

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE EU'S EASTERN POLICY

A Joint Policy Brief

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Assumptions:

- (1) The EU's role as a global actor largely depends on its success in the immediate neighbourhood. The EU can only become a real international actor if it is an actor *first in Europe*. The EU needs to enhance its policy first towards new neighbours if it wants to sustain prospects for its leading role in global affairs.
- (2) The EU's policy towards its *European* neighbours has to be differentiated from its policy towards neighbours of Europe or other regions of the world. The EU can only become a 'modernization project for Europe of the 21st century and beyond' if it includes *every* part of it. An inclusive and effective policy of the EU towards its new neighbours is an inherent part of a modernization, reforms and security agenda for the present EU. Relations with no other region in the world have such an important internal dimension and consequences for the EU and its own future.
- (3) The EU currently faces several internal challenges: institutional and financial reforms, structural modernization (Lisbon Strategy), 'enlargement fatigue', etc. The EU needs to develop an inclusive pan-European policy, so that it can maintain its strategic initiative, as well as its internal cohesion and function.
- (4) There is not a dilemma between the EU's foreign and enlargement policy in Europe, nor between enlargement and internal reform. The combination of the EU's partnership and integration policy ('open door') could serve both in assisting European modernisation of neighbouring countries as well as in strengthening the EU's role in these countries and vis-à-vis Russia.
- (5) The question 'where are the borders of Europe' must be answered first by European non-EU countries, not so much by the EU itself. 'United Europe' means 'Europe of democracies.' Unless new neighbours will not be able to modernize their post-communist regimes and societies, Europe will remain to be divided. Therefore, the prospect of membership should be open for these new neighbours who meet the accession criteria.
- (6) Because of the geographical proximity and the experience of transition to democracy, the new member states could be crucial in strengthening the EU's role in its new neighbourhood. The potential of new member states in this respect has yet to be acknowledged and

fully utilized. They can contribute to the assessment of domestic developments and facilitate a better understanding of the perspectives of neighbouring countries. New members' active role would increase the overall ownership and broaden political legitimacy of a coherent and enhanced EU Eastern policy.

- (7) An increased role of the EU in its new neighbourhood would also have beneficial influence over the situation in and policies of the Russian Federation, particularly with regards to the former Soviet republics. A successful EU neighbourhood policy is inseparable from proper relations with Russia.
- (8) The European Union not only needs effective institutions, jobs and economic development, but it also needs to strengthen its values. External policies that openly promote democracy, the rule of law and respect for human and civil rights contribute directly to this. This is the way to overcome 'European fatigue' and cynicism.

Existing challenges:

- (1) Strategic and institutional *inconsistency*: Over the last eight years the EU has developed two *parallel* strategic frameworks for its policies towards its neighbouring countries. Both policy concepts have had their own parallel implementing instruments (CFSP – TACIS; ENP – Action Plan) and institutional mechanisms for the EU's collaboration with partner countries from Eastern Europe. However, they have been not adjusted to each other.
- (2) *Discrepancy* between the EU's policy goals and instruments: The Amsterdam Treaty declared the promotion of democratization processes and human rights as one of the most important priorities of the CFSP. However, the EU policy tools have not reflected sufficiently such priorities (e.g. TACIS assistance programs for Russia and the Ukraine).
- (3) *Inflexible* policy planning and programming: The EU assistance programs for Russia and Ukraine in the period of 2005–2006 have been based on Country Strategy Papers on Russia and Ukraine from 2001. Hence, they did not reflect neither undemocratic developments in Russia, nor dramatic changes after the Orange and Rose revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, not to mention the political and human consequences of the Chechen war.

- (4) A tension exists between the regional nature of vital EU interests in new neighbouring countries (e.g. energy security, combating illegal migration, etc.) and the mere *bilateral* approach towards countries of the region.

The recent Commission's Communication² and the December 2006 European Council's Decision on Strengthening European Neighbourhood Policy have created a new momentum for the German Presidency to address existing deficits and to re-define a framework for the EU's Eastern policies. In this context we recommend the following –

Policy recommendations on goals and instruments of the EU's Eastern Policy:

- (1) The EU cannot effectively pursue its regional interests without applying regional policies brought under the umbrella of one comprehensive, consistent regional strategy. Therefore the EU needs to develop a coherent two-tier strategy: The existing *bilateral* frameworks should be complemented by a new *regional* framework(s). The Action Plans should facilitate *political* modernization and democracy building, while sectoral agreements (as designed in the Commission's Communication³) should serve *sectoral* modernization of new neighbours (Free Trade Agreements/FTA, Trans-European Networks/TEN).
- (2) In order to develop a coherent regional strategy towards new neighbours, the EU should aim at bridging ENP policy with the EU-Russia common spaces agenda. By the same token regional sectoral agreements within ENP could lay down foundations for institutionalized *regional sectoral* dialogues with ENP countries *plus* Russia especially in sectors of vital importance (e.g. energy security, combating illegal migration, etc.) The EU should insist that EU-Russia energy dialogue should also include Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.
- (3) The ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) for the EU's new financial perspective 2007–2013 should be brought in line with the ENP goals, challenges identified in the EU's basic treaty in general, and the European Security Strategy in particular.
- (4) In order to overcome structural and institutional inconsistency between foreign (CFSP) and neighbourhood (ENP) policies, an effective and flexible planning, consultation and implementation mechanism should be developed between the Commission, the Council and member states. The planning mechanism should be changed so that it facilitates a *flexible*

policy response, including a continuous adjustment of assistance programs for the new neighbourhood. The EU cannot plan its policy response towards its new neighbours within the five-or more-years period because the post-Soviet countries are still facing dramatic political and economic challenges of their post-communist transition.

- (5) The EU's *visa policy* towards new neighbours should reflect strategic EU interests in the region. The policy should also acknowledge the basic fact that a strict visa regime impedes desired *legal* movement of persons, but does not thwart the *illegal* migration from third countries.
- (6) The EU should redefine its *assistance priorities* in favor of the *political modernization* promoted by the Action Plans – i.e. strengthening democracy in new neighbouring countries through improving the system of representative democracy (including political parties), supporting NGOs and civil society, sustaining free and independent media, building an independent judiciary and promoting the rule of law, protection of private property as well as promoting anti-corruption measures and public accountability. In these areas the transition experience of new member states may be particularly valuable.

¹ Throughout this paper the term 'new neighbours' refers to the countries neighbouring EU member states to the East, that is, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and also including Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. (Western-Balkan countries are considered as potential candidates and are not covered by the term.)

² COM(2006)726 / Dec 4 2006

³ *ibid*

