

RETHINKING EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract

EU today copes with a range of challenges that have impact on its relations with neighbours. In this context authors highlight some important aspects as: the new concept of Europe and how can be understood the term of a New Eastern Europe; how evolves regional policy of EU towards the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and what are the achievements and difficulties of these states in their relationship with EU; how it is necessary to investigate ENP in the context of some new regional security problems; which is the role and impact of Russian Federation in the development of ENP and the Republic of Moldova relationship with EU etc.

Keywords: EU, neighbourhood, regional policy, challenges, Eastern Europe

Introduction

The issue of European Neighbourhood is one of those that emerged recently in the context of the enlargement of the European Union towards the East, especially towards the states of the former USSR. Faced with the complicated and contradictory realities of relations with the Russian Federation, which at one point declared openly its interest in this area, advancing the policy of the so-called “near neighbourhood”, the European Union was forced to think and implement an Eastern-oriented policy that declared its European orientation with the prospect of joining the community. This has resulted in the so-called European Neighbourhood Policy as a component and very important part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Since the launch of this policy in 2003, there have been years in which major changes have taken place, events that either have confirmed or questioned the need for and effectiveness of this policy have taken place. We have come today to talk and even discuss the need to rethink the European Neighbourhood Policy. How should this policy be rethought? What is seen as positive about the European Neighbourhood Policy and what should be revised? These and other questions are obviously interesting and require answers.

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1. The European Neighbourhood Policy: a possible direction of rethinking

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been advanced from the very beginning as a policy of regulating relations with the South and Eastern European countries (Dragan, 2015). Initially, the ENP was launched in 2003, endorsed in 2004, and was a new approach to relations between the European Union and its neighbours, an approach that surpassed the traditional one based on simple co-operation. This policy was a framework to strengthen neighbourhood relations and aimed at stepping up cooperation with wider EU neighbouring countries to create an area of prosperity and good neighbourhood, a “circle of friends” at the Union’s borders. The main objective of the ENP, as shown in the strategic documents of the EU, is sharing the benefits of EU enlargement in 2004 with its neighbouring countries. Another objective is the one set by the European Security Strategy of 2003, namely increasing security in the neighbourhood of the enlarged Union. ENP does not offer the prospect of EU countries concerned, but also allows a privileged relationship with neighbours and better focus efforts in areas of vital importance to European standards near the countries concerned.

In 2011, the ENP was revised as a result of the riots in the Arab world. The revised ENP objective of the EU was to support partners that undertake reforms in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and human rights; to contribute to their inclusive economic development and to promote a viable partnership. The renewed ENP provided for enhanced cooperation in the political and security spheres, supporting economic and social development, stimulating growth and job creation, stimulating trade and strengthening cooperation in other sectors. Under the new ENP, an incentive-based approach (“more for more”) was applied, which provided flexibility for a modulated financial assistance regime on the basis of progress made by ENP countries in the field of democracy and respect for human rights.

After more problems arise, in 2015 the EU proposes a new approach to the ENP, which does not actually provide for political integration and brings nothing new to the associated countries, but urges them to make reforms. The new ENP was based on a stronger “differentiation” of partner countries according to the proven aspirations and ambitions, as well as individual performance in the implementation of reforms. The main element of the new ENP is, as experts have said, to strengthen the security and socio-economic stability of the 16 neighbours in the south and east. New emphasis was on stepping up cooperation with security partner countries, particularly in the fields of conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and anti-radicalism policies. It was also envisaged to primarily take into account the aspirations and needs of each partner state¹.

What really happened to the ENP? As some European policy experts note, unlike the success of eastern enlargement efforts that transformed former communist countries into prosperous market democracies, the European Neighbourhood Policy was a spectacular failure. It offered money, technical

¹ Timpul (2015), Moldova și noua politică europeană de vecinătate, 8 December (retrieved from <http://www.timpul.md/articol/moldova-si-noua-politica-de-vecinatate-84184.html>).



assistance and access to markets, but not membership to 16 countries from East to South in return for adopting democratic, administrative and economic norms of the European Union. “As we now see the situation”, former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt said at the beginning of 2015, “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are surrounded not by a circle of friends but by a circle of fire.” Failure to stabilize or democratize the EU’s neighbourhood was partly the result of forces that Brussels could not control: Russia’s resentment regarding the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as political and sectarian disputes in the Middle East (Mareş, 2015). Thus, especially after 2015 with the events in Ukraine, the ENP has come to a neighbourhood crisis, to a total failure (Polis, 2015).

