

The European Union and its Neighbourhood: Time for a Rethink



Helen Wallace

Centennial Professor, European Institute
London School of Economics and Political Science
h.wallace@lse.ac.uk

Summary

On 7 May 2009 leading policy-makers from the European Union (EU) are scheduled to hold a high-level meeting with political leaders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (see map on p. 2) in order to launch a new Eastern Partnership (EaP). It is high time for EU policy-makers to renew and to reinvigorate the relationships with these east European neighbours, as indeed with the southern neighbours (the subject of a parallel initiative to develop the Union for the Mediterranean). The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) had run its course in its previous format. The EU (further) enlargement policy is running up against problems. However, the content of the EaP has so far been sketched only in outline. It has been launched at what has turned out to be a difficult moment, given the political turmoil inside some of the target countries. Much more thought – and imagination – needs to be given to how to reshape these relationships and to which tools are needed for the job. In particular:

- EU policy towards these six eastern neighbours needs to be much more closely linked with its policy towards the other European countries involved in actual or potential pre-accession processes;
- the interests and experience of existing EU member states need to be more actively and more prudently harnessed in developing the EaP, as well as the future enlargement policy, not least given the complex political geography of eastern Europe;
- the substantive content and tools of EU policy needs to be geared to the circumstances on the ground in the EaP target countries, including as regards the forms of conditionality that might be appropriate;
- a more explicit partnership should be articulated with the other international and regional institutions and agencies that are active in the region; and
- EU policies towards Russia and towards Turkey need to be taken systematically into account in the development of the EaP from the outset and at both the macro and the micro levels.

By way of background

Almost twenty years on from the fall of the Berlin Wall, there is a good deal of unfinished business. The old and simplistic divide between "West" and "East" has given way to a more complicated and unpredictable set of security challenges. The new Russia has still to find its place in the post-cold-war system and other Europeans have yet to figure out what kind of relationships to develop with Russia. Transformation processes leading towards functioning market economies and towards sustainable democracies are uneven across the post-socialist region. Some countries have fared better than others. The onslaught of the current global financial crisis has exposed disturbing vulnerabilities, including some countries that are now EU member states. In both the western Balkans and the prospective EaP countries the economic outlooks are deeply worrying ([Bastian 2009](#)). Anchoring democracy turns out to be a bigger challenge than the optimists had hoped in the post-1989 euphoria – and there is an intersection between political (in)stability and economic (in)stability, in particular for countries still in the process of establishing viable states and relaxed national identities.

Enlargement policy so far

On the more positive side of the balance sheet the EU enlargement policy has been by-and-large a success – or at least so far. The 1995 enlargement was facilitated by the end of the cold war and brought into the EU Austria, Finland and Sweden, three countries that have each played pivotal roles in developing relationships with the wider Europe. Ten countries from the former Soviet imperium (along with Cyprus and Malta) joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, signalling the value of the magnet of EU membership in underpinning economic and political transformation processes. Indeed the belief in the power of pre-accession conditionality as a lever for reforms had encouraged EU policy-makers to envisage eventual EU membership for Turkey and for the western Balkans. Moreover, it turns out that the EU itself has adapted better than many had feared to the day-to-day tasks of managing institutionally an EU with now 27 members – and despite the failures (so far) to ratify either the Constitutional Treaty or the Treaty of Lisbon. Business in Brussels goes on pretty much as usual and without gridlock. A period of calm consolidation of enlargement might have been expected, had it not been for the global financial crisis

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which has turned the policy agenda of the EU topsy-turvy.

