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Partners, not Neighbours!

Rapporteur:

Edmund Ratka

Project Assistant

KAS Tunisia

Editor:

Hardy Ostry

Resident Representative

KAS Tunisia

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ENP REVIEW FROM A MAGHREB PERSPECTIVE

Instead of only repairing the outdated European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), put under review in 2015, the European Union should develop a new framework to deal with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean. Both the geopolitical context and the internal situation of many ENP target countries experienced major changes since the European Neighbourhood Policy has been introduced in 2004.

The recommendations presented in this paper are based on deliberations with experts from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria and thus present a "Maghreb perspective" on the ENP and the Mediterranean policy of the EU.*

Maghreb experts argued for a radical change in the European mind-set and political discourse. It should be based on the will of creating a true partnership and acknowledging the common concerns on both sides of the Mediterranean. To mark such a new beginning, the notion of "European Neighbourhood Policy" should be abandoned. On the institutional level, structures of EU-Maghreb and Euro-Mediterranean relations should be simplified. However, experts appreciate and recommend pushing further the trend in the ENP, seen especially since 2011, to better take into account civil society. Moreover, in reviewing its relations with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean the EU should consider if its incentives for reform and cooperation are strong enough and how conditionality could be reframed. The facilitation of mobility would constitute an especially efficient instrument to award cooperation and reform. In view of the deteriorating security situation, the fight

against terrorism and the reform of the security sector is another urgent field of cooperation. Finally, instead of focusing on bilateral relations only, the EU should much more actively encourage South-South cooperation and regional integration. In doing so, instead of aiming at the Southern Mediterranean en bloc, the EU should focus on regional sub-structures such as the Maghreb.

In reforming its policy along these lines, the EU must be aware of the ENP's rather disappointing record sheet during the last decade as well as the geopolitical context that has tremendously changed and further complicated EU policy in the region.

The ENP: modest outcomes and a poor image in the South

The European Neighbourhood Policy was a useful framework to advance bilateral relations with cooperation-oriented countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, in particular when it comes to trade and the promotion of economic relations. However, the ENP's results are far from satisfying. First, the ENP is regarded as heavily Eurocentric in the Maghreb, both on the discursive and the policy implementation level. The perceived degradation from "partners" (a key notion of the Barcelona process) to "neighbours" has been repeatedly mentioned as a semantic illustration thereof.

Second, the strict bilateralism of the ENP did not encourage regional integration or at least the cooperation the Maghreb is terribly lacking of. As the responsibility for that lies

27, Rue de l'Île de Zembra
1053 Tunis - Les Berges du Lac II
Tunisie
Info.Tunis@kas.de
www.kas.de/tunisie

first and foremost with the Maghreb countries themselves, the ENP did indeed, according to Moroccan and Tunisian experts, encourage competition about reinforcing relations with the EU that came at the expense of stronger South-South relations.

Third, the ENP focus on economy with the dismantling of trade barriers without facilitation of the mobility of persons has tainted the credibility of the European Union. In general, the Maghreb countries consider that they did not receive enough recompense for their cooperation with the EU or EU member states concerning for instance the fight against illegal migration (Morocco) or for democratic change (Tunisia). In addition, regrouping under the same ENP branding both East and South furthered faulty comparisons between Eastern European countries (and thus potential future member states of the EU) and the Southern Mediterranean countries. The latter receive much less EU funds and assistance and thus feel unfairly treated as "second class neighbours". Tunisian experts resentfully emphasized that Tunisia has received in 2014 15 euros per inhabitant from ENP funds compared to 25 euros for Moldova.

Fragmentation, destabilization, multipolarization, re-securitization and the awakening of civil society

The optimistic vision at the launching of the ENP of a "ring of friends" by the then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, who promised "everything but institutions" to the countries bordering the EU, has given place to a much more sober and complex reality. Likewise, hopes that have been raised in the course of the "Arab Spring" at the beginning of 2011 remained unfulfilled even as some countries, in particular Tunisia, experienced a flourishing of civil society and democratic reforms.

