Is the EU's New European Neighbourhood Policy Fit to Address Security Challenges in the Southern Neighbourhood?

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On 25 May 2011, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commission Vice-President, Baroness Catherine Ashton, and the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, presented a new communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Boldly entitled 'A new response to a changing neighbourhood', the document is the outcome of a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) begun in summer 2010 in response to the changes of the Union's new foreign affairs set-up under the Lisbon Treaty. It proclaims the need for a new approach to build and consolidate healthy democracies, pursue sustainable economic growth and manage cross-border links and specifically mentions 'stronger political cooperation on … security [and] conflict resolution matters'.

Comprising the countries on the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt; and the Palestinian Territories, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—the Southern Neighbourhood faces no shortage of security and conflict-related challenges. In order to assess how well the revamped ENP is likely to perform in addressing them, these challenges first need to be identified. They fall into two broad categories, the first of them being issues related to instability and insecurity IN the Southern Neighbourhood itself:

- Latent/unresolved conflicts between states, primarily evolving around borders in the Middle East between Israel and Syria and Lebanon
- Communal/sectarian/secessionist civil wars, primarily the (currently suspended) power struggles in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, as well as the self-determination struggle in Morocco/Western Sahara
- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict which combines elements of inter-state and intra-state conflicts linked to the broader regional setting of the Arab-Israeli conflict
- The so-called 'Arab Spring', i.e., the popular uprisings against a widely perceived lack of economic opportunity, freedom and dignity in a number of the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa—with their largely unpredictable outcomes and consequences

All of these conflicts pose a serious humanitarian challenge (and have in many instances done so for years if not decades), but they also constitute a security challenge to the EU (and more broadly) in that they are an essential part of an environment that is conducive to the proliferation of cross-border security threats. In this second category of security challenges, the issues are of more immediate and direct impact on the EU itself:

- Illegal (trans-) migration to EU member states
- Transnational organised crime, especially related to smuggling of goods and trafficking in humans, arms, and drugs
- International terrorism
- Supply and transit dimensions of European energy security

The new ENP mission statement recognises that addressing these threats is a shared interest with the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood, and at least implicitly, also makes a connection between the two categories in seeing problems IN the Neighbourhood among the causes of security threats BEYOND its geographical boundaries. More to the point organised crime, international terrorism, etc., are, to some extent, symptoms of underlying problems in the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

Looking back over more than half a decade of ENP, the track record of the policy to achieve its strategic goals of strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of the EU and its neighbours is less than stellar. Among all the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood, only two—Morocco and Jordan—have fully implemented, and moved beyond, their original action plans. In recognition of this, the EU granted them 'advanced status' in 2008 and 2010, respectively. Yet, one might question, for example, how much Morocco really has advanced since the inauguration of the ENP in 2003: the conflict in the Western Sahara—after all, one of the security

challenges in the Southern Neighbourhood constantly referred to in EU documents—is nowhere nearer a resolution than it was eight years ago.

Is this likely to change now? The 'new response to a changing neighbourhood' signifies a certain degree of continuity in its commitment to democracy, economic development, sub-regional cooperation and regional differentiation that has characterised the ENP since 2003. What is if not new, so at least far more explicit, is a greater emphasis on conditionality and political and security cooperation. Thus, the EU seeks to 'enhance [its] involvement in solving protracted conflicts'. However, rather than outlining concrete steps that go beyond the implementation of ENP (and CFSP) to date, the emphasis is on continuing what already happens (and has arguably not been very effective): membership in the Middle East Quartet, opposition to violent border changes, using operational presence through existing missions to back reform efforts, and employing instruments that promote economic integration and sectoral reform to support confidence-building measures and conflict resolution objectives. The only, partially innovative new initiative is an emphasis of the EU's preparedness to develop post-conflict reconstruction scenarios as incentives for conflict settlement.

While the EU recognises that 'more continuous and more intimate political dialogue' is necessary to 'tackle the sources of instability and conflict' in the Southern Neighbourhood, the section in the new ENP strategy on 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean' (originally launched by Ashton and Commission President Barroso on 8 March 2011 in response to the 'Arab Spring') is rather silent on political and security cooperation in this respect, as is the 'Dialogue for migration, mobility and security with the southern Mediterranean Countries' (released on 24 May 2011). It thus remains unclear how the EU will translate is aspirations for more security and stability into the fast-changing reality of the Southern Neighbourhood. How can we explain this?

There are a number of problems that have beset the ENP from the very start:
- Member states still find it hard to speak with a common voice on foreign and security policy matters, they are often divided among themselves, and rifts also frequently emerge between member states and the EU institutions, and among EU institutions. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and more recently on Libya provides ample illustration for that.
- The EU's (and its member states') internal security agenda often dominates, thus privileging the treatment of symptoms (organised crime, terrorism, illegal migration) over a more comprehensive approach to their causes.
- EU capacity to develop and implement an effective security and conflict resolution policy remains underdeveloped, especially as far as human resources are concerned—in the institutions in Brussels and in the delegations on the ground.

More fundamentally perhaps, however, the EU seems to have 'bought' too much of its own narrative about the all-persuasive power and cure of democracy and economic development as sufficiently effective substitutes for a more strategic and powerful security and conflict resolution policy. To the credit of the Union, the stronger emphasis on conditionality indicates that democracy and economic development will not always be readily embraced by everyone in the neighbourhood. The jury is still out on whether tougher conditionality can deliver the reforms that the EU, correctly, believes to be necessary to tackle not only the symptoms but also the root causes of conflict and instability. It may not work in every case, but even it works in only a few countries in the Southern Neighbourhood, this would be much needed, significant and welcome progress.