Review of the European neighbourhood policy

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Marek SIWIEC (S&D, PL) and Mário DAVID (PPE, PT) on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Members began by recalling that it is in the highest interest of the EU to be ambitious in economic cooperation and adopt a mutually beneficial, responsible and flexible strategy based on support for democratic transitions and defence of human rights, towards its southern neighbourhood. In this new context, relations with these countries should be given fresh impetus, based on cooperation focusing on democracy and prosperity on both shores of the Mediterranean, and not only security and migration control. Accordingly, Members welcome the Joint Communications of the Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on 'A new response to a changing Neighbourhood' and 'A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean' and the approach presented therein.

Acknowledging the European aspirations and the European choice of some partners, the committee insists that tangible and credible incentives should be given to the neighbourhood countries to engage in the common goal of building deep democracy, and that differentiation based on each country's political, economic and social realities, performance and achievements should be predicated on clearly defined criteria and assessable and regularly monitored benchmarks for each individual partner country. Recalling the objectives of development cooperation, it asks the Commission and the EEAS to work towards eradicating poverty. At the same time, it looks for a strengthened network of institutional arrangements, which is stable, economical and dedicated to developing closer economic integration and political association among all those involved.

The report raises several points with regard to the revision of the ENP:

(1) Deep democracy and partnership with societies: Members advocate measures to strengthen the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, the market economy and good governance. These include:

- strengthening civil society (which will benefit, between 2011 and 2013 from a budget of EUR 22 millions with the Facility being more substantially funded in the next Multiannual Financial Framework;

- the proposal for a European Endowment for Democracy (EED), which should complement already existing EU instruments and should involve a right of scrutiny and the involvement of the European Parliament in its governance structure;

- a 'more for more' performance-based approach;

- human rights dialogues conducted with all partner countries, including strengthening freedom of expression and media independence and pluralism, and access to the Internet;

- an annual assessment of the situation as well as the outcomes of the dialogues should be included in the annex to the annual progress report of each partner country with a clear mechanism to reconsider and progressively limit bilateral cooperation if human rights violations are confirmed;

- strengthening women's participation and that of young people and respecting the rights of the child';

- full and effective respect for the freedom of religion (at individual, collective, public, private and institutional level) should be identified as a priority, as well as the development of democratically oriented political parties with women in positions of responsibility;

- enhancing the visibility of the EaP and UfM projects in the partner countries.

At the same time, Members insist that the international community freeze its financial assistance to the Belarusian regime until all detained and arrested opposition leaders, journalists, presidential candidates and their supporters are released and cleared of charges and rehabilitated. They urge the European Union to reorient towards society and increase its assistance to Belarus in order to address the needs of the population.

(2) Sustainable economic and social development: generally, Members call on the EU to encourage structural reforms in the economic, social and legal arenas as part of its support for democratic transitions noting emphatically the close interweaving of democratic and socio-economic development.

They call for immediate measures, to alleviate the situation of the countries currently facing significant socioeconomic crises, with special regard to partner countries where democratic transition aggravates economic difficulties, if all parties involved commit themselves to verifiable compliance in each specific case with the social, environmental and labour standards applicable internationally and in the EU.

Others measures recommended are as follows:

- the promotion of sub-regional cooperation and cross-border projects (particularly the development of South-South' and 'East-East' trade and economic integration among the countries concerned;

- the strengthening of administrative capacity building in employment and social affairs ensuring that the minimum wage according to national practices provides an adequate standard of living for workers and their families

- embracing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) as the guiding policy framework for medium-term pro-poor economic growth.

(3) Association agreements: Members underline the opportunity that negotiations on Association Agreements provide to boost reforms. They should therefore include concrete conditions, timetables and performance benchmarks, which should be regularly monitored. As well as real and tangible incentives for the partners. They invite ENP partner countries to move forward on creating the conditions that will allow the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) ensuring that international conventions on labour laws and child labour are monitored.

The committee notes that a European perspective, and the membership aspirations of Eastern Partnership countries pursuant to article 49 of the TEU, constitutes a driving force for reforms in these countries and further strengthens their commitment to shared values and principles such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and good governance.

It believes that the conclusion of Association Agreements can be an important step towards further political engagement and a stronger relationship with Europe.

