

Radical Reshaping Required

Michael Emerson

Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)

1. The Map

The Joint Consultation paper asks “Should the current geographical scope be maintained?” The answer has to be ‘no’. The present ENP map is obsolete, and its reconfiguration has to be at the heart of reshaping the ENP policy itself. It started with Prodi’s ring of friends. But in reality the EU is surrounded by a vastly wider ring of some friends, some failed states, some enemies and one strategic competitor. Until now the implicit paradigm in EU thinking has been that of ‘concentric circles’, in which various EU policies are exported to the neighbours in progressively thinner degrees as the proximity becomes more distant. But now, for all but the closest friends, the paradigm is all about security, rather than Europeanisation.

The new neighbourhood map should surely be extended to the ‘neighbours of the neighbours’ in all three directions (but this terminology should itself be dropped): to the East to include Russia and Central Asia, to the Middle East to include all the Arabian peninsula and the Gulf (including Iran), and to the South to extend across the Sahara to the Sahel and Horn of Africa. If a new name is needed, it might be the ‘Wider European Neighbourhood’.

But beyond semantics, the key point is that geographic zoning can no longer be the key to the substance of the policy. Only for some purposes is it still useful to offer standard policy packages for groups of countries such as for the AA/DCFTA partners. For other purposes sectoral policies have to be of the essence, addressing for example ‘illegal migration’, or ‘radical Islam’, or ‘energy security’. In these cases there is no fixed political geography, while the linkages with internal EU policies are essential, and so it is not coherent either to think just in terms of ‘external’ policies. This means that the articulation of the sectoral with the geographic has to be radically revised.

There is also a China and ‘Greater Eurasia’ point. The Chinese wider neighbourhood policy now overlaps with the wider European neighbourhood, and their new Silk Road now aims at the EU. These two wider neighbourhood policies should talk together, and invent a ‘Greater Eurasia’ concept alongside Putin’s small and unattractive Eurasian Union.

2. The Association Agreements and DCFTAs

The ‘old’ ENP has left an important legacy in the three AA/DCFTAs with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Some commentaries that ‘the ENP is dead’ therefore warrant a Mark Twain response: ‘rumours of my death are greatly exaggerated’. Task number one is to make a success of this legacy. However, the texts are also far from perfect. The loading of EU acquis was done with insufficient discrimination, and the balance of obligations and incentives can be criticised at both technical and strategic levels, with messages here also for the agreements under negotiation with Morocco and Tunisia.

Early delivery of good news for the partner states is desperately needed, since otherwise reversal of public support for their ‘European choice’ is all too possible. Indeed it is already visible in Moldova and it begins in Georgia too, while the situation in the bankrupt and war-stricken Ukraine is surely precarious politically. The EU is not trying hard enough to deliver good news. Even minor good news, such as visa liberalisation for Georgia was not forthcoming at Riga. Strategically significant good news will for sure be costly for the EU, either financially (e.g. large scale grant funding for energy saving in Ukraine) or politically (the old but inescapable issue of membership perspectives). It is not adequate just to stress that it is for them to make the effort to take advantage of the new opportunities. The pro-European elites in these countries are trying, but their positions are vulnerable, with ubiquitous Russian propaganda and of course aggression in Ukraine.