Another very important aspect of what happened to the EU ENP to which we want to draw attention. All the European Union’s neighbours were put on a common list: the Southern ones – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunis and the Eastern ones – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Thus, states that are actually European, at least geographically, as well as the Republic of Moldova, have come to be neighbours with Europe/European Union. As a result, the policy of these states, and especially the citizens’ conscience, has gradually begun nurture the idea that they are in fact EU neighbours, not Europeans. And here comes the big question: Are we Eastern Europeans, Europe’s neighbours, or are we still Europeans? The question is not trivial and simple at all. It is a question of which many speculations, many demagogies and manipulations have been and are being made for which reason this question, and in general, all the European Neighbourhood Policy must be rethought.

In our view, the ENP should be first and foremost rethought not in terms of neighbourhood, but in terms of Europeanity and in terms of European diversity. The issue needs to be examined from the point of view of unity and difference, of what is (and can be, including through Europeanization) common, and what is different, specific. If this dialectic is not taken into account, the unity of the opposites, the differences, in a way, then, although in the recent years it seems that the mistake has been understood, we still have what we have. The same requirements, unique standards (which obviously should exist, although without generalisation), sometimes produce extreme results. From this perspective, we should also look at the issue of future European enlargements, in general the issue of the European future.

2. Rethinking European Neighbourhood Policy in the context of a New Eastern Europe

Europe is a continent of great diversity. The European countries reunited within the Council of Europe, which is the largest human rights organization on the continent, are national states with different own histories, different cultures, traditions, customs, etc. And so are the Member States of the European Union, now 28, including the UK, which is still part of the EU until the conclusion of the BREXIT negotiations. All the European countries are part of the great notion of



Europe, but at the same time they are also parts of a different Europe (Revistă de sinteză, 1999). According to Duțu (1999), when asking ourselves “How many Europes are in Europe?”, the answer should be formulated according to different criteria: geographical, historical, cultural and civilizational, confessional, political etc.

Thus, from a geographical point of view, we are talking about Western Europe and Eastern Europe, Northern and Southern Europe, Central Europe, Scandinavian Europe, the Balkans, etc. They differ not only geographically, territorially, climatically, and so on, but also from a cultural point of view, of belonging to the Western or Eastern culture, as well as from the point of view of the level of economic development, etc. From a historical point of view, we speak of Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, Modern, Enlightenment, Contemporary Europe. These Europes are not just historical notions. They are also notions of the present, because what created the epochs, stages, and periods of the past, at least many of these creations, are being preserved and form the cultural, material and spiritual heritage of today’s Europe. From the cultural and civilizational point of view, we speak of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic Europe, the Latin Europe (formed from those states and regions of Europe in which a Romance language is spoken and which have a culture distinct from Germanic and Slavic cultures. Latin European countries are Andorra, France, Italy, Moldova, Monaco, Portugal, Romania, San Marino and Spain), Slavic Europe (consists of those states and regions of Europe that speak a Slavic language and have a distinct culture from the German and Latin cultures, and contains the following states: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Poland, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine). These, being distinct by traditions, customs, languages, etc., taken together, form what we call European civilization.

From a confessional point of view, we speak of Catholic Europe, which, according to some authors, is the most genuine Europe (Marga, 2001, p. 29), Orthodox Europe, Protestant Europe, the Europe of different and many religious sects. From this point of view, we have a very large division of Europe, it being once all united under Christianity. (Duțu, 1999). From a political point of view, we speak of the social democrats’ Europe, the European People’s Party Europe, the Europe of Conservatives, the Europe of the Greens, the Ecologists, the Europe of the Socialists, the Europe of Nations and Freedom, the Liberals’ Europe, the Europe of Reformists, the Europe of the nationalist and Eurosceptic parties, Europe of the European Left etc. These and many other parties, political orientations are active in European countries, they form different alliances, associations, transnational factions, including within the European Parliament, having different views on the present and the future of Europe. People also mention the Old Europe, related to the Western one, most of which belongs to the West, and the New Europe, with particular reference to the countries of Eastern Europe, those formerly belonging to the so-called socialist camp, Small Europe and Greater Europe, Old and Young Europe.



