Strengthening the European neighbourhood policy

2007/2088(INI) - 04/12/2006 - Document attached to the procedure

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The present Communication on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is the first general review of the implementation of this policy since its inception. In addition to the Communication proper, country-specific progress reports on the implementation of the first 7 Action Plans are being published, together with this overall assessment and a more detailed technical assessment on sectoral issues. These reports document the progress which has been made, and provide a basis for the suggested enhancements to the ENP which are put forward in the Communication.

1) Progress by partners in Action Plan implementation: ENP partners are very diverse politically, economically, socially and culturally. It is therefore rather difficult to produce an overall cross-country analysis of the implementation of the ENP. There are however certain overall trends that can be identified, and certain general conclusions to be drawn. Within each Action Plan, the governance field is perhaps the most difficult in which to achieve and measure progress. With different cultures and challenges, and different levels of commitment, each partner has addressed these issues in its own way. The enhanced dialogue on human rights that has taken place with southern partners deserves special mention. There has also been progress by several partners in the reform of electoral systems, in judicial reform and in public-sector governance. The picture is more mixed as regards respect for fundamental rights, however, with less progress by certain partners in addressing issues such as restrictions on press freedom, intimidation of NGOs, political prisoners, ill-treatment in police custody, and extra-judicial killings.

Political dialogue and cooperation with ENP partners has been significantly enhanced in most cases, with enhanced dialogue in sub-committees in certain cases, and greater cooperation with certain partners on CFSP issues. ENP partners have had a mixed macro-economic experience in the last two years. Some have experienced moderate to strong growth throughout the period, while others have recovered in 2006 after a sharp decline in growth in 2005. Certain countries have been hard hit by rising energy prices and in one case by the blockage of some traditional markets. The drastic decline in all economic indicators in the Palestinian Territories remains a case apart and a major cause for concern.

Progress has likewise been mixed in fighting poverty. Some ENP partner countries have made significant progress in strengthening social and human-resource development policies, though further sustained effort is required by all. At the other extreme, the situation in the Palestinian Territories causes grave concern. Education and health are being given increased attention in all partner countries. Most partners have national sustainable development strategies in place or are in the process of reviewing them. National inter-ministerial structures exist in most cases, but they hold regular meetings only in a limited number of countries. A key challenge is therefore for most countries to activate the existing structures, in order to ensure a truly cross-sectoral approach to sustainable development.

Negotiations on trade are progressing with all Mediterranean partners (agriculture and services). Work on conformity agreements shows a promising start, while in the fields of customs or the economic regulatory framework, the ENP has made progress. The ENP has been particularly useful with certain partners in addressing the shared challenge of migration. An agreement on readmission and visa facilitation was initialled with one partner in October 2006, and negotiations are being prepared with two others. Cooperation on combating organised crime, terrorism and drugs has also advanced in a number of cases.

Reform and modernisation in transport, energy, public finance management, the information society, and the environment is a challenging task, but has been pursued actively by most partners. Detailed technical dialogue, building on Action Plan priorities, has proved its worth.

With the support of the Tempus programme, partner countries have pursued their reform and modernisation efforts in the area of higher education.

2) Progress by the EU in supporting Action Plan implementation: the EU has also been addressing its own commitments in supporting our neighbours in their reform efforts.

In the political, trade and Justice Liberties and Securities fields, and in sectors such as transport, energy, the environment and research, much of the core work has been carried forward through enhanced dialogue, or through negotiations on new trade or readmission agreements. EC technical and financial support has had a significant impact here, for example through technical assistance and twinning in relation to trade and market reform, to migration issues, or to energy or transport policy.

Assistance, per se, is not at the core of the ENP – the funding available is not there to "buy reform", but to support a reform process already agreed upon.

Nevertheless, the Commission has made every effort, working together with ENP partners, to focus current assistance on the core priorities set out in the ENP Action Plans. This has included the adjustment of existing programmes to address Action Plan priorities, and the introduction of new tools (TAIEX and Twinning) responding directly to the need for specific reform-related advice and assistance. The existing TAIEX programme has been extended to cover ENP countries, with more than 20 activities requested or being implemented, while more than one hundred twinning programmes are already under preparation or in the early stages of implementation with ENP partners. Financial assistance has also been increased, working in particular through the EIB and EBRD.

The Commission has also made every effort to ensure that our future assistance responds fully to ENP policy requirements, and is truly "policy-driven". The new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) will be available from January 2007, providing an increase in total funding for ENP partners (a 32% increase in real terms), and considerably increased flexibility in the type of assistance which we can provide. New possibilities for cross-border cooperation will be available, and a dedicated scholarship programme is being developed. Detailed programming for the period 2007-10 is being finalised, fully reflecting of the priorities set out in the respective ENP Action Plans. Proposals for a substantial increase in the EIB lending mandate are before the Council. It will be important also for Member States, in their own bilateral cooperation programmes, to reflect on how these can best reflect ENP priorities.