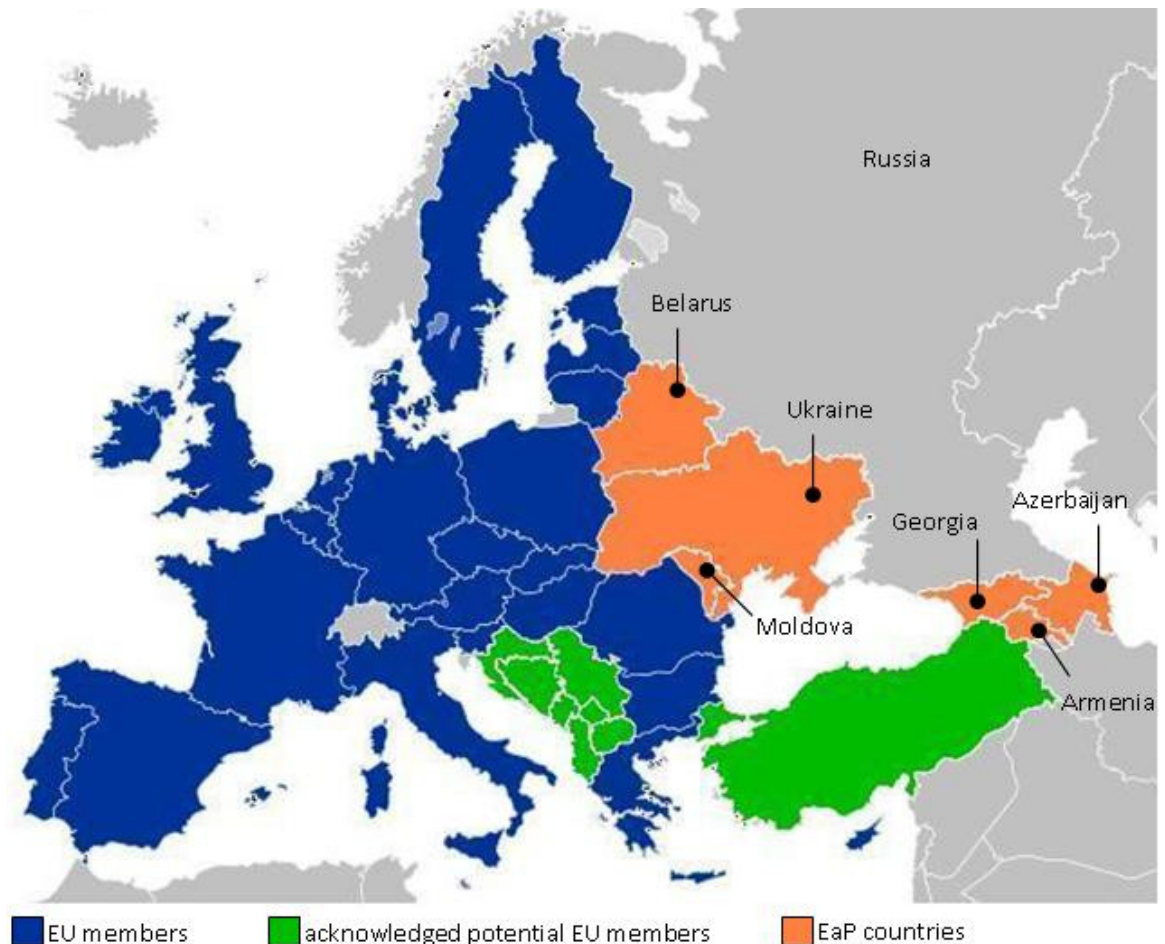
Nonetheless it was already becoming evident four or five years ago that, although enlargement had been in concrete terms a highly successful EU policy, it was not a universally popular policy within the EU either with policy-makers or with public opinion. There were and there remain worries about the EU being over-stretched. Some argued that Bulgaria and Romania had been accepted prematurely. During the referenda campaigns in France and The Netherlands in 2005 (on the Constitutional Treaty) and in Ireland in 2008 (on the Treaty of Lisbon) evidence emerged of concerns about, in particular, the labour migration consequences of enlargement in a period of increasing migrant and asylum flows also from outside the EU. Such concerns take on added cogency and are more widely felt in a period of rising unemployment within the EU. So the signs of enlargement fatigue have set in and even those member governments that have in the past supported enlargement have become much more muted on the subject ([Devrim and Schulz 2009](#)). In principle the EU remains nonetheless broadly committed to a membership perspective for the countries of the western Balkans as well as for Turkey. Indeed accession negotiations are under way for Croatia and

