

# The Eastern Dimension of European Neighborhood Policy — the Role of German, Czech and Polish Presidencies

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**Abstract:** *The European Neighborhood Policy is the youngest of the EU common policies. It is meant to cover its eastern and southern neighbors and result in the creation around of the EU of a so-called ring of friends — consisting of stable, prosperous and democratic neighbors.*

*One of the purposes of the ENP is helping the governments of neighboring countries in the process of their political and economical reforms by offering them the benefits of closer relationship with the EU and its member states. The ENP replaces a one-size-fits-all approach in the EU's external relations by a flexible and differentiated approach that takes into consideration the specific needs, potential, expectations and possibilities of neighboring countries.*

*Most of the EU member states have the economical, political and social relations with the neighboring countries. With that in mind, they put stress on developing different dimensions of the European Neighborhood Policy. In the last few years the competition between the eastern and southern dimensions of the ENP has become clearly visible, involving the main actors on the European political stage.*

**Keywords:** *European Neighborhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, EU external relations*

## 1 European Neighborhood Policy

In 2003, in its efforts to become a global actor, the EU proposed the development of partnership with its neighbors in a neighborhood policy of prosperity and stability [1]. The European Commission proposed a new foreign policy of the EU — the European Neighborhood Policy that shall cover its eastern and southern neighbors. The main reason for propos-

ing the ENP is that it is in the EU's interest to surround itself by a so-called *ring of friends* — consisting of stable, prosperous and democratic neighbors. The stability and prosperity of its neighbors was acknowledged to be a guarantee of the development and long-term prosperity of the EU, as well as of peace and security [2].

The United Europe has been searching for over a decade for a new formula for its relations with post-Communist and post-Soviet countries [3]. However, the direct need for establishing a new mechanism of cooperation with neighboring countries was acutely felt after two planned enlargements: in 2004 (of 10 new countries, most of them from Eastern Europe) and in 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria). The enlargement meant that the EU had new eastern neighbors, namely Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine [4].

One of the purposes of ENP is helping the governments of neighboring countries in the process of their political and economic reforms by offering them a contribution in the benefits of closer relationship with the EU and its countries. In 2002 the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and a member of the European Commission Chris Patten stated in their letter to the Council the need for developing an individual regional strategy between the enlarged EU and Eastern European countries and the need for overhauling the external relations of the EU — especially the need for targeting the immediate neighbors [5]. They divided the neighboring countries into three main groups:

- The Balkans, for whom the accession to the EU is an explicit goal, despite a number of existing problems and many difficulties ahead;
- The Mediterranean area (apart from the current candidates), for whom the membership option is explicitly excluded. Instead, more emphasis is put on the co-operation with and within the region;
- Union's eastern neighbors who fall in between. In this group the main challenge for the EU remained to be Ukraine [6].

In May 2003 the European Commission sent a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament titled *Wider Europe — Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors* — giving an impulse to launching a new EU policy [7]. The Commission addressed the proposals in the strategy to those neighboring countries that do not currently have the prospect of membership in the EU — the addressees of the strategy were enumerated in the text of the Communication: they were the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and the Palestinian Authority. The main purpose of the strategy was to use the opportunity offered by enlargement to enhance relations with EU's neighbors based on shared values: democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The Commission stressed the Union's determination to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe, new fragmentation of Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union.

The first quasi-official interpretation of the ENP was set to convey the idea that enlargement and the European Neighborhood Policy are two separate policies [8].

In May 2004 the European Commission issued another Communication: *European Neighborhood Policy — Strategy Paper*. It proposed to create a new instrument of the external

relation of the EU. Thus, the new common European Policy named the European Neighborhood Policy was established. The proposal of the Commission is addressed to the countries that became direct neighbors of the EU after the enlargement in 2004 and remained separated from the possibilities given to the European countries in Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union. In the group of new partners (not mentioned in *Wider Europe*), the Commission listed Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The purpose of the ENP was to start a rapprochement with the neighboring countries through cooperation in the areas of energy and transport, commitment to shared values, more effective political dialogue, economic and social development policy, trade and internal market, justice and home affairs, environment, information society, research and innovation, people-to-people, programmes and agencies [9]. Other important document that developed and deepened the European Neighborhood Policy is the Communication from the Commission to the Council and The European Parliament *On strengthening the European Neighborhood Policy*, proposed by the Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner in December 2006 [10].