From a geopolitical point of view, there are other terms of a Western or Occidental Europe (though the concepts of Western and Occidental do not coincide), which is mainly distinguished by history and culture from the Eastern Europe.

From the point of view of transatlantic relations, at least five Europes are mentioned (this is an idea originally launched by Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida in the famous paper “Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations After the Iraq War”): Atlantic Europe, the best illustration of which is the UK, Europe itself, the essential one (Core Europe) or/and Old Europe, presented at this level especially by Germany and France, New Europe, a concept that designates the group of the new Member States of the European Union, a very important concept in the context of our examination, a non-aligned or neutral Europe (Non-aligned Europe), which includes the non-member states of the North Atlantic Treaty, namely Sweden, Ireland, Austria and Finland, and Periphery Europe, the exponent of which is Russia, an actor labeled as a generator of discord at both the European Union level and at the level of transatlantic relations² (Păun, 2008). And yet many, many other Europes from different points of view – Europes from the point of view of mentalities, Europes of the regions, Europes from the anthropological point of view, etc.

In this brief presentation we seek to analyse the Europe’s degree of diversification. And let us keep in mind that the discussions in this regard have not ended yet. Thus, lately, especially after the recent internal and external crises that the European Union, Europe as a whole, is passing through, the idea has been advanced and more discussions are breaking out about a Greater Europe, a Europe not only from the Atlantic to the Ural, but a Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok, a Europe that includes the Russian Federation. So it is a Europe of the Council of Europe if not possibly a large European Union, which would include all European countries, including Russia, in perspective. (On the subject of relations with Russia, we will come back below in another context).

A so-called New Eastern Europe is also being discussed lately, given the fact that we already have an Eastern Europe, including the countries that formerly belonged to the socialist camp, that is to say, such countries as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, so the states that joined the European Union in the latest enlargement waves of 2004 and 2007.

The New Eastern Europe forms the states of Eastern Europe that previously belonged to the former USSR and now forms the group of states of the so-called Eastern Partnership, namely Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan. How does this New Eastern Europe differ, and what characterizes it, the states in this area? We can highlight some peculiarities, differences, characteristics that, in our opinion, should be taken into account, including the elaboration and promotion of the European Neighbourhood Policy, its rethinking under the current conditions.

² Nicolae Păun (2008), “Vocile” Europei și limitele ale parteneriatului transatlantic in „Monitorul de Cluj” (retrieved from www.monitorulcj.ro/cms/site/m_cj/news/53959).

- The states in this group are ex-Soviet, ex-communist states in the so-called transition, a transition that, for some states, like the Republic of Moldova, takes too long;
- The states in this Europe are states at the confluence or even the collision of two geopolitical zones, the Western or the Occidental one, and the Eastern one, Oriental.
- These are countries on which both the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Russia's policies of the "near abroad" are extended.
- The states in this area, at least some of them, such as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, but also Armenia and Azerbaijan, face separatism, frozen conflicts, aggressive actions on the part of Russia, including economic embargos, energy blackmail, cyber attacks, other different actions of the so-called hybrid war etc.

All these realities should be taken into account, including in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, when attempts are being made to rethink this policy, especially the policy towards the Eastern Partnership states in this area of the New Eastern Europe.

The interests of Russia in this area should be taken into account to a certain extent; regardless of how complicated this might be, given the influences on the region that come not only from the West, but also the East. Of course, along with consistent efforts to change, in line with the current demands of democratization, Europeanization, modernization, the behaviour of Kremlin governance both internally, in relation to its own citizens and its own problems, and externally, in relation to the neighbours, the European states, the states of the world. It must be acknowledged that this is the current geopolitical situation. Policy changes and opportunities need to be rethought from the perspective that the New Eastern Europe area is a contact one, thus an area of cooperation, collaboration, a joint discussion and problem-solving area, not an area of new conflicts, new divisions of Europe, or contradictions.