Turkey, and could open with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), if Greece and FYROM could reach an accommodation on their bilateral dispute. Yet making a reality of this commitment to further enlargement is also a persistent challenge. The negotiations with Croatia have been disturbed by a dispute with Slovenia. The negotiations with Turkey are proceeding only very slowly, not least because of the loss of momentum on the Turkish side, President Sarkozy has again in April 2009 declared his opposition to Turkish membership and Chancellor Angela Merkel has signalled her preference for a "privileged partnership" rather than EU accession.

The other countries of the group are some way off being engaged in a pre-accession process for a variety of reasons that pertain to the individual circumstances of individual countries. Thus with the probable exception of Croatia the time line for any of these countries to be set on a realistic accession route looks rather long. This suggests that the interim arrangements for linking these countries to the EU will need to be thought about as durable for the medium-term at least and not only for the short-term. This thus raises questions about the roles and capacities of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) (the successor to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe) and

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II The European Neighbourhood Policy has borne disappointingly few fruit.

II More nuanced reflection is needed on the interconnections between Nato and EU policies as regards when and whether each should enlarge further.

II The Commission proposals for the Eastern Partnership are written in ambitious terms and emphasise the need for both bilateral and multilateral elements.

the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) (remodelled as a trade forum for the western Balkans after its original members joined the EU).

The European Neighbourhood Policy

Alongside this extended enlargement policy the EU set in place from 2003 onwards the ENP as an overall umbrella under which the EU would develop essentially bilateral action plans to thicken relationships case by case with most of the other neighbours both to the east and to the south, although excluding, in particular, Russia. The ENP emerged as a catch-all approach instead of the more targeted strategy (notably *vis-à-vis* Ukraine) which some EU foreign policy officials had advocated. On the one hand, it was intended that the ENP would produce a more coherent approach to the "neighbourhood" as a whole. On the other hand, it seemed rather clear that the ENP was also to be understood as an "anything but membership" policy. For this reason it was convenient to bracket eastern and southern neighbours together – and hence within the bureaucratic politics of the EU, and especially the Commission, responsibilities for ENP were firmly segregated from those for enlargement. Some of us were always somewhat doubtful about the wisdom of this approach. As things have turned out it has borne disappointingly few fruit – and it has certainly not diminished the desire of at least some of the European ENP countries to set their sights on the goal of regular EU membership.

The Nato dimension

One other factor also had an impact on developments. During the 1990s the discussions of EU enlargement and Nato enlargement went hand in hand. The 10 central and east European countries that joined the EU had all previously been accepted as Nato members and indeed Nato provided another important anchor for their transformation processes. In the case of the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) this Nato policy had been judged provocative by the Russians. Latterly, however, it has become clear that the idea of Nato membership sooner rather than later, but EU membership later rather than sooner will not easily fly either *vis-à-vis* some of the countries in the western Balkans. Although Albania and Croatia joined Nato in April 2009, the accession of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is currently blocked by Greece, while "intensified dialogues" are under way with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, and Serbia now has a conditioned Individual Partnership Programme. In the case of the proposed EaP countries, Nato took a decision in Bucharest in 2008 to welcome the potential accession of Georgia and Ukraine, but this has not been activated yet, since this would be an intolerable provocation for the Russians. Hence more nuanced reflection is needed on the interconnections between Nato and EU policies as regards when and whether each should enlarge further, as well as on the testing issue of how to manage the relationship with Russia. It cannot be presumed for the future that Nato will provide the default anchor for the EaP countries and hence EU

policy will need to take more explicitly into account the security dimension.

All of these factors combine to throw into question EU policy towards the wider Europe – or rather the EU's several components of policy towards the wider Europe, i.e. the western Balkans, Turkey, Russia, and the EaP6.