## 2 German Presidency Proposal: European Neighborhood Policy Plus — a *New Ostpolitik*

Most of the EU member states have long-standing economical, political and social relations with the neighboring countries. Because of that they put stress on developing different dimensions of European Neighborhood Policy. In the last few years the competition between eastern and southern dimension of ENP has become clearly visible. It involves the main actors on the European political stage. During the first half of 2007 Germany held the EU Council Presidency. In the summer of 2006 Germany's political representatives, particularly Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmaier, announced four priority agendas [11] for their country's presidency in which he planned to undertake new initiatives and develop EU policies. One of the priorities was the EU's external relations and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. At a press conference in December 2006, launching the German EU Council Presidency, Steinmaier declared: *I believe we must do more here — for all of the EU's neighbors, in the East as in the South. This means greater cooperation in individual sectors, possible participation in the internal market and more scientific and cultural exchange* [12].

In that area, Germany wanted to develop an attractive overall policy under the name of a new *Ostpolitik* that would include three major pillars: European Neighborhood Policy Plus, the revision of Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia which was left out of the ENP and the EU's strategy for Central Asia. In December 2006, Steinmaier's office requested the European Council for a mandate to *develop and deepen the Neighborhood Policy* [13]. Germany's proposal defined the EU's *Eastern Neighboring*. According to the concept, *Eastern Neighboring* is defined as the area between the EU and Russia [14]. In its proposal on strengthening the ENP Germany focused on Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, as well as South Caucasus countries — Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The ENP + proposal consists of six main theses:

- an emerging integration and security vacuum at the EU's doorstep — from Ukraine to the Caucasus. Germany demanded from them a more active engagement;
- the need to change the ENP for those of Eastern European countries that wanted to follow the European model of transformation, as a chance to develop closer relations with the EU through a *voluntary adoption of the Acquis* was not attractive for them any more;
- the assurance of sustainable democratization, stabilization and modernization of EU's Eastern Neighbors considering the regional and individual differences and peculiarities;
- the need to escape the binary logic of the EU's accession / non accession dilemma with Eastern neighbors — Germany postulated a stronger engagement of its *European neighbors* than of the *neighbors of Europe*;
- *Partnership for modernization between the EU and Eastern Europe and Caucasus* (namely, Ukraine, Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Belarus), based on *sectoral agreements* with binding character — a new tool of exporting the EU's Acquis to the countries of the region (that would replace the previous tool — Action Plans). Germany proposed a status of observers in the EU institutions responsible for these sectoral policies and intensive consultations and establishing common statements in the political cooperation;
- special impulse to the development of the ENP during Germany's Presidency [15].
- Those who promoted the *New Ostpolitik* emphasized the differentiation created by Germany, the one between *Europe's neighbors* — which include Eastern and Southern states (the Mediterranean countries) and *European neighbors* which refers to the former Soviet states. For that reason, Eastern Europe was placed on a qualitatively position on the map of Europe. The ENP proposal hit the weakest points of the EU Eastern Neighborhood, especially the exclusive bilateralism in the relations with eastern neighbors. The *sectoral agreements* proposed by Germany, as a tool of exporting *Acquis*, can stimulate the modernization of the countries that would bring their legislation closer to that of the EU, as well as would serve the interests of the EU in crucial sectors. They would change the voluntary character of Action Plans in which the country can decide which part of *Acquis* it wants to implement. Current regulations were called *unrequited love* or a *blind alliance*, which might be replaced by agreements binding for both parties [16].

A differential treatment of the ENP partners sparked resistance from a few member countries, namely France, Spain and Portugal. The idea of the European Neighborhood Policy was to give the same opportunities and conditions of cooperation to all. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco matter much more for them than Ukraine. The German Foreign Office suggested adjusting the budgetary balance between the East European and Mediterranean neighbors, which was at that time at 30 to 70 percent respectively. That offer was unacceptable for those European states that had stronger historical, cultural and economic relations with Southern partners [17]. For that reason, during the Portuguese (under the motto: *Stronger Union for a better world*, in the second half of 2007) and French (the second half of 2008) Presidency in the Council, the stress in the ENP was placed on establishing a closer cooperation of Mediterranean countries. Both Portugal and France clearly pointed out the strategic role of southern neighbors for the EU's security and stability.

### 3 Eastern Partnership as a Polish-Swedish Proposal

In May 2008, during a Council meeting, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, supported by the Foreign Minister of Sweden Carl Bild, presented a Polish-Swedish proposal of so called *Eastern Partnership*. We read in it:

*There is a need to strengthen the European offer in the Eastern direction and to develop an Eastern Partnership. Such a partnership should be based on, but go beyond the current ENP, confirming, on the one hand, the differentiation principle towards the neighbors, in line with the ENP, and, on the other hand, strengthening horizontal links between these neighbors and the EU. The authors proposed deepening bilateral co-operation and more profound integration with the EU — extended to all eastern partners, but first and foremost for Ukraine, and other countries — according to their ambition and performance. The proposal contained the idea of creating a permanent formula for multilateral co-operation complementary to the existing regional co-operation schemes [18].*