3. Rethinking European Neighbourhood Policy in the context of EU-Russia relations

The European Neighbourhood Policy under the current conditions, in the context of the dramatic changes taking place, must be rethought also from the perspective of relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation. It is strictly necessary to take into account the new realities: the radical changes that take place in Russian politics; the forceful return of Russia on the international arena; Russia's claims of global power; invoking the interests that Russia would have in its immediate neighbourhood, including in the New Eastern Europe or the Eastern Partnership area of the European Union.

In this new context, a rather complicated one, Russia should not be excluded from solving the problems faced by the New Eastern European states, especially since many of these issues were also created by Russia, or at least given Russia's



interests in this area. No new divisions must be created in Europe, new walls, new conflicts, because we already have so many, those in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia.

Our opinion is that Russia should participate in the European processes, even if it does not want it; it must be imposed through communication strategies, common interest, through diplomatic, economic, political and other means. This is because without Russia, without this power, as demonstrated by the current realities, it is and will be difficult to solve many of the problems of European integration and unification, European enlargement, issues related to the prospects of joining the European Union of the states of this New Eastern Europe from the Eastern Partnership, prospects for Moldova's accession to the EU as well. The chances of Republic of Moldova of joining the European Union, depend also on Russia, depend also on how much it will succeed in working with Russia, convincing it, discussing together and solving problems.

It is time to recognize that a Greater Europe, a European Common House, cannot be built or become possible without Russia neither now nor in the immediate future. It has been discussed repeatedly on this regard and different ideas have been exposed. Many authors have considered and still consider that Russia is definitely not a European country. This opinion is held inclusively by the Romanian author Andrei Marga (Marga, 2001, p. 25-27). We do not completely agree with this point of view. Yes, for certain reasons and criteria, especially those related to culture, mentality, democracy, living, rights and freedoms, etc., Russia may not correspond to the notions of Europeanness, Europeanization. But Russia is still the European country geographically, although this is not the most important factor. Russia, unquestionably, is a European country from a historical point of view, because it has been included in the history of the past and took part in the European processes, the European events. And from a civilizational point of view; Russia is also a part of Europe, of European civilization, a component of which the Slavic civilization is. From this point of view, the Russians are closely connected and linked historically, culturally to the Slavic peoples of Europe, including the Western Slavs living in EU Member States. Especially since Russia is currently actively involved in European affairs, it maintains and develops relations with the European states, and also, it has to be said, creates new problems.

During the course of history, Russia also made efforts to approach Europe, form example Russia of Peter the Great or Russia of the epoch of the great empress Catherine II etc.

The conclusion may be that Russia can be included in Europe, not excluded. It would be necessary in this respect for the European Union to develop and implement, in the frameworks of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, in agreement with the states in this area, especially with the states that have signed Association Agreements with the EU, such as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, certain communication strategies with Russia. Permanent high-level contacts between EU and Russian leaders are also needed, contacts that in recent years, especially after 2014, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, have not really been made.

4. Rethinking the European Neighbourhood Policy from the perspective of the “Moldovan integration policy”

From our point of view, the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially when it comes to the Republic of Moldova, should also be discussed and rethought from the point of view of the so-called “Moldovan integration policy”. Here we are considering the fact that, as it happened in Moldova in many objective circumstances, but also largely subjective ones, we differ in everything, including the European integration policy promoted by the Moldovan authorities. Even in 2004 it was signalled this policy that it is speculative, declarative, duplicate, and demagogic. (Vasilescu, 2004, p.10-19). Minor changes were operated during the last 14 years. Something has been added to those characteristics, equally particular for our policy: Trickery (trickery in Moldovan politics has also been discussed in our country). This has been particularly characteristic of the governments under the so-called “European Alliance for European Integration” since 2009. When failing to create a ruling coalition, they hidden under the umbrella of discussing principles and values, while in reality negotiating the seats, offices, spheres of influence. Instead of implementing the provisions and commitments assumed by signing the Association Agreement, they resorted to a new trick, to the so-called “central government reform”. They’ve got rid of a few more ministerial offices, maybe the undesirable ones, they’ve made some mergers, a few reshuffles. In our opinion, it is nothing but a reason for “adjusting the provisions of the Association Agreement to this reform”. To adjust means to postpone, as much as possible, at least until 2020, the real, stringent, necessary reforms.