In fact, the Southern Mediterranean, including the Maghreb, is today much more unstable and fragmented than a few years ago, encompassing countries in democratic transition, authoritarian regimes and failing

states such as Libya. In fact, Libya remains a source of instability and a breeding ground for terrorism, threatening the Maghreb in general and Tunisia in particular. Against this background, the "security paradigm" has now re-gained dominance in the region after turbulent years of social unrest, the weakening of public order and the spread of Islamist terrorism.

Beyond the on-going domestic re-configuration of several Southern Mediterranean countries, the broader geopolitical context has also changed, with a multiplication of actors in the region. The diverse spectrum extends from emerging non-state actors such as terrorist groups to newly interested states. As Europe remains by far the most important partner in particular for the Maghreb countries, others are gaining ground. The European economic crisis has weakened the financial leeway of the EU and tainted its image as a model to be followed. Turkey, the Gulf States, Russia or China could not only serve as political, economic and financial partners for the Southern Mediterranean countries, but also provide references for alternative models of development. The European Union thus finds itself in an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment.

Finally, while the "Arab Spring" protests of 2011 did not lead, for now, to a sustainable democratization of the region, civil society and social movements in many countries are now more aware of their own force of mobilization. As this concerns mainly domestic issues, it may also have implications on the respective country's foreign policy orientation. Against this background, we advocate six recommendations to take into account for reviewing the ENP and the future EU Mediterranean policy.

1. Show respect!

If the EU wants to remain (or better: to become) a trustful actor in the Maghreb, it has to change its mind-set and discourse both on the political and operational level. Instead of conceiving the region south of the Mediterranean as "the other", as a mere source of terror and fear, the European Union should emphasize that it shares common concerns and that both shores of the Mediterranean have to work together to realize their respective interests. Acknowledging interdependence is the precondition for cooperation. Such a discursive shift must also materialize on the operational level. In particular the Brussels-dominated ENP procedures are seen in the Maghreb as lacking respect and trust for the countries of the South. As far as possible, both governmental and societal actors of the partner countries should be consulted – and their views taken into account – before conceiving Euro-Mediterranean projects.

2. Simplify institutions!

The proliferation of the Euro-Mediterranean institutions since the 1990s has led to a loss in transparency and increased partner countries' confusion about European "actorness". Not at least due to the increasingly heterogeneous character of the region, the parallelism of specific bilateral tracks and a multilateral track cannot be brushed away. However, these policies could be unified (and re-branded) under an overall framework. Within such a framework, concrete multilateral arrangements should be pushed forward by means of "variable geometry" (i.e. with case-specific sub-groups of partners) as it was initially foreseen by the Union for the Mediterranean. Furthermore, EU member states' policies must be better coordinated and should be integrated into such an overall approach. For this purpose, the European External Action Service and its Delegations on the ground must better assume their role as focal points.

3. Include civil society!

"Co-ownership" and better taking into account the concerns of Southern partner states remains a delicate task when it comes to regimes lacking democratic legitimacy and accountability towards their citizens. While the EU cannot – and should not – completely circumvent governments, it should consequently pursue a "bottom-up approach", focusing on the inclusion of civil society as far as possible. The EU can still step-up capacity building projects of civil society organizations in its widest sense and thus outreach to young entrepreneurs, for instance, or other less known reform-oriented actors. Second, budget support should be, as far as possible, conditioned on civil society participation, financial transparency and accountability.¹ Third, the rapprochement of Maghreb and European citizens should be reinforced through the extension of exchange and dialogue as well as cultural programmes.