The skeleton of the proposed Eastern Partnership

Explicit calls for a rethinking of the ENP mounted during 2008, with the call from President Sarkozy for a reinvigorated Union of the Mediterranean. This provided a catalyst for voices calling also for a rethink of the relationships with the eastern neighbours, notably from the Czechs (who tabled the first "non-paper" in April 2008), the Poles and the Swedes. A joint [Polish-Swedish paper](#) followed in preparation for the June 2008 European Council, which mandated the Commission to develop proposals. This was given added urgency by the Georgian-Russian conflict in August 2008. The Commission paper of 3 December 2008 ([COM \(2008\) 823/4](#)) was endorsed in principle by the European Council of December 2008 ([Presidency Conclusions, 12 December 2008](#)) and again substantively by the European Council in March 2009 ([Presidency Conclusions, 21 March 2009](#)). It is to be taken further at the announced summit of May 2009.

The content proposed so far for the EaP remains only the outline of a skeleton, with much to follow by way of substance and method ([Hillion and Mayhew 2009](#)). The Commission proposals for the EaP are written in more ambitious terms than those of the ENP and emphasise the need for both bilateral and multilateral elements. Deeper bilateral engagement would include: association agreements (with the appropriate bilateral institutions); economic integration by means of "deep free trade areas" with each country, with sectoral elements that might include agriculture; "mobility and security pacts" to open up scope for free movement of individuals; and measures to promote energy security. The multilateral framework would have an "operational structure" including: biannual meetings of heads of government; annual meetings of foreign ministers (back-to-back with an EU Council session (foreign ministers)); and four "thematic platforms" with defined programmes of work and panels of experts. These thematic platforms would be: (a) democracy, good governance and stability; (b) economic integration within a Neighbourhood Economic Community and convergence with EU policies (including environment and climate change); (c) energy security; and (d) soft measures to promote contacts between people (cultural cooperation, education etc). Third countries (Turkey?) could be involved in the thematic platforms. It is envisaged that EU funding would rise from €450 million in 2008 to €785 million in 2013, with additional resources also for "regional" initiatives and loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

There is only a very light reference to cooperation related to the common foreign and security policy

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(CFSP) and European defence and security policy (ESDP) dimensions to EU relationships with the countries concerned. It is crystal clear that these dimensions need much more attention, not least given the several conflicts awaiting resolution either among EaP countries or *vis-à-vis* in particular Russia: Nagorno Karabakh; Abkhazia; South Ossetia; Transnistria. And in any case the EU is already partially engaged in conflict-resolution in the region, for example through the work of the EU Special Representatives for Georgia, Moldova, and the Southern Caucasus. Similarly there is only light reference to the visa and labour migration issues, despite the fact that these are priority concerns for at least some EaP countries, and despite these having been highlighted by especially Polish proponents of the EaP.

Reactions to the proposals on the EU side

The member states of the EU have given a kind of green light for the development of the EaP by endorsing it at the European Council sessions of December 2008 and March 2009. On neither occasion, however, was there an extended discussion by EU political leaders, hardly surprising given the burden of the global financial crisis. Thus the main inputs so far have come either from the Commission or from some of the few EU member states with a clear interest and declared ambitions in relation to the EaP or to individual target countries. Predictably the Polish Government has been particularly proactive, understandably given its long-term concern for upgrading the EU-Ukraine relationship and for keeping open the possibility of a membership perspective for Ukraine. The Swedish Government initially supported the development of the EaP, although it has latterly been more muted on the specifics of how to develop the substance. The Swedes will of course be in the hot seat of the EU Council presidency in the second semester of 2009. The Czech EU Council Presidency has been committed to pushing the EaP forward during the first 2009 semester, but of course has had many other distractions.

