order to ensure an "effective control and surveillance of external borders", frontex.europa.eu.

³⁴ Balfour, *EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring*, 2012, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁶ Kausch, *The End of the (Southern) Neighbourhood*, 2013, p. 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

4.2. The Member State – European Commission Dichotomy

Another aspect that requires investigation when assessing the EU's policies towards its neighbouring states, is the relation between the European Commission and the European Member States, as well as its impact on the respective third countries. Considering the political guidelines that structure the ENP, the EU's institutional set-up demands that it is the Member States which have most influence on the agenda-setting process and respective policy priorities.

The Member States, however, are often driven by very divergent foreign policy objectives, which makes it difficult for the EU to fit these into a common approach. Historically, both the United Kingdom and France enjoy close relations to their former colonies, protectorates and mandate territories, and have a vested interest in maintaining especially their economic ties to the region. The same holds true for many southern Member States, such as Spain or Italy, that are reluctant regarding any “downgrading of certain dysfunctional Mediterranean states with which they have traditional links”.³⁸ In contrast, a bloc of countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic or Germany are much more oriented towards the EU's eastern neighbourhood and therefore allocate their capacities to other foreign policy goals.

This inner European divergence indicates two major implications for the ENP. On the one hand, the disparity in foreign policy views necessitates the ENP to entail large amounts of compromise. Consequently, much of the ENP is characterised by a very technocratic and vague language, introducing terms like *benchmarks*, *differentiation* or *tailor-made* in order to appease the different perspectives by the Union's Member States. Yet, such an ap-

proach does not convey a strong political message to the partnering country, nor does it make the instrument-led tool more understandable.³⁹ On the other hand, the complexity of the ENP is not only discouraging for third countries, but also for Member States that “are accustomed to the simpler structure of state-to-state relations”.⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, many European countries themselves neglect the conditionality principle in their own bilateral relations with the Mediterranean countries. Both factors thus undermine the ENP's conditional approach and consequently contribute to the assumption that the EU and the Commission “lack credibility when seeking to impose political conditionality”.⁴¹

The existing dichotomy between the ENP's emphasis on an incentive-based, conditional approach and the way that Member States often circumvent this prerogative in their own bilateral negotiations, further contributes to the decreasing impact of political conditionality.

4.3. A European Conception of the Neighbourhood

While the previous discussions on both leverage and implementation of the ENP reveal the need for structural improvement, it is further crucial to consider the conceptual framework that encompasses the EU's relation to the Mediterranean.

The term *neighbourhood policy* discloses much about the initial belief and appraisal by European policy makers on the EU's role in the region. It depicts the EU as the defining element in a region which is understood to be driven by the idea of doing business *the European way*. The concept of a specifically European neighbourhood therefore deluded many to believe “that Europe has some special power and perhaps even responsibility” in relation to other countries in the region.⁴²

³⁸ Leigh, *A new Strategy for Europe's Neighbourhood*, 2014, p. 3.

³⁹ Balfour, *EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring*, 2012, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Lehne, *Rebooting EU Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 11.

⁴¹ Leigh, *A new Strategy for Europe's Neighbourhood*, 2014, p. 3.

⁴² Levy, *Rebooting EU Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 3.

This hubris is evident when regarding the fact that the EU is unable to keep the Mediterranean countries from sinking into turmoil – despite the ENP’s prerogative of establishing a ring of well-governed states. The European self-identification as a regional power undeniably incorporates special relations with neighbouring countries, which is evident in the cooperation on migration and energy issues. Yet, this mandate threatens to overwhelm the EU’s capabilities in light of the fact that most countries, especially in the southern neighbourhood, are struggling states rather than thriving economies.⁴³

To deal with these instable political situations in the neighbouring countries, the ENP incorporates a so-called “comprehensive approach” to security management. What this rather vague terminology entails is the relatively plain observation “that security and development are interdependent”.⁴⁴ However, the EU does not possess its own military force and most Member States are reluctant to pool such resources. Therefore, the “comprehensive approach” also serves to devalue the military component in favour of emphasising the development aspect. Even though an inherent focus on long-term aid, reconstruction and the support of multi-level governance can be considered as more appropriate than a past doctrine of military intervention, it also pulls the EU into exactly “those sorts of nation-building missions which the West discovered, in Iraq and Afghanistan, to be beyond its powers”.⁴⁵