In this situation the European Union, the European leaders, the European institutions do not even seem to know what to come up with, what to propose to really adjust the European Neighbourhood Policy to the realities of the neighbouring countries of the Eastern Partnership, including the realities of the Republic of Moldova. Various conditionality policies have been devised and proposed, both positive and negative. A new ENP, a revised ENP (2011), a renewed ENP (2014-2015), a new realistic policy was put forward. Various neighbourhood assistance instruments were created and advanced, including the European neighbourhood instrument, the new financial instrument that will provide incentives in the neighbourhood countries that best perform their actions by 2020 (ENPI Info Centre, 2014). All this to find viable solutions to support and motivate states such as the Republic of Moldova, which from the “success story of the Eastern Partnership” has become a slacker, failing the neighbourhood policy exam. It has also been proposed, in the context of a new neighbourhood policy, that the European Union should apply the experience of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Moldova as well as in Ukraine and Georgia. In order to increase the impact, it was proposed that the EU financial assistance be concentrated on the areas requiring the most reforms or investments to meet the accession criteria. It was also envisaged that the new ENP would provide more practical and visible public benefits in the shortest time possible. In the case of Moldova it is considered



that this can be done by channelling more assistance to support sustainable agricultural and rural development (European Commission, 2015).

However, regardless of what is being proposed or done, as long as the official policy in the Republic of Moldova remains demagogic, speculative, as long as there is not enough openness, transparency, as long as the integration policy is not an honest one, truly credible both inside the country and on the outside, as long as any rethinking of the European Neighbourhood Policy remains unnecessary, inefficient, it will not give the necessary results.

The last point we would like to draw attention to here in the context of rethinking the European Neighbourhood Policy is security. This, in view of the circumstances created, of the problems that have arisen, has become of paramount importance for the European Union as a whole, for the whole of Europe, including the countries of Eastern Europe. The fact that this aspect became of prime importance is also demonstrated by the first joint inter-parliamentary conference on regional security issues and the prospects for European integration “Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine: Eastern Partnership and Current Security Challenges” organized in Chisinau in March 2018. The Inter-parliamentary Summit drew attention and discussed the issues of information security, energy and the current common challenges, economic growth and the rule of law in the Eastern Partnership. It was intended that the summit should lead to a dialogue between the three states that would lay the foundations for security cooperation mechanisms in a tense regional context as a result of the growing division between East and West after the crisis in Ukraine at the end of 2013 and early 2014.

Of course, it is a good thing for these three states concerned to try to discuss and jointly settle the issues of security, economic development, European integration, etc. Especially, since it is expected that such meetings and contacts will be permanent. In our opinion, in this process of discussion, negotiation, search for solutions, problem-solving, together with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions and structures, it would be necessary and important to include Russia as well. Without its participation, without reasonable compromises, without taking into account the interests of all the parties involved, it will be very difficult to make some progress in this area of the New Eastern Europe, including the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Conclusions

European Neighbourhood Policy should be rethought and adjusted to new realities and evolutions on international arena. In this context, an important dimension has the development of the new concept of New Eastern Europe. EU should build its relationship with New Eastern Europe states in terms of Europeanity, in terms of European diversity, including European’s diversity in Europe. Also, it is important to not exclude Russian Federation from European processes, especially from perspective of closer cooperation between EU and Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia etc. For Republic of Moldova it is important to focus on reforms according to EU requirements, but also according to

its national specific as well. Thus, it should use all opportunities that ENP and EaP offer in order to advance on its European integration process.

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