

European neighbourhood policy

Conclusions of the Neighbourhood Commission (Brussels - 4 May 2007)
adopted by the Vienna Central Council (1 June 2007)

The Commission on "Relations with EU neighbour countries" - known for short as the "Neighbourhood Commission" - of the European League for Economic Cooperation devoted its latest meeting, chaired by Mr Giselbert Schmidburg, to an examination of the "European Neighbourhood Policy". The meeting heard talks on this theme from Mr Graham Avery, Secretary General of TEPSA (Trans-European Policy Studies Association) and Mrs Sieglinde Gstöhl, Professor at the College of Europe in Bruges, along with the comments of Mr Luc-Dominique Bernard, Professor Emeritus at the Université Catholique de Louvain, and Mr Andrea Moggi, Policy Coordinator at the Directorate-General for External Relations of the European Commission.

These talks and the debates that followed inspired ELEC with the following observations and ideas:

- 1- The European neighbourhood policy has the aim of encircling the European Union to the south and east with a 'circle of friends', by exporting European values to 16 countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, the Lebanon, Syria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia) in its vicinity, these values being: the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, and the principles of the market economy and sustainable development. It is an important aspect of the Union's foreign policy.
- 2- In principle, the neighbourhood policy does not aim to prepare these countries for entry into the EU but rather to offer them an alternative to entry. For this reason, its efforts to export the EU's values to these countries by encouraging the appropriate reforms undoubtedly lack the significant lever which was and still is provided - in the context of enlargement policies - by the prospect of future membership for candidate countries. Nevertheless, the tools used by the Union, which contain both incentives to reform and deliberative instruments to promote the internalisation of European values, have been broadly taken from the battery of measures used to prepare for the most recent enlargements.
- 3- The neighbourhood policy is aimed at two very different groups of countries: the first consists of the 10 countries situated to the south and east of the Mediterranean, which are neighbours of Europe without being a part of it; almost none of these countries is pursuing membership of the European Union. The second consists of the 6 countries to the east of the EU, which regard themselves as a part of Europe and have not given up their hopes of joining the European Union. The neighbourhood policy is thus essentially perceived by the first group as a development aid policy, and by the second as a disguised policy to prepare for a future enlargement of the Union. This raises the question of the wisdom of bringing these two policies under the same roof.
- 4- Among countries which differ so widely in both their motivation and their structure (their political regimes, their history over recent decades, their level of industrial development, the extent to which the market economy is established and the ability to attract direct foreign investment), the use of peer pressure as a instrument for encouraging reforms seems to be of dubious value; however, we may wonder

whether the use of a 'scoreboard' comparable to that developed by the EBRD could not at least facilitate the objective comparisons that this instrument demands?

- 5- Whatever method is used to measure the progress made under the auspices of the neighbourhood policy, it seems quite clear that - at least in the second group of countries - the policy's potential success will translate into an increased desire to accede to the European Union, and that within the EU pressure for a new round of enlargement will increase, along with the underlying tensions that such pressure would bring with it. If the neighbourhood policy meets with success, is there not a risk that this will damage the cohesion of the European Union? But if it should fail, wouldn't the risks of having potentially unstable or hostile states on the EU's borders represent an even greater danger?
- 6- This dilemma is actually part of a wider problem, which has emerged more particularly in recent years owing to the debates around both the last enlargements and the draft constitutional treaty, and which can be summarised in the question: "What Europe do we want for ourselves and our descendants?". It is increasingly obvious that we will no longer be able to find to this question a single answer likely to be accepted by all Member States, and that in consequence not merely will progress towards integration fail to proceed at the same speed, but the nature of this progress will also have to be differentiated to reflect the different aims of the States concerned.
- 7- A possible solution, which ELEC's Neighbourhood Commission proposes to study in greater depth, would be for the Treaties to admit at least two membership categories in a "Europe of concentric circles": a central core of counties who aspire to closer political union and accept a single currency and a joint security policy; and an outer ring of countries for which it is enough to take part in a single market, with all that that implies, but which do not want to go any further. An intermediate ring for countries accepting certain joint policies could also be envisaged. Under such circumstances, the neighbourhood policy could lead to the future accession to the European Union of countries beyond its eastern borders without fear that this could overturn the European project as a whole.

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