

## European Neighbourhood Policy Review:

# LESSONS FROM NORTH AFRICA

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Developments in North Africa in the past four years suggest that the initial objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), namely to create a community of stable and prosperous countries at the EU's borders has, to a large extent, failed. The EU is now planning to review the policy by autumn 2015. On 23 February 2015, the Hertie School of Governance and the Jacques Delors Institut - Berlin invited policymakers and analysts from leading European think tanks and academia to review the ENP with regard to North Africa in an expert workshop (Chatham House rules). The participants discussed the most relevant lessons to be learned from North Africa and outlined how and to what extent the ENP could and should be changed.

This policy brief summarizes key themes of the debate and distils the most relevant policy recommendations.

What emerged in the discussion is that the political developments and dynamics in the EU's bordering regions have overwhelmed the capacities of the EU to support its goal of a prosperous and stable surrounding environment. The ENP and its toolbox seem to be outdated and not flexible enough to respond to the complex developments on the ground while bridging the member states' divergent preferences. The EU has been acting with ad-hoc arrangements and measures to deal with the political transformations. There was a broad agreement that there is de facto no common European approach towards the MENA region and that the traditional focus on security-related issues still prevails.

Many participants pointed out that a revised ENP and EU approach towards the MENA region should not repeat the mistake of the past and equate stability with security. Egypt was frequently mentioned as an example where the EU seems to embrace authoritarian stability. Instead, the EU should aim at strengthening democratic reforms and the rule of law as progress here signifies more stability in the long run. The European engagement should be more comprehensive and coherent. It should be tailored to particular countries and be more responsive to local and societal needs by also taking into account other regional actors and sub-regional dynamics. Libya and Tunisia were said to be the key countries that require enhanced European engagement. To achieve its goals, the EU and its member states should move away from giving financial assistance in a rather

unconditional or inconsistent manner and develop more sophisticated conditionality tools and apply them rigorously and consistently. Financial allocations should be tied to progress in democratic reforms. Moreover, the EU and its member states should strengthen their cooperation with local non-state actors, especially civil society organisations.

The main **policy recommendations** to enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of the ENP were:

### 1. Adjust to a rapidly changing political environment

Fundamental changes in the MENA region have taken place during and after the so-called "Arab Spring". A review of the ENP framework and of its tool-kit needs to do justice not only to these fundamental political

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changes, but also to the constantly and rapidly changing geopolitical environment that characterizes the region. The ENP should set clearer, long-term goals, based on a common geopolitical analysis. The revised framework should also allow for more flexibility in implementing these goals and related policies. Overall, the ENP should be more 'political' and move closer towards a foreign policy.

## 2. Enhance the degree of differentiation

Today the ENP comprises sixteen countries which have little in common but their relative instability. Instead of a rigid regional one-size-fits-all approach the EU should work on developing complementary country-specific foreign policy strategies and tools under the ENP umbrella and allow for flexible short-term crisis management.

## 3. Apply smarter, micro-level conditionality

The EU and its member states should make better use of political conditionality to achieve common goals. Unfortunately, conditionality has often been applied in an inconsistent and therefore ineffective manner. The principles of "more for more" and "less for less" have not been sufficiently implemented.

The EU and its member states should not give way to short-term politico-economic interests in the region (e.g. arms exports to the region and neighbouring Gulf countries) which may undermine the long-term goals of the ENP. The EU should further develop its micro-level conditionality tools (e.g. project-based conditionality funds). Micro-level conditionality will have to be applied rigorously and monitored with regard to its broader impact on democratic reforms and the rule of law. In this domain, useful lessons can be learned from EU development cooperation. In addition, the EU should make more creative use of the leverage points it has. These can include targeted measures in the fields of arms trade, tourism, or diplomacy. The sharpening of conditionality tools could enhance the EU's credibility and its overall political leverage.

## 4. Get serious about engaging local actors

The EU does not involve local civil society actors enough. It needs to invest more in terms of acquiring knowledge on the ground and engaging systematically and closely with non-state and civil society organisations. This would help avoid an overly Eurocentric conception of the ENP and ensure greater responsiveness to local needs.

## 5. Enhance the number of dedicated External Action Service staff

Effective monitoring and political engagement (see points four and five) will not be possible without additional staff. The EU needs to enhance its local presence and invest more into country staff to build local capacity and to boost support and cooperation.

## Conclusion: A major reform of the ENP and its instruments is necessary

To conclude, it seems that the discussion on the ENP has been stuck for some time. Its key goals, namely to secure prosperity, security, and stability in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, certainly remain valid at a time of increasing geopolitical disorder. A radical overhaul of the policy might not be politically feasible at this stage. However, the increasing instability at the Union's borders strongly calls for a smarter and more strategic use of the existing ENP framework and its instruments. ■

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