

Credibility of EU global strategy depends on neighbourhood policy's success

Written by Andi Cristea on 25 November 2016 in Opinion
Opinion

The credibility of the EU's global strategy rests on a successful European neighbourhood policy, writes Andi Cristea.



Andi Cristea | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

It is hardly disputable that the neighbourhood of the European Union is less stable than ever before.

Against this backdrop of insecurity, crisis and outright war, the EU is also confronted with a new reality: a divergence of aspirations.

These two elements combined have resulted in the most negative dynamic the ENP has ever faced. The EU, as a union and a foreign policy actor, is judged on its effectiveness within its own

neighbourhood.

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Our success and credibility - both globally and in the eyes of our own citizens - rest in our ability to tackle the challenges on our doorstep.

Clearly, we need to rethink our policies in terms of objectives, interests, instruments and partners. We need a strategy that allows us to be more effective against the unprecedented and multiple challenges we are confronted within our immediate neighbourhood, as a matter of utmost priority.

As to the first element of concern, that of instability, frozen and protracted conflicts today are unfortunately a reality for both the east and the south.

Looking at the security dimension from a traditional perspective, my feeling is that so far, the ENP has decoupled the security issue from its actions and efforts on political association and economic integration; and this equally in policy and programming terms.

Yet, security, even if outside the direct remit of the ENP, has an impact on the building of a well-functioning state and the associated reforms. Of the 16 partner countries covered by the ENP, a total of 11 states are directly affected by conflict.

In this sense, and extending this policy deficit to a wider scale, I believe it is of crucial importance to foster closer coordination between the ENP and the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and development policy as well as relations with third countries whose influence on ENP partners should not be neglected.

The EU needs an approach that mobilises all available instruments and resources, including the ENP, in a coherent, efficient and effective manner.

Threats to peace and security, tragedies like the ones in the Mediterranean Sea, relentless human rights abuses, remind us of the need for a comprehensive approach. Conflict-resolution, migration, refugees and human trafficking are also areas in which the ENP can, and should do, more by addressing the root causes.

Creating a strong link between the review of the ENP and the implementation of the global strategy can provide the right answers in this regard.

The second characterising feature of the current neighbourhood context is related to the radically different choices made by ENP countries on their relations with the EU. There is an unprecedented divergence of aspirations both to the east and the south.

On the one hand, this new state of affairs must be reflected in a new policy formulation that goes beyond the existing A to Z approach of action plans. It is strongly tied to a value-based agenda and a thorough understanding of the inherent indivisible nature between stability and democracy, and

between security and human rights, this can indeed be the effective policy response to differing ambitions.

This would, in turn, lead to a more efficient use of resources, a more strategic targeting of priorities and, ultimately, more progress.

On the other hand, given that European countries within the ENP can apply for membership if they satisfy the criteria and conditions of admission under the treaty of the European Union, it is even more vital to acknowledge the important shift in aspirations among Eastern partnership countries in our external policies.

This can only mean one thing: the EU needs to do more for those who have real and tangible European ambitions, for those who have decided on the European path.

We need additional efforts and bolder strategies on the membership perspective of frontrunners, committed and determined countries like the Republic of Moldova, as losing momentum and entrenching the status quo can only trigger irreversible drifts, derailing the process altogether.

As rightly underlined on numerous occasions by EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, resilience in countries, institutions and civil societies surrounding the EU is the first priority in the implementation of the global strategy.

The European Parliament was able to build convergence and adopt a strong and ambitious text on the review of the European neighbourhood policy.

I believe that our discussions and political output have created a common thread and a constructive dynamic, as have the questions the Commission and Council addressed with their joint communication and conclusions respectively.

The finalisation of the strategic review and the evolution of the EU global strategy, now in its implementation formulation phase, add yet another building block to the ENP review process and provide a unique opportunity for the ENP's success.

However, undeniably and most importantly, the opposite is equally true. The credibility and future of the global strategy rests on an effective European neighbourhood policy that is able to deliver.

A successful implementation of the reviewed and renewed ENP will therefore be key.

About the author

Andi Cristea (RO) is Parliament's S&D group shadow rapporteur on the review of the European neighbourhood policy

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