



European Studies Association Concordantia  
Grote Gracht 80-82  
6211 SZ Maastricht  
The Netherlands  
[www.student-forum.eu](http://www.student-forum.eu)

## Policy Proposal on The European Neighbourhood Policy:

Building Brides: The Future of the European Neighbourhood Policy

Brussels, 13-04-2014

Working Group: European Neighbourhood Policy

**Authors:** Albina Paloi, Cristina Baraganescu, Diego Filiu, Felix Bahmann, Lilia Chikhladze, Luca Merotta, Marline Kester, Remco Zwetsloot, Revaz Janashia, Viktor Artemenko

**Tutor:** Olga Burluyk

## **STUDENT FORUM MAASTRICHT**

*Student Forum Maastricht (SFM) is an annual student conference held at the Maastricht University Campus in Brussels. The conference is co-organised by the European Studies Association Concordantia, Maastricht University and the European Commission. The participants are post- and undergraduates with an academic focus on European Union related studies and a strong involvement in civil society. Together with officials from the European Commission and experts from civil society and interest groups, they develop policy proposals for pressing topics within the EU. The 2014 edition of SFM took place from April 9<sup>th</sup> to April 13<sup>th</sup>. The topics of this year's conference were Youth Unemployment, EU Migration policies, the European Neighbourhood Policy, Sustainable Development and EU Free Trade Negotiations. For more information on Student Forum Maastricht, please visit: [www.student-forum.eu](http://www.student-forum.eu)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This proposal provides suggestions for the improvement of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Eleven students and one tutor, from a variety of countries, have come together through the SFM to discuss and evaluate the ENP. In this process they met with several experts from relevant EU and civil society institutions.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Taking into consideration the imminent European parliamentary elections and the many changes since the launch of the Eastern Partnership 5 years ago, the time is right for a fresh look at the European Neighbourhood Policy. Although it has achieved a great degree of success in such areas as the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the Erasmus programme, the ENP has fallen short of its goals in a number of arenas:

- It has not sufficiently engaged members of all layers of civil society in policy development and implementation,
- Democratisation within the neighbourhood zones, specifically with reference to the Southern partners, has not been effective,
- The ENP has at times failed to successfully generate an environment of mutual gain, regarding to the EU's tendency to disregard issues of high priority to partner states.

Past reviews publicised by the European Commission and leading think tanks have stressed various areas of improvement, for example:

- Emphasis on joint policy development and ownership,
- Enhanced differentiation in policy,
- Strengthening the ENP's political leadership,
- Shift away from a top-down and asymmetrical approach,
- Externalising successful EaP projects to the EUROMED,
- Employment of both a regional and national approach to policy.

The proposals listed below, building on these past proposals, suggest ways to address the remaining shortcomings of the ENP.

## ENHANCING VISIBILITY IN PARTNER STATES

Although it has not achieved all its aims, the ENP has led to substantial progress in some partner countries. However, most of these changes have occurred without the knowledge of the partner countries' populations. This is mostly the result of the EU's lack of effective mechanisms to reach out to these populations. As partner state governments do not only respond to EU incentives but also to domestic pressure, it is vital that this shortcoming is addressed. We therefore argue that **the EU should dramatically step up its efforts to inform populations about the content and goals of the ENP**. It should:

- Conduct thorough studies of the media and opinion landscapes in all partner countries,
- Frequently send small-sized delegations to areas in which populations are not aware of the EU and the ENP, with the explicit goal of raising public awareness,
- Elicit more media coverage with special media events in partner states,
- Organize more high-profile visits, especially in times of crisis,
- Extensively cooperate with and fund existing and new media projects focusing on the EU,
- Take into account the variation of political contexts for public diplomacy,
- Clarify the ENP's objectives and methods, and make its outcomes known,
- Enhance the coherence of the EU's leadership for the ENP by adopting a clearer communication task division.

## IMPROVING INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP

Considering that the ENP involves multiple actors, both in policy design and policy implementation, there have inevitably been moments of disagreement and confusion in the past. While some changes have been made to address these issues, we argue that **the EU should further clarify the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved in the ENP**. It should:

- Enhance coordination between the EEAS and the Commission in order to ensure that their tasks do not overlap,
- Ensure a clear *formal* division of tasks between the aforementioned actors to make up for the lack of legal clarity in the Lisbon Treaty,
- More strongly involve Member States in drafting Action Plans and overall policy.

