Strengthening the European neighbourhood policy

2007/2088(INI) - 22/10/2007

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the joint initiative report draft by Charles **TANNOCK** (EPP-ED, UK) and Raimon **OBIOLS i GERMA** (PES, ES) in response to the Commission's communication on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The report fully supports the principal objectives of the ENP, which is aimed at consolidating a ring of prosperity, stability and security, to develop close ties with and between neighbouring states and to commit them to pursue reforms towards democracy based on respect for human rights, the rule of law, better governance and economic and social development. MEPs underline the need for special attention to be paid to the promotion of equal rights, in particular the improvement of women's rights, but also as regards minorities and the ability of the neighbouring countries to overcome ethnic, religious or social conflicts by peaceful means.

Geographical coverage of the ENP: MEPs expressed doubt about the meaningfulness of the ENP's geographic scope, as it involves countries which geographically are European together with Mediterranean non-European countries. They note, however, that it does not currently seem realistic to fundamentally change this overarching policy framework and therefore stress the need for a greater effort to define the multilateral objectives and instruments of this policy so as to enable the EU and its neighbouring states to face shared challenges, and at the same time to respect the different conditions and specific characteristics of the regions and countries involved.

Moreover, the report notes that the conditionality enshrined in the ENP approach draws on the positive experience of enlargement. It can constitute an appropriate incentive for acceleration of reform processes in the ENP countries towards their convergence with the EU if conceived positively and differentiated according to the specific needs and capacities of the country concerned. The committee underlines that **respect for universal human rights** and fundamental freedoms is the core principle of EU policy and that, regardless of the degree of willingness of partner countries' governments to cooperate and to share in these values, civil society in all ENP countries must be strongly supported and its participation and core role in the reform and democratisation process encouraged. The committee therefore urges that **partnership fora should be held on a periodic basis**. Actions aiming to intensify people-to-people contacts are strongly supported by the MEPs, such as city and region-twinning programmes, exchange programmes (Erasmus Mundus).

Strengthening coherence: Member States are urged to align their own policies in ENP countries as much as possible with the priorities set out in the ENP's Country Strategy Papers in order to guarantee policy compatibility, coherence and complementarity. The fact that Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia have aligned themselves with most of the EU's CFSP declarations and positions has been welcomed.

On trade issues, the committee welcomes the longer-term aim of establishing a neighbourhood-wide free trade area. It supports the negotiation of bilateral deep free trade agreements between the EU and the respective ENP countries, which should, in line with the implementation of regulatory reforms, go beyond tariffs and encompass services and the protection of investments.

Further multilateral cooperation: cooperation should go beyond existing regional cooperation. Relations should be built in areas such as the environment, energy security, culture, transport and border and migration management. MEPs support the negotiation of legally binding sectoral agreements which facilitate the integration of common policies. They stress in particular the need to leverage investments in extending the trans-European energy and transport networks to the ENP countries. In the area of justice

and home affairs, MEPs stress the need for further cooperation as regards visa facilitation and readmission agreements. Improvements are needed as regards the management of migration flows, combating illegal migration and ensuring that international human rights obligations are respected. It calls on the Member States, the EU and all ENP countries to intensify their cooperation in the fight against trans-national organised crime, terrorism, trafficking in human beings and drug trafficking. The report stresses the need to ensure that the implementation of readmission agreements fully respects the principle of non-refoulement, and to ensure access to a fair asylum procedure. It urges the Commission to organise effective monitoring of the treatment of persons returned under readmission agreements concluded with ENP countries, in particular with regard to possible 'chain refoulement'.

The report also advocates better dialogue and coordination and more joint actions between the EU and the USA in advancing common goals such as the promotion of democracy, the enhancement of energy security and the strengthening of regional security in the EU's neighbourhood.

Financing: MEPs stress the need for appropriate levels of funding and close coordination with other financial institutions in order to make the neighbourhood policy successful. They believe that advantage should be taken of the review of the 2007-2013 financial perspective planned for 2008-2009 to increase the budget of the ENPI. They call on the Commission to coordinate its financial resources and policy analysis capabilities with those of the international financial institutions (EIB, EBRD, World Bank), so as to generate synergies in conditioning and stimulating reforms along the lines of the ENP action plans. The motivating concept of the Governance Facility to provide additional financial support to best-performing countries is welcomed. This should reward real progress made in terms of objectives related to human rights and democratic governance, be based on transparent allocation criteria, and be used to further support the reform process.