The *neighbourhood* notion is further problematic due to not only overstretching the EU’s resources, but also in oversimplifying its relation to the neighbouring countries. Participation in the ENP is merely defined by regional proximity instead of a country’s political aspiration

or economic abilities. In fact, “there is a vast divergence in these countries’ attitudes towards the EU”.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the concept of a European neighbourhood continues to propagate a *one-size fits all* approach, disregarding country-specific cultural or historic influences. Another difficulty that sways with the concept of a policy being essentially coined by regional proximity, is the non-consideration of important actors outside such a specific geographic realm.⁴⁷ While the countries of the Mediterranean are increasingly influenced by other powers, such as the Gulf States, Iran or Russia, and to a lesser extent China, the EU’s neighbourhood policy fails to incorporate these parties into a common agenda.

Whereas the European neighbourhood-logic thus legitimises the employment of political conditionality, due to the assumption of the EU as a regional fixpoint, the question whether the ENP’s conditional nature is compatible with national sovereignty is mostly disregarded. Yet, national identity, sovereignty and self-determination were a recurring theme in the 2011 protests and have come to champion the agenda of many post-revolutionary regimes in the region.⁴⁸ To uphold these values in the face of foreign intervention is an important source of legitimacy for many governments, which in return aggravates compliance with the EU’s demand for domestic reform.

Thus, the EU’s notion of the *neighbourhood* bears a number of misconceptions that threaten to thwart the European influence on its neighbouring states. A faulty evaluation of its neighbourhood further explains why the concept of political conditionality has long been championed by the ENP without being able to ensure efficient implementation.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁶ Lehne, *Rebooting EU Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Leigh, *A new Strategy for Europe’s Neighbourhood*, 2014, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Balfour, *EU Conditionality after the Arab Spring*, 2012, p. 26.

V. Towards a Renewed European Neighbourhood Policy

The need for the EU to readjust its neighbourhood policy is evident. The previous analysis indicates that the ENP's current conception is ill-suited to implement the European ambition of a well-governed neighbourhood. Shaped by the concept of political conditionality, the ENP rests upon a number of wrong assumptions and conclusions. This is not to say that the European Neighbourhood Policy is de facto inadequate. On the contrary, the EU should continue to protect its values, but needs to make changes in the way to pursue them.

5.1. Enhanced Leverage

While the argument exists that the EU should refrain from employing political conditionality, this analysis claims that it is highly improbable for the EU to depart from its main foreign policy principle.⁴⁹ Following a more pragmatic approach, the ENP's leverage should be enhanced through a re-evaluation of the incentives offered. The EU needs to supply incentives that are tailored towards country-specific needs and that should adequately fit the economic, political and social capacities of the partnering country. A differentiated approach in what the EU demands and offers would make the ENP more attractive and relevant. This requires the allocation of more resources to specific country and regional analytical bodies under the oversight of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which would contribute to an improved assessment of domestic and regional realities and the successive development of adequate policy tools.

Based on this, the logic of economic and political approximation to European standards should only be applied to those countries that have manifested an advanced interest in the EU and possess the capability to enact reforms. Moreover, a continuous pursuit of the

more for more approach should also include a stronger *less for less* mechanism, in order to make the principle of political conditionality more authentic and avoid closer entanglements with authoritarian regimes.

5.2. Dissolved Dichotomy

In her position as the Union's new High Representative, Ms Mogherini needs to deploy a strong political message to the ENP. Part of her responsibility should be to put up European foreign policy as a value-umbrella under which the national governments coordinate their foreign affairs.

For a stronger incorporation of the Member States, national ministers should further be involved in the implementation of the ENP. This could be realised through common diplomatic missions, which make use of the specific bilateral relations between certain Member States and countries covered by the ENP, by sending mixed delegations of EU representatives and Member State diplomats. Ms Mogherini should also facilitate the variety of expertise on different aspects of foreign policy that exist in the Union's Member States, and channel these into a common European approach through establishing topic-related working groups. By incorporating Member States into a common foreign policy-making process at a lower level, it is more likely that their respective policies will diverge less at a senior level.

5.3. Redefined Neighbourhood

Another crucial task for Ms Mogherini is to adequately redefine the concept of Europe's neighbourhood. This is important for two reasons.