## CLARIFYING STRATEGIC VISION

Given the developments of the Arab Spring over the past years and the recent events in Ukraine, the geopolitical dimension of the ENP has become apparent once more. Lasting peace and prosperity can only be achieved through dialogue. Refraining from cooperation risks once more dividing the European continent into two competing blocs. It is necessary, and possible, to overcome zero-sum logic. We argue that **the strategic framework surrounding the ENP and its place Europe's foreign policy in general should be clearly defined**. The EU should:

- Include the Extended European Neighbourhood in the policy-making process,
- Promote cooperation through trade as an alternative to bloc confrontation,
- Provide more effective protection for ENP countries embracing European values.

## FACILITATING JOINT OWNERSHIP

Although the principle of ‘joint ownership’ is established throughout the ENP, modification of its execution is necessary so as to ensure better reflection of the material and political realities in the partner states. We argue that **ownership should not be limited to the implementation of ENP policies, but should be extended throughout the policymaking process from start to finish**. The EU should:

- Closely involve partners in the design and deliberation of policy proposals,
- Participation should be extended beyond governmental bodies to include the participation of various stakeholders,
- Lower the threshold for participation in the policymaking process,
- Strongly encourage partners to initiate Action Plan proposals,
- Advocate assistance in mechanisms increasing dialogue and feedback and inform them four months in advance of Action Plan review,
- Offered technical and financial support through programs such as the European Endowment for Democracy or the Human Rights Instrument (EIDHR).

## INCREASING DIFFERENTIATION THROUGH SECTOR COOPERATION

In light of the agriculture-based economies of partner countries, it is believed agriculture should play a major role in the panels of the ENP. In spite of the future perspective of Partner countries’ access to the EU internal market, agricultural products still differ considerably from country to country as well as from region to region. Therefore, policies tailored to the specific partner’s needs shall be put forward. Sorting countries into regional blocs is useful for common problems such as transport and sustainable development, but specific partnerships aimed at individual countries have to be enhanced in light of the different situations featuring in individual countries. We therefore argue that **deepening of the differentiation would lead to the intensification of cooperation in the Neighbourhood**. The EU should:

- Further develop cooperation with partner countries of European economic interest,
- Introduce sector agreement on agriculture and common standards for export product,
- Include and develop policies based on measurements for alignment in specific sectors in the European Integration Index.

## STRENGTHENING PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT

The people-to-people domain has been one of the most successful aspects of the ENP in terms of public outreach and capacity building. We argue that **by continuing to build on the past success the EU will be able to continue and extend its positive impact in this area**. It should:

- Reinforce active youth participation and the education of future leaders of partner states,
- Build upon the ongoing success of the Erasmus programme by expanding its dimension towards the East,
- Create an Erasmus East Component that would focus on inter-partner exchanges of students in higher education, enabled by scholarships,
- Encourage the establishment of a network of past beneficiaries of Erasmus exchange so as to create a platform for regional networking and debate on educational standards. This could be further developed into Eastern Youth Forum on Education.

## EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETIES ACTORS

The ENP faces several challenges with regard to civil society. There is a tendency to engage in talks with the established civil society actors while giving less recognition to actors with limited resources. This pattern hinders the ability of the EU to have a dialogue with representatives of different social groups, possibly resulting in a skewed picture of the opinions of populations in the partner states. Limited funding opportunities further intensify the problem of empowering less established groups in the partner states. We argue that **the EU should substantially step up its efforts to enable a diverse range of civil society actors in partner states. In addition, it should work to increase coordination and capacity-building among civil society actors.** The EU should:

- More directly fund locally based civil society groups instead of favouring international grassroots organisations,
- Raise the scope of activities and funding of European Endowment for Democracy,
- Apply the ‘more for more’ principle to civil society actors,
- Extend successful civil society practices of the Eastern Partnership to the Southern partners.

## ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE WITH NEIGHBOURS OF NEIGHBOURS

Events in Ukraine have once again brought to the forefront the importance of international and regional organizations and actors in the European Neighbourhood. We argue that **there is an increasing need to take into account various interests coming from states and regional organisations which hold influential roles in the European Neighbourhood.** The EU should:

- Foster and formalize the current mechanisms of ENP in relation to the neighbours of neighbours, without undermining the partners themselves,
- Increase the scope and instruments aimed at engaging in dialogue with various stakeholders.