Eastern European Neighbourhood: the report notes that that democratic neighbours which are clearly identifiable as European countries and which respect the rule of law may in principle apply, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, for membership of the EU if they meet the Copenhagen criteria. It reiterates that the current negotiations with Ukraine should result in the conclusion of an association agreement before envisaging its accession. A corresponding approach should be taken in relation to Moldova.

As regards **Belarus**, on the other hand, the committee condemns the continued executions carried out in there, the only country in Europe still imposing the death penalty. It underlines that the EU should urgently provide more effective support for civil society, free media and political parties committed to democracy and that it should immediately apply a moratorium on the death penalty. The report considers that Belarus has the same European vocation and perspectives as Ukraine and Moldova, once it embraces democracy, respects fundamental human rights and freedoms and enhances the rule of law.

The committee is convinced that a motivating framework with medium-term implementation targets should be established, based on a new generation of association agreements to be negotiated with ENP countries which respect fundamental European values, are willing to integrate more closely with the EU and demonstrate objective performance in terms of ENP action plan implementation. These agreements should envisage the development of the bilateral relationship with the EU in progressive stages. It reiterates its earlier proposal to develop with those countries clearly identifiable as European the deep free trade agreements in the context of a possible **'European Economic Area Plus'**.

As regards the **south Caucasus**, MEPs commend the conclusion of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Ukraine, as well as the initiation of such a process with Moldova. They stress the importance of having adequate guarantees of access to a fair asylum procedure for those in need of international protection, in particular when applying 'accelerated readmission procedures' to persons intercepted in border regions, as provided for in the readmission agreement with Ukraine and the proposal for a readmission agreement with Moldova. They believe that the gradual integration of the EU’s eastern

neighbours into the European Energy Community should be pursued, and urge that reforms of energy sectors be implemented as a matter of priority. The report underlines the need for a stronger involvement on the part of the EU in the resolution of so-called **frozen conflicts**, inter alia through confidence-building programmes, conflict management and projects on education, culture and civil society building in breakaway territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

The committee calls on **Turkey** to establish normal diplomatic relations and to re-open its land border with its neighbour Armenia as part of the confidence-building measures necessary for lasting peace and economic integration in the region. It underlines the importance of elaborating a more sophisticated policy for the Black Sea area, complementing the ENP, and emphasises the importance of having Turkey and **Russia** as partners in the development of a viable strategy for that region. The committee considers it important to enhance the parliamentary dimension of the political partnership between the European Parliament and the countries involved in the eastern part of the ENP. It suggests, therefore, the setting-up of an **EU-Neighbourhood-East Parliamentary Assembly** (EURO-NEST), following the example of the multilateral parliamentary assemblies already established with the participation of the European Parliament, and involving the Parliaments of Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, as well as pro-democracy observers from Belarus. This assembly would usefully contribute to the implementation of the strengthened ENP and would bring added value to the work of bilateral interparliamentary delegations.

Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood: emphasising the strong and long-lasting links between the EU and the southern Mediterranean countries, MEPs call on the Commission to further explore the various options for the next generation of broad-scope agreements with the Southern ENP countries including provision for arrangements to implement the human rights clause as well as the creation of a free trade area. They regret that, although, since the beginning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, substantial progress has been achieved as regards democracy and human rights, this progress has not been sufficient .They urge the Commission to continue working with governments, regional and local authorities and civil society actors in these countries. They call on the Member States to reflect on possible ways of achieving deeper cooperation, including by means of increased flexibility in opening agricultural and labour markets in the future, in ways compatible with social protection and equity. The Southern ENP countries are urged to increase their efforts to open economic systems to a greater extent and to harmonise their economic regulation with the relevant parts of the EU acquis.

The report acknowledges the different circumstances, interests and priorities of each of the southern countries, which are taken into account in the negotiation and implementation of action plans. It stresses the utmost importance of an increase in regional cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) framework and underlines that **the ENP in no way replaces or competes with the EMP**, but that the two policies are complementary, making it possible to combine the multilateral approach of the Barcelona Process with the bilateral perspective.

The role of the European Parliament: the report reiterates its commitment to continue to scrutinise the implementation of the ENP, in particular by making use of its powers, including, as a last resort, its budgetary powers, and by continuing the dialogue with the Commission concerning the application of the ENPI and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The committee intends to examine regularly the ENP progress reports and undertakes to make more effective use of its delegations to interparliamentary bodies. It stresses, in this respect, the importance of the nongovernmental dimension, namely the Euro-Mediterranean civil society platform, in strengthening the political dynamic in the southern partner countries.