Beyond this small group of member states the extent of engagement is much less clear. The Lithuanian Government has welcomed the initiative and claimed part of the credit for pushing it forward, not surprisingly given its geographical and historical positions. Interestingly both French and Italian ministers have signalled the need to find ways of associating Russia and Turkey with the development of the EaP, with the Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, going so far as to suggest that Russia be invited to attend the May 2009 summit ([press report 17 March 2009](#)). This point was stressed in an "[advisory letter](#)" of 17 March 2009 to the Dutch Government by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (a longer paper will follow), which insisted on: a) the need not to neglect Russia and Turkey in developing the initiative; b) the importance of making the EaP multilateral; c) the case for keeping open the prospect of EU membership as a longer term goal;

and d) the link to Nato policy. Germany has so far been somewhat absent from the discussion, although it has flagged up the difficulty of including Belarus in the EaP, despite the circumstance that the Czech Foreign Minister on 17 April confirmed the invitation to the Belarusian President to the May 2009 summit. The UK has indicated general support for the EaP. There has been also an argument among the EU member states about when and whether to be explicit about the level of financial resources to back the EaP. The Commission proposal for an allocation of €600 million (which would have added €350 million to the already committed budget for the next 4 years) was mentioned in the [European Council Declaration of 20 March 2009](#), though not firmly endorsed after strong French opposition to the equally strong Polish support for the commitment. There is continuing and tricky "discussion" about the allocation and availability of funding under the existing ENP financial arrangements and about the division of resources between southern neighbours in the Union for the Mediterranean and the eastern neighbours of the proposed EaP.

Some dogs, however, have not barked in the discussion so far, or at least not yet very loudly. Significantly some EU countries close to the EaP neighbours have been disturbingly silent in the public debate, most notably Greece, and perhaps more understandably Bulgaria and Romania (see below on the Romanian response to the Moldovan political crisis). These three are all "Black Sea" countries and members of the [Black Sea Economic Cooperation \(BSEC\)](#) process, agreed in 1992, established in 1994 (with a secretariat in Istanbul) and turned into an "organisation for regional cooperation" in 1999. BSEC includes as members all of the proposed EaP6 except Belarus (which has observer status), as well as Russia and Turkey as full members, with the additional involvement of various international agencies and latterly the European Commission as an observer alongside a number of other countries including 7 other EU member states. A further dimension was added in 2007/8 with the launching of the [Black Sea Synergy](#), an initiative backed by the European Commission to promote regional cooperation and to coordinate among a series of existing frameworks. Bulgaria, Greece and Romania are all committed to giving the still infant Black Sea Synergy an opportunity to bear fruit. Thus for example a recent Romanian paper makes proposals for a "[Black Sea cooperation platform](#)" on migration. Ministers from these three EU member states meet periodically to coordinate their policies towards Black Sea cooperation (with a meeting scheduled for late April 2009).

The absence of a strong Greek voice in the discussion creates a particular lacuna for three reasons. First, Greek policy-makers and entrepreneurs have an extensive and intensive knowledge of the Balkan and Black Sea regions (including a significant diaspora across the EaP6).

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They are particularly well-placed to develop proposals and tools that might be functionally appropriate for meeting circumstances on the ground in at least some of the EaP countries, just as they are also well-placed to bring critical judgement to bear on proposals from "Brussels" in which good intentions may run ahead of feasible reality. Second, Greek policy-makers, along with their Bulgarian and Romanian counterparts, have much to contribute to the discussion of how the EaP proposals do – or do not – mesh in with the existing circles of Black Sea cooperation. Third, Greek policy-makers are also much better placed than most to comment on how the EaP proposals mesh – or maybe do not mesh – with the EU's continuing enlargement policy *vis-à-vis* the Western Balkans and Turkey. The Greek Government has recently reconfirmed its support for Turkish EU membership. Greece also currently holds the rotating presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which provides an additional platform for cooperation.