It reaffirms that, for the Southern partnership, the aim is to bring the two shores of the Mediterranean closer together with a view to establishing an area of peace, democracy, security and prosperity for their 800 million inhabitants. Members would like to see DCFTAs as the first step towards a big 'Euro-Mediterranean Economic Space', and they call on the Commission and the Council to facilitate the implementation of the six packages of measures outlined in the Commission document of 30 March 2011 concerning the monitoring of trade and investment initiatives for the benefit of partners on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean.

(4) Sectoral cooperation: Members recommend further cooperation in sectors such as industry, SMEs, research, development and innovation, ICT including security of IT systems, space, and tourism and stress the benefits of joint research programming initiatives by the EU and its neighbours. They welcome the **reinforcement of the energy cooperation dimension of the ENP**. They consider it necessary to step up energy efficiency and the promotion of renewable energy, to strengthen energy supply and nuclear safety measures, particularly in regions that are prone to high seismic activity. The committee welcomes the proposal for the creation of a European Energy Community and believes that it could be an important step towards cooperation with our neighbours. It emphasises the strategic significance of the Nabucco project and of its swift implementation, as well as of liquefied natural gas (LNG) transportation under the AGRI project.

The report draws attention, furthermore, to the supporting role which the EU could play in tackling environmental problems in neighbouring countries, particularly in eliminating large stocks of 'obsolete pesticides', which can cause large-scale chemical pollution. Further cooperation in the transport sector, international, regional and interregional cultural cooperation, education and sport is also considered to be essential. Members call on the Commission to take over Parliament's proposal, produced in the wake of the Arab Spring, to establish a **Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus programme**, an initiative which – assuming that it were successful – would be suitable to extend to the neighbourhood as a whole. In addition, the Commission should take over take over Parliament's proposal to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Leonardo da Vinci programme. They reaffirm the great support for the EU-funded project of **ENP scholarships** to the university graduates from the ENP and the EU at the College of Europe.

(5) Migration policy: overall, Members recall that the EU should improve the management and maximise the mutual benefits of migration for development, inter alia by providing better conditions for the establishment of legal migrants in the EU and dealing with the root causes of irregular migration in the partner countries. The Union needs to favour legal labour migration by **concluding mobility partnerships** , which take account of the demographic, sociological and occupational balance on both sides, and encouraging exchanges of specialists between the EU and third countries. The EU should advance its work on visa facilitation and readmission agreements on a parallel basis in the utmost transparency with a view to moving – gradually and on a case-by-case basis, once all conditions are met – to a visa-free regime.

Reaffirming the principle of 'non-refoulement'as part of European asylum policy, Members insist that the Union shall facilitate access to EU funding for projects to inform migrants about their rights and responsibilities, including unaccompanied minors, women and other vulnerable groups and make every effort to facilitate the development of an accessible, fair and protective EU asylum system.

(6) Regional dimension: Members reiterate their firmly held view that the European Neighbourhood Policy will not be wholly effective unless synergy is created between its bilateral and multilateral dimensions. The multilateral dimension of the EaP should be further strengthened and developed, including the Civil Society Forum; notes the importance of establishing a constructive dialogue with Turkey and Russia on regional issues of common interest and particularly as far as security issues are concerned.

Members consider that the territorial cooperation principles apply also to external borders and are a key tool to improve EU economic development as well as the EU's overall ENP political goals. They consider that the **new ENP approach must allow the EU's macro-regional strategies** and that the potential of the EU macro-regions which include EU neighbouring countries should be fully used for better coordination of priorities and projects of common interest to the EU and the ENP countries in order to achieve mutually positive results and to optimise invested resources.

Members insist on the following issues:

- to boost Euroregions' within the European Neighbourhood Policy;
- the high potential of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) involving regions beyond the external borders;
- take into account the role of the outermost regions in the EU external relations policy;
- the importance of further fostering regional cooperation in the Black Sea space and developing further the EU Black Sea Strategy.

Members stress the importance of the Union for the Mediterranean as a permanent forum for dialogue and cooperation and an instrument for the promotion of democracy. The UfM should promote sound economic, social and democratic development and create a strong and common basis for a close regional cooperation between the EU and its Southern neighbours. Members welcome the increase in the overall budget of the Neighbourhood Investment Facility. They call on the Commission and the EEAS to explore opportunities for an institutional interlink between the ENP and the neighbourhood policies of key regional players, above all Turkey.