The idea of Eastern Partnership was to create a forum of regional cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, plus, for now on an expert level only, Belarus, ruled by an authoritarian regime. Eastern Partnership was to be based on the EU's existing Neighborhood Policy, so the Commission would play a central role in it [19]. The main areas of bilateral and multilateral co-operation were:

- I: political sphere and security (democracy, common values, rule of law, as well as co-operation in the fields of foreign and security policy, civil service and local administration);
- II: Borders and trans-border movement (migration, making visa regime more flexible, border infrastructure);
- III: economic and financial (implementation of reforms foreseen in the Action Plans; economic integration of the Eastern neighbors, removing trade barriers between the EU and the Eastern Neighborhood; development of transport and teleinformatic networks; energy; co-operation between independent regulators; tourism),
- IV: environment (countering climatic change, environment-friendly technologies, developing ecological consciousness),
- V: social (cross-border co-operation, people-to-people contacts, development of co-operation between NGOs, educational programs, joint research) [20].

The document presented at the June European Summit did not mention *European perspective* for these countries [21] — according to minister Sikorski, in the context of difficulties with the ratification of Lisbon Treaty, *there was no good mood for enlargement in Europe, so such a suggestion would ground the project before it even took off* [22]. However, Polish diplomats believe that if EU consents to the project, it may attach more importance to Eastern neighbors and, as a consequence, the chances for the future membership of Ukraine and Moldova will significantly increase.

According to its authors, Eastern Partnership was ultimately to result in the abolition of visa requirements for the citizens of the participating countries and the creation of a free-trade zone in services and agricultural products. Moreover, the project provides for the EU to

conclude bilateral agreements with individual countries, much like the one the Commission was at that time negotiating with Ukraine [23].

In December 2008 the Commission finally introduced Eastern Partnership [24].

Building on previous Commission proposals to strengthen the ENP, Eastern Partnership is to reinforce the interaction with all six partners, always tailored to each partner's specific situation and ambition. In bilateral relations the areas of cooperation are as follows: new contractual relations, gradual integration in the EU economy, mobility and security, energy security and supporting economic and social development. The thematic platforms outlined in Eastern Partnership are:

- I: Democracy, good governance and stability
- II: Economic integration and convergence with the EU policies
- III: Energy security
- IV: Contacts between people.

One of the clearest signals of a concrete commitment to its partners the EU can give is to bring funding levels in line with the Partnership's level of political ambition. Currently the ENPI funding for the partners amounts to € 450 million for the year of 2008. The Commission intends to propose to progressively increase this amount to reach approximately € 785 million in 2013. This will require supplementing the current ENPI envelope with € 350 million of fresh funds on top of the planned resources allocated for 2010–13. This combination of fresh and reprogrammed funds will bring the total amount of resources devoted to the new initiatives identified in this Communication to € 600 million.

The Commission proposes to launch five flagship initiatives with a strong focus on multilateral cooperation. Their success will depend on the political commitment of partners and the adequate funding from the EU's side. The initiatives are:

- Integrated Border Management Program (aligned with the EU standards, a prerequisite for progress on the mobility of persons).
- SME Facility (small and medium enterprises would receive external stimuli for growth and employment through technical assistance, financial intermediaries, risk capital and loans).
- Regional electricity markets, improved energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy sources (appropriate regulatory framework and financing mechanisms).
- Southern energy corridor (this is a key infrastructure initiative serving to diversify transit routes and sources of supply for the EU and its partners.).
- Prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters (strengthen disaster management capacities and establish effective cooperation between the EU and the partner countries).

The Commission proposes to organise the multilateral Eastern Partnership framework at four levels: meetings of Eastern Partnership Heads of State or Government (held every two years), annual spring meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the EU and the Eastern partners, attached to a General Affairs and External Relations Council, four thematic platforms (established according to the main areas of cooperation), panels to support the work of thematic platforms in specific areas [25].

In spite of the economic crisis, at the summit in March 2009 in Brussels, the European leaders agreed with the Polish proposal to assigning additional 600 million euro to finance Eastern Partnership within ENP [26].

The project of Eastern Partnership has raised doubts, not only in some of the EU member states, but also among the partner countries, most importantly in Ukraine, for whom any form of Neighborhood policy without membership perspective cannot be fully satisfying and who needed to be convinced that Eastern Partnership is more than another version of Neighborhood policy. The initiative is likely to be criticized by Bulgaria and Romania, as their project — the Black Sea Synergy — could be undermined by the new initiative. Spain and Italy, traditionally reluctantly agreeing to the EU's closer ties with the East, are expected to create problems [27]. Above all, in 2008, Polish diplomacy has been engaged en masse in promoting the initiative. Mr Tusk has put his and Poland's entire political authority on the line.