Reactions from the target countries and other neighbours

What then of the reactions from the six relevant target countries? The Armenian and Azerbaijani governments seem not as yet to have expressed strong opinions. The Belarus Government has given preliminary (albeit ambiguous) indications of interest, although the prospects for its substantive involvement will clearly be subject to tight conditionality on the EU side. The Georgian Government has responded positively, while stressing, on the one hand, the importance of the EU recognising its sovereignty and territorial integrity and hence the conflict-resolution dimension, and, on the other hand, that the EaP is no substitute for an EU membership perspective. Moldovan politicians criticised the initiative as a diversion from their aim of full EU membership, against a background of their claim to be much more advanced in their transformation processes than the Caucasus countries, a claim which looks tendentious in the light of the current crisis in Chisinau. Ukrainian politicians have been somewhat lukewarm; they have stressed, on the one hand, their firm aim of full EU membership, and, on the other hand, the importance of thicker bilateral relationships with the EU, on which they are well ahead of the other EaP countries, given the prior agreement by the EU to develop an EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (and not merely a partnership and cooperation agreement). However, the various indications (at the time of writing) of political unrest in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine greatly complicate the picture.

In addition and importantly, some Russian officials have signalled their concerns about the EaP initiative. Thus on 21 March 2009 Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, accused the EU of seeking to develop a "sphere of influence" in the Russian neighbourhood. Turkish politicians have had other things on their minds given the recent elections. Nonetheless their efforts in recent months to normalise relations with Armenia are a relevant dimension. Steps are being taken that could lead, for

example, to the opening of the border, although keeping a balanced relationship with Azerbaijan is a real challenge. We should also take note of the close Russian-Turkish relationship.

Some discussions relevant to the EaP initiative have taken place inside other international agencies active in the EaP countries, such as the Council of Europe, to which all EaP6 except Belarus belong. Recently a Joint Action has been developed by the EBRD, the EIB and the World Bank to provide economic and financial stabilisation support for central, eastern and southern Europe, in this case prompted by concerns for these countries' economic welfare, irrespective of the nature of their relationships with the EU.

A critical assessment of the initial proposals

It will take some time for the EaP to be further specified and for ideas to crystallise about the most appropriate substance and tools for taking it forward. Several criticisms can be levelled at the initial outline of the EaP:

- It has been developed without the benefit of a solid template based on previous experience, not least given the evident concern to avoid committing to a pre-accession template, and given the lack of workable and tested alternatives to a membership perspective. In this context the European Economic Area (EEA) template seems entirely inappropriate as a model for the proposed Neighbourhood Economic Community, given that it was devised for and sustained by the advanced market economies of EFTA, with their highly developed legal and regulatory systems and the institutional capacity to create a counterpart "second pillar". The EaP countries start from quite different bases; thus, for example, Azerbaijan and Belarus do not yet belong to the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#).
- There is some confusion about the balance between bilateral and multilateral components of the offer. On the one hand, there are many good reasons for developing a multilateral approach, although this is not something that fits easily with the *acquis* of any of the countries concerned. On the other hand, it seems rather obvious that any country that can develop momentum in its bilateral relationship (especially as upgraded to an Association Agreement) is likely to give this priority, as the Ukrainians have already indicated.
- More realism is needed about the characteristics of the EaP countries and their relationships with each other, including economically. It would be helpful to have a good map of the economic and social exchanges (or lack of them) among the group. All carry legacies of their historical hub-and-spoke links with Russia and have sparse trade and economic links with each other. They certainly do not comprise a single coherent 6-country group and it is not evident that they divide into two more coherent 3-country groups. In other words more attention needs to be given

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II The conflict resolution issues should be more clearly in the policy frame.

