



106

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SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS SOUTH AND EAST: Sometimes better is more

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Twenty years after the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe shook the European continent and ended the Cold War, the popular uprisings against the autocratic regimes in the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East are changing the world again and opening an opportunity for the establishment of democratic regimes in the area. Only a few weeks ago, experts of the region and politicians alike would have considered this perspective unthinkable.

A **non-paper**, endorsed by France, Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Slovenia, was discussed at the meeting of EU Foreign Affairs ministers on 21 February. The document suggests a substantial revamping of the Union's neighbourhood policy, in the light of the recent popular uprisings and consequent regime changes in Northern Africa. Along with some welcome initiatives, the paper contains a controversial suggestion that has had both the Brussels corridors and the EU's Eastern capitals buzzing.

Departing from the single policy framework for both Eastern and Southern neighbours, prevailing since the creation of the policy after the 2004 enlargement, the Six call for a stronger differentiation as regards how the EU treats its partners. Claiming that there is a disparity in the funding of the Union's Eastern and the Southern neighbourhood policies to the detriment of the latter, the paper calls for the aid to be shifted from the East to the South.

Before analysing the dry numbers behind this proposal, it should be noted that despite the rhetoric of the single policy framework, the EU's attitudes towards the Eastern and Southern neighbours have always been clearly distinct, both in terms of policy focus and financial commitments. When looking eastward, the EU policy has generally been geared at achieving democratic transformation and institutional reforms, albeit with varying levels of exigency and success. In contrast, the EU approach towards the South has largely ignored such concerns, and has focused on the issues of security, stability and managing migratory flows towards the EU. This double approach has led to competition for funding from the two regions of the neighbourhood, to clientelism by EU member states according to cultural and geographical proximity, and to many confrontations over the years.

The figures presented at the official website of the Commission, however, do not support the claims made by the Six. The largest bulk of the European Neighbourhood Policy instrument goes to individual countries, and the funding for this for 2011-2013 divides as follows:

Country/territory	Population	ENPI 2011-2013 (indicative allocation)	% of Total	ENPI funding per person (indicative allocation)
ENPI South				
Algeria	33.769.669	172.000.000	4,7%	5,09 €
Egypt	81.713.517	449.290.000	12,3%	5,50 €
Israel	7.112.359	6.000.000	0,2%	0,84 €
Jordan	6.198.677	223.000.000	6,1%	35,98 €
Lebanon	3.971.941	150.000.000	4,1%	37,76 €
Morocco	34.343.210	580.500.000	15,9%	16,90 €
Occupied Palestinian Territory	4.008.332	352.800.000	9,7%	88,02 €
Syria	19.747.586	129.000.000	3,5%	6,53 €
Tunisia	10.383.770	240.000.000	6,6%	23,11 €
Total	201.249.061	2.302.590.000	63,2%	11,44 €
ENP East				
Armenia	2.968.586	157.300.000	4,3%	52,99 €
Azerbaijan	8.177.717	122.500.000	3,4%	14,98 €
Belarus (1)	9.685.768	16.070.000	0,4%	1,66 €
Georgia	4.630.841	180.290.000	5,0%	38,93 €
Moldova	4.324.450	273.140.000	7,5%	63,16 €
Russia	140.702.094	120.000.000	3,3%	0,85 €
Ukraine	45.994.287	470.050.000	12,9%	10,22 €
Total	216.483.743	1.339.350.000	36,8%	6,19 €
TOTAL (South+East)		3.641.940.000	100,0%	
<small>(1) For the year 2011</small>				

A closer look at the table, when removing from the equation the obvious cases apart, i.e. the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel and Russia, shows an overall balance of financing per capita between the East and the South. All in all, it may be argued that, while there is no direct correlation between the number of inhabitants and the aid received, the biggest share of the funding seems to also go to the largest countries. The willingness to engage seems to form a part of the calculation. Consequently, Morocco receives the largest proportion of the envelope (580.500.000€), with Ukraine (470.050.000€) and Egypt (449.290.000€) ranking second and third.

It is clear that the EU's external policies are in general severely underfunded, in particular in comparison to, for example, the enlargement policy or agricultural policy. However, no doubt that the above-mentioned sums present substantial amounts of financing for previously autocratic and inherently corrupt regimes (and not only in the South), particularly considering that ENPI assistance is tailored to the priorities of the partner government. Further, the spread use of budget support by the EU, a form of financial assistance where aid money is poured directly into a target country's national budget, is particularly vulnerable to corruption.

Thus, an immediate question arises -particularly in an economic crisis environment- where should the additional funds to support democratic transformation in Egypt and Tunis come from? If, as the letter of the Six implies, they would be taken from the Eastern neighbours, then the ENP will lose what there is left of its coherence with regards to the proclaimed objectives.

There is a widespread understanding that, on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, the EU has tried to solve their problems by throwing money at them for too long now, all the while closing its eyes to the wrongdoings of their regimes. Meanwhile the Eastern neighbourhood, as senior researcher Nicu Popescu rightly pointed out recently, “seems to look increasingly like the south a few years ago – a collection of states with increasingly close economic relations with Europe, but with centralised, non-competitive politics, which routinely afford to ignore the EU on many political and security questions.” Thus, it would be advisable to carry out a close scrutiny regarding the past use of funds as well as their ongoing application, and necessary efforts should be made with a view to recovering the funds. Otherwise, Stefani Weiss, Director of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and Franziska Brantner (MEP, Greens) will turn out to be right when saying that the “Union can set up ever more sophisticated programmes and donate even more money, but this will only buy us a clear conscience (and / ... / it will fill the coffers of the ruling elite)”.

While the pundits have lamented the “absence of Europe”, and particularly that of the EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs in the enrolling events, the EU member states - still hesitating, however, whether to apply sanctions against Libya’s bloodthirsty dictator - have started to think about how to reshape the EU’s policy towards its changing neighbourhood. Let’s hope the necessary degree of self-criticism will guide this awakening. There is no doubt that strong EU support to democratic transitions in Egypt and Tunisia at this critical time is crucial. To be effective, however, it should also be built on the lessons learned by the EU regarding its own policy both towards its Eastern and Southern neighbours, and not at the expense of either the ones or the others. The key question is - should “strong” mean more or better?

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