## 4 Eastern Partnership as one of the priorities of Czech and Polish Presidencies in the Council

During the first half of 2009 the Czech Republic holds the EU Council Presidency. The motto of the Czech presidency is 'Europe without barriers' and its priorities might be expressed as 'Three E: Economy, Energy and European Union in the World', which places external relations on a qualitatively new position [28]. The program of the Presidency was presented by the Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek on 14 January, after the official launching of the Presidency in a debate with MEPs and Commission President José Manuel Barroso. In the Work Program of the Czech Presidency one reads: *In accordance with historical ties and current challenges, the Presidency will give priority to the strengthening of cooperation between the EU and the Eastern European and Southern Caucasus countries. The key topics will include the deepening of energy, economic, trade and environmental partnerships; respect for fundamental rights and freedoms; support for democratization and transformation processes; facilitating mobility and management of migration; supporting mutual contacts on various levels; and political and security cooperation. The basic characteristic of the Presidency will be a differentiated and individualized approach to these countries, while utilizing available EU instruments* [29]. Expressing its full support for the deepening of the European Neighborhood Policy, the Presidency declared its efforts to strongly promote Eastern Partnership, with *the aim of achieving balance between the individual geographical partnerships of the EU*. In the opinion of the Presidency, Eastern Partnership, in the shape proposed by Poland and Sweden, represents *a new comprehensive and reinforced policy of the EU eastward, and its clear and ambitious articulation is in the interest of the EU*. Pointing out to the events in Georgia in 2008, the Presidency shows the urgent necessity of advocating regional cooperation and strengthening the EU's relations with its Eastern neighbors [30]. The Czech Republic declared its efforts to continue negotiations with Ukraine on a new, deeper level of mutual relations and to launch negotiations on a new agreement with Moldova. As we read in the Programme: *No less intensively, the*

*Presidency intends to pursue relations with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as working on the conclusion of new, enhanced agreements, deepening relations and cooperation within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. Special attention will also be paid to Georgia (the Presidency declared its involvement in the process of the conflict, while maintaining the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia) and Belarus (the Presidency declared its support for gradual development of relations between the EU and Belarus, the commencement of a constructive dialogue with Belarus, and seek to support the civil society in Belarus) [31].*

The Presidency decided to organize an opening summit on Eastern Partnership. On 7 May 2009 Prague hosted a summit to officially launch the Eastern Partnership project for six non-EU former Soviet Bloc nations. The European leaders decided to invite the representatives — heads of states and governments of all 6 countries, along with the authoritarian leader of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka. The invitation for Lukashenka was a last minute decision — the Presidency, together with the leaders of other 26 member states, were considering that case for weeks. Although the Presidency coordinators still have doubts if Belarusian leader is ready to listen to the unpleasant remarks at the EU summit, the invitation was accepted. Earlier, commenting on Eastern Partnership Lukashenka said: *There are positive moments in the warmer relations between Europe and Belarus. We believe it to be a starting point for further relations. We welcome this positive step of the EU towards its neighbors. It is a pragmatic, reasonable and timely move.* The president also commented on the readiness of Belarus and the EU to continue the dialogue on the freedom of the press and election regulations, among other issues [32]. Participation in Prague summit could be the first visit of Lukashenka to the EU since 1995 as in autumn 2008 the EU decided to resume relations with Belarus in recognition of a progress in the process of democratization of the country.

Poland is preparing to perform the EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2011. In the Program of Preparation for the Presidency adopted by the Polish government in January 2009 Eastern Partnership was officially announced as *proposal of a priority of Presidency* [33]. The government's Program anticipated active involvement of Polish Parliament of the next term of office in launching the parliamentary dimension of Eastern Partnership. The role and possibilities of Polish activeness at the Presidency will strongly depend on the ratification of Lisbon Treaty and the position of the Presidency in 2011 [34]. The entering of the Lisbon Treaty into force would result in the situation when the Polish presidency would face the need to cooperate with the permanent President of the European Council [35].

So the Eastern Partnership is the so called *Flag initiative* of Polish diplomacy, government and Prime Minister Donald Tusk, fully supported by president Lech Kaczyński.

## Summary

On 7 May 2009 the leaders of 27 European States launched a new initiative, that would place the relations of the EU and its Eastern Neighbors on a qualitatively level. According to Florian Rapan, *Without bearing any grudge against the states within former Soviet Union*

which suppressed the 'spring in Prague' in 1968, the Czech Republic is determined to offer the six former Soviet states another 'spring in Prague' with the possibility to get them closer to the Western economic and security system in order to face the current and future challenges [36].

The future role of the Eastern neighbors will depend on a number of deciding factors: the engagement and political will of those EU members who have stronger relations with Eastern neighbors, the engagement and reforms taken by Eastern Partners interested in closer cooperation with the EU, as well as the EU-Russian relations. The latest events in Georgia and Moldova make the European leaders conscious that EU's security, stability and development begins outside its borders and prove that deepening relations with eastern neighbors is a necessity.

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