- to a functional needs' assessment as regards the requirements of the EaP countries.
- The emphasis on promoting trade relationships with the EaP reflects a kind of quaint path-dependency on the part of the EU as regards the content of its relationships with many other countries. Notwithstanding the importance of trade in leveraging economic growth, it is not the top priority for any of the EaP6 in current economic circumstances, and the availability of demand inside the EU for their exports will for some time be limited. Stabilisation and investment support will surely be much more urgent priorities for them.
 - The disjunction between the Commission's emphasis on social, economic and governance dimensions (all genuinely important) and the geopolitical realities of the countries' situations is a major issue to be addressed. This suggests that the conflict resolution issues should be more clearly in the policy frame, despite and because of the sensitivities of the issues at stake.
 - It is disappointing that so far there has been little explicit signalling of how the EU contribution to the transformation and stabilisation of these countries is to be coordinated with the work of other international and regional agencies or with the bilateral programmes of individual EU member states. This is a gap partly because of the risks of confusion and overlap can have unfortunate and counterproductive consequences, and partly because in times of austerity it seems even more important to coordinate carefully. Here the EU (and especially the member states closest to these processes) can draw on its own experiences of, for example, the Söderköping Process (initiated by the UNHCR and the Swedish Migration Board in 2001 to promote cooperation between the acceding EU member states and the eastern neighbours, i.e. Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) or its support for the Black Sea Synergy and Black Sea Economic Cooperation (currently both at stages in their development where their deliverables need to match their ambitions), just as it has lessons to learn from the way in which the framework for the western Balkans has evolved under the new RCC and the revised CEFTA.
 - The reluctance to face up to the membership aspirations of at least some of the EaP countries will continue to be a difficulty for both the EU side and the partners' sides in developing the relationships. This is relevant to the way in which conditionality mechanisms are developed, to the incentives structures of the EaP, and to the ways in which the bilateral association agreements are fashioned.

All in all therefore, a good deal remains to be done to improve the focus and quality of the proposed EaP, as well as its intended deliverables.

In search of a more comprehensive and "joined-up" policy

The implications of the discussion above are that the EU needs to develop a more comprehensive policy – and one which joins up a variety of different segments of different policies. The joining-up is needed in at least four respects:

- i. The EU should review its current firm distinction between countries that are actual or potential candidates for regular EU membership and those that are on the other side of this line, not least because the timelines for anchored transformation and stabilisation, as well as the resolution of security issues, are so difficult to predict country by country.
- ii. The EU should put its own house in order by aligning those of its own policies that are relevant to the region, in particular as regards CFSP, on the one hand, and the routines of "external relations" or of enlargement/pre-accession processes, on the other hand. Here it is critically important to manage carefully and in parallel the relationships between the EU and Russia, on the one hand, and that between the EU and Turkey, on the other hand.
- iii. Much more attention needs to be given to how EU policy is developed in relation to the policies of other international and regional agencies and organisations towards the region – EU member states are after all also (mostly) members of Nato and all are participants in the EBRD, the World Bank and so forth.
- iv. It is crucially important to reengage a larger number of EU member states in the development of policy, both in the sense of political attention and as regards their own bilateral and regional contacts with this or that country in non-EU Europe. Prior experience tells us that active "godparents" inside the EU are very relevant to the ways in which the non-members are treated. (Only a minority of EU member states are currently involved in Black Sea Synergy, three as members and seven as observers.)

Future policy has to be situated somewhere on the spectrum between, at one end, an assumption of no (or virtually no) enlargement beyond the EU27 and, at the other end, a more permissive acceptance of potential further candidates, as and when their transformation processes take them into the category of plausible candidates. [John Palmer \(2008\)](#) argues, for example, for an ambitious and durable alternative framework to regular EU membership in the form of a "European Commonwealth". His view is that further enlargement of the EU is improbable and probably undesirable and that a wide, ambitious and durable framework should be created by the EU with all of its European neighbours (including Russia), with shared multilateral institutions and wide-ranging functional cooperation. There is currently virtually no support for the directly contrasting policy that would admit a "membership perspective" for all of the EaP6, partly because of enlargement fatigue and partly because of

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II Reinforce the consortium of international agencies dealing with economic stabilisation.

II Take forward sectoral policy cooperation, notably on energy issues, .. including through partnerships with Russia and Turkey.