The first reason involves a pragmatic importance, which is essential for the implementation of the ENP. A more cooperative stance towards other regional powers, such as Iran,

⁴⁹ Achtrainer, *Mittelmeer-Politik auf Abwegen*, 2014, p. 6.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey – and partly Russia – which assert a significant impact on the political developments of the Mediterranean countries, is necessary. The EU will not be able to employ its concept of political conditionality without also recognising the mentioned countries as important regional actors. It will be decisive to incorporate these countries into the progressive development of a common agenda for the Mediterranean, instead of merely categorising them as “strategic partners”.⁵⁰ This is particularly important to avoid a situation where partnering countries face an all-or-nothing decision, being torn between two opposing political camps. Other approaches would eventually leave the EU isolated and further diminish the relevance of a conditional foreign policy.

This necessarily implies expanding the ENP’s scope by devising a strategy for the Mediterranean sub-regions, such as Central Asia, the entire Middle East and the Sahel. An integration of these regions into the ENP’s wider framework will facilitate the EU’s influence on developments in its neighbouring countries. A substantial emphasis on regional and sub-regional integration constitutes another important aspect which a revised ENP should strengthen. To ensure a more efficient implementation of its foreign policy goals, the EU will need to increase its collaboration with, and support of, “regional organisations, [...] crossborder links, regional infrastructure, and regional trade and cooperation”.⁵¹

The second reason entails a rather analytical connotation. A central weakness of the ENP has been its inability to assume and discern evolving political developments. This is evident for the Arab Spring, as well as for the crises in Syria and Iraq and the consequent rise of the Islamic State (IS).

It is therefore necessary for the EU to enhance deliberation with other regional powers. In particular the dialogue with Russia, Iran

and Saudi Arabia – who are generally perceived to advocate different values and principles in their foreign policy – is decisive, since a more critical discussion will help the EU to scrutinise its own ideals. Over the past decade, the EU has been too content in its approach to promote good governance and democratic values, not being challenged enough to question the legitimacy and adequacy of its dogmatic lens. A thorough rethinking of the EU’s own position, and that of others respectively, will therefore contribute to a more precise and astute analysis of developments and movements in the southern neighbourhood, eventually enabling the EU to identify these earlier and respond quicker.

VI. Conclusion

Briefly summarising the previous analysis, it can be validated that the principle of political conditionality has become the driving theme for the European Neighbourhood Policy. Mainly informed by the success of the EU’s enlargement policy, the concept of political conditionality has come to define the EU’s relation with its Mediterranean neighbourhood. The assumption that pursuing a policy, guided by political conditionality, was most adequate to promote a neighbourhood of well-governed states was reinforced by the popular uprisings in 2011 and the belief that the Arab Spring constituted another wave of democratisation.

However, the paradigm of political conditionality reveals a structural misconception of the ENP. Being constructed on (1) incentives that dwarf European leverage, (2) an existing dichotomy between what the EU preaches and what the Member States practise, as well as on (3) a misguided understanding of the neighbourhood, the ENP lacks the presuppositions to effectively employ political conditionality in the Mediterranean countries. The previous achievements of policies characterised by political conditionality have thus led to the assumption that the concept was a self-

⁵⁰ Levy, *Rebooting EU Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 3.

⁵¹ Lehne, *Time to Reset the European Neighbourhood Policy*, 2014, p. 15.

fulfilling prophecy and could similarly inform the ENP in a successful way. With regard to Ms Mogherini's mandate, a major challenge for the EU will hence be to analyse and reassess its relations with the Mediterranean countries, in order to develop a better conception of and more adequate policy tools for a renewed ENP. The European Neighbourhood Policy remains the Union's most comprehensive foreign policy instrument.

Yet, for it to regain relevance with regard to its southern neighbourhood, the EU will need to rethink its relations with the Mediterranean and establish a new framework in which it can embed the concept of political conditionality in a more feasible manner. Otherwise, it might become true what critical observers have provocatively argued already, namely that the altered geopolitical environment will lead to the ENP's demise.^{52 53}

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⁵² Tocci, *The Neighbourhood Policy is Dead*, 2014, p. 2.

⁵³ Ben Ahmed, Faleg & Chiesa, *Mr. Renzi's Neighbourhood*, 2014, www.the-american-interest.com.

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All internet sources were last accessed on 16th January 2015.

Impressum

Herausgeber

Deutsches Orient-Institut

Jägerstraße 63 D

10117 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0)30-20 64 10 21

Fax: +49 (0)30-30 64 10 29

doi@deutsches-orient-institut.de

www.deutsches-orient-institut.de

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Autor

Lucas Rasche

Chefredaktion

Benedikt van den Woldenberg

Edgar Zedler

Layout

Gareth Davies

Vorstand

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