4. Increase incentives!

The ENP has been conceived with the same logic as the Enlargement policy. However, the Enlargement policy has been built on two assumptions that do not exist in the Southern Mediterranean: Inherently cooperation-oriented partner countries and the EU's disposal of the big "carrot" which is EU membership. In the Maghreb, if the EU wants to encourage cooperation and reform through incentives, it must step up its offer. The three "Ms" (money, market, mobility) put forward by the EU in 2011 constitute, in principle, a convenient toolbox. However, it

¹ This is particularly important as a crucial share of ENP funding is still delivered as budget support directly to governments. For instance, half of the 1 billion euros of EU funds to Egypt during the 2007-2013 period was channeled through the Egyptian treasury despite the "lack of budgetary transparency, an ineffective audit function and endemic corruption", as deplored by the European Court of Auditors (cf. its Special Report 4/2013, "EU Cooperation with Egypt in the Field of Governance").

has to translate into concrete policy action, especially when it comes to a fair dismantling of trade barriers for agricultural goods (such as for Tunisian olive oil) and for visa facilitation. Much can be gained, including in confidence and credibility, without high costs if mobility is increased for specific groups (such as students or specifically qualified workers) and for the purpose of circular migration. In addition to the three "Ms", the EU can award reform and cooperation by upscaling political relations, as it is already the case with the notion of "advanced status" of Morocco or the privileged partnership with Tunisia. These concepts, however, could be better materialize and made more visible to the public through high level meetings with regular consultations.

5. Fight terrorism together!

Beyond mobility and a better balanced opening of the markets, security and the fight against terrorism is a promising field for intensified cooperation as it perfectly illustrates the shared interests of Europe and the Maghreb. Cooperation should include both the normative and the operational level, targeting all dimensions of fighting Islamist terrorism, from the causes of radicalization to countering fundamentalist propaganda to training and equipment of security forces. In doing so, the European Union should pay attention that increased security support comes along with the respect of civil liberties. More generally, pushing for and accompanying security sector reforms in partner countries should become a priority in the EU's Mediterranean policy. Beyond cooperation in operational and technical terms and the exchange of expertise and experience, the EU should take security cooperation to a political level, installing a permanent security dialogue with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean.

6. Encourage South-South cooperation!

The Southern Mediterranean and in particular the Maghreb is particularly suffering from the lack of regional cooperation and

political or economic integration. The EU should point out the responsibility of the countries themselves, whilst also doing more on its own to actively encourage South-South cooperation or integration. First, a too strong emphasis on bilateralism as exerted via the ENP should be avoided or at least be accompanied by multilateral arrangements. Second, priority funding should be given to projects which include two or more Southern partner countries. In particular cross-border projects, such as free trade zones or transport routes in border areas merit more support. In doing so, the European Union should focus on sub-regions such as the Maghreb instead of nurturing unrealistic ambitions of integrating the Euro-Mediterranean area as a whole. Finally, the EU must better engage in conflict prevention and resolution (for instance in the Western Sahara or in Libya) which is a precondition for intensified South-South cooperation.

The situation for the European Union at its Southern border appears today much more difficult than when the ENP was launched more than a decade ago. In fact, the ongoing protracted and painful reconfiguration of the Southern Mediterranean and the whole Middle East constitutes an enormous challenge the European Union cannot neglect. It also provides a chance for Europeans to demonstrate that they are able to defend their interests and values in a spirit of cooperation and partnership and that they are determined to assume their responsibility in international politics.

*** About KAS FOCUS TUNISIA**

The "KAS FOCUS TUNISIA" reports synthesize workshops or conferences of the KAS Tunis Office and its partners to bring their findings and recommendations to the attention of political decision makers and a broader public.

The present paper is based on a workshop that KAS has organized on June 5 and 6, 2015 in Hammamet ("Vers une nouvelle Politique européenne de voisinage – la perspective maghrébine"). More information on the workshop, including the list of participants, is available on www.kas.de/tunisie.

While drawing on the various expert contributions and the discussions during the workshop, the results presented in this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinion of each individual participant or of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.