(7) Conflict resolution: the report recalls that peaceful resolution of regional military conflicts, including so called frozen ones, is the essential precondition for democracy consolidation, respect for human rights, prosperity and economic growth, and thus should be of the highest interest to the EU. The EU should get more involved and play a more active, coherent and constructive role in the resolution of regional conflicts, inter alia via the EEAS, by developing more confidence-building measures, reconciliation and mediation. Political cooperation should be intensified for the purposes of security and combating terrorism and individual forms of extremism.

Members believe that intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is crucial to enhancing mutual understanding, respect, solidarity and tolerance with and among the neighbourhood partner countries. They insist on the need to keep a regional approach and welcomes the decision both to appoint an EUSR for the South Caucasus and for the Southern Mediterranean Region and to establish a task force for the Southern Mediterranean. A similar task force for the South Caucasus should be considered and a proactive role of the EU in the Transnistria talks.

(8) Parliamentary dimension: Members reaffirm that the multilateral parliamentary assemblies, such as EURONEST and the PA-UfM, are crucial vectors of confidence- and coherence-building between the EU and the partner countries and among the partner countries themselves, and therefore greatly contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean. They call on the EEAS and the Commission to associate EURONEST members to the maximum extent possible with the multilateral structures and platforms of the EaP and insist on the need to recognise the PA-UfM as a legitimate parliamentary institution of the UfM. The report calls on the EC to provide enhanced financial, technical and expert support to the EaP countries' national parliaments' administrations within the Comprehensive Institution Building programme in order to strengthen their efficiency, transparency and accountability, which is crucial if the parliaments are to play their proper role in the democratic decision making processes. It confirms its openness to welcome representatives of the Belarusian Parliament in EURONEST as soon as parliamentary elections in Belarus are considered democratic by the international community, including the OSCE.

Funding: Members welcome the proposal for the new European Neighbourhood Instrument and the increase of funding for the ENP, as requested in its previous resolutions. The distribution of funds should be flexible and adequate for both regions while keeping the regional balance. They considers that maintaining a reasonable balance between East and South components is important, especially since Eastern neighbouring countries are in the process of implementing Eastern Partnership related programmes and reforms and have an EU perspective. Members **demand a sizeable increase in the Heading 4 ceiling of the EU budget for the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument**, given that over the last years despite some progress in promoting enhanced cooperation and progressive economic integration between the European Union and the partner countries, more needs to be done as new challenges and areas for cooperation emerge.

Moreover, Members underline that the reallocation of appropriations needed for the increased funding for the ENP should be based on clear priorities and **should therefore not be to the detriment of the Union's only crisis response and peace-building tool**, the Instrument for Stability, as proposed by the Commission. They emphasise that the funding of the ENP should not be affected by the current sovereign debt crisis.

Other measures are suggested such as:

- Integration Facility to support civil society in the European Neighbourhood,
- the allocation of resources on a limited number of clearly defined priorities and measurable objectives,
- the provision of budget support if and only if there are guarantees of sound financial management in the countries concerned,
- mobilisation by the ENP countries themselves, their own domestic resources, in order to establish transparent systems of taxation, involve the private sector, local governments and civil society effectively in the ENP agenda and aim for their greater ownership of ENP projects.

In parallel, Members call, in the light of the Arab Spring as well as the retreat from democracy in some of the Eastern partnership countries, for a specific self-critical evaluation of the financial instruments used in the past within the ENPI, with regard to their functioning in the fields of democracy, human rights, governance, fighting corruption, institution-building and support to civil society. They are of the firm conviction that financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA must also be examined in the context of this review and be subject to long-term programming, as an integral part of the Neighbourhood Policy. They do not consider the argument valid that the political instability in the region and the specificities of the peace process only allow provisional programming and case-by-case reinforcement.

Given the current pressing needs, especially in the Southern neighbourhood, Members call, for a **swift agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the proposal for reinforcing the Neighbourhood Instrument over the period 2012 to 2013**.

They also insists that the Council should adopt without further delay the legislative proposal to amend Article 23 of the ENPI Regulation, which would make it possible to reinvest funds returned following past operations.

Lastly, they call on the Commission to consider alternative ways to ensure additional risk capital funds to be immediately made available through the EIB, for both the Southern and the Eastern dimensions.