II Identify ways of addressing the foreign and security policy concerns (including a "Nato policy") relevant to relationships with the EaP6.

the uncertainties of the transformation processes in the countries concerned. In addition the outlook and timescale for enlargement to include Turkey or the Western Balkans (with the probable exception of Croatia) look uncertain. Though logic might favour the merits of acknowledging a "membership perspective" for at least some of the EaP6, in the short-to-medium term most plausibly Moldova and Ukraine, this may be too much for EU policy-makers to swallow at the moment. We have to be realistic about the current inertia as regards further enlargement.

The preferred thesis underlying this paper is to keep the door open for both current and further potential candidates, depending on their processes of transformation and subject to the firm retention of pre-accession and accession conditionality. This suggests that we should blur rather than sharpen the line between "candidates" and "potential candidates" and concentrate on thickening and deepening functional cooperation, as well as investments in political and economic stabilisation. Given the difficulties of establishing a policy that is crystal clear and given also the transaction costs involved in a multiplication of idiosyncratic institutional procedures for managing relationships with this or that country or group of countries, there is a strong case for an institutional spring cleaning and a strong case against the proliferation of institutional frameworks. Palmer is right to stress the costs of procedural promiscuity. There is, however, some merit in functional differentiation among different domains of cooperation along something like the following lines:

- Develop more conventional trade liberalization through, on the one hand, an enlarged CEFTA process ([Wijkman 2009](#)), which could relatively easily be stretched to include Moldova and Ukraine, and in due course perhaps others from the EaP6 (in addition to the existing members from the Western Balkans). A serious investment in making CEFTA deliver makes more sense than the creation of yet another and separate framework. On the other hand, there is probably a need to pilot an appropriate form of trade liberalisation among the countries of the Southern Caucasus – in this case with Turkey as an integral partner in the process, given its economic weight and experience in that part of the neighbourhood – although much needs first to change on the ground.
- Continue and reinforce the consortium of international agencies dealing with economic stabilisation, investment and so forth across the region, where the EU involvement has to be dovetailed with those of the EBRD and the World Bank – and not only via the EIB. This seems much more important than the EaP proposal to insist on "convergence" with EU policies at this stage.
- Clarify and develop – again on a consortium basis – the complementary roles of the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE as regards the development of the rule of law, democratic

processes, stable governance, human rights and so forth.

- Take forward relevant areas of sectoral policy cooperation, with energy markets and energy security being obvious priorities, as the Commission has already signalled, and here again be careful to connect to both existing instruments (such as the South East Europe Energy Community, as well as the various Black Sea fora) and to partnerships with Russia and Turkey.
- Identify ways of addressing the foreign and security policy concerns (including a "Nato policy") relevant to relationships with the EaP6 and to the subject matter laid out in the EaP proposals, in recognition that EaP policy, like enlargement policy and the previous ENP, is part of EU foreign policy.

The approach outlined above lacks the intended crisp definition of an EaP and instead replaces it with a "Venn diagram" approach, which, on the one hand, allows for the development of functional cooperation with fuzzy boundaries and with clear linkages to other international and regional agencies, while, on the other hand, emphasising the necessity of tying policy into a more sharply defined foreign policy perspective. To achieve this requires the efficient harnessing of resources and experience and also the building of capacity to deliver functionally effective results. Here indeed the European Commission has a key role to play: by developing a strategic approach to these interlinked policies (as it did in developing the enlargement policy of the EU during the 1990s); by reinforcing its own staff expertise on the countries concerned in order to deepen knowledge of them; and by keeping up the pressure on the EU member states to pay attention and to devote resources to the whole of non-EU Europe. In this context it would be counter-productive to segment the management of any version of the EaP by appointing a "special coordinator", as the Polish Government has repeatedly proposed. Moreover, this could contribute to a weakening of the Commission's role, just as the new framework for the Union of the Mediterranean with a new secretariat in Barcelona has stripped influence away from the Commission. Instead the distribution of portfolios in the next college of commissioners should be adapted to improve the coherence of policy – and both the Council and the European Parliament should find ways of joining together the various segments of policy.

Yet maybe any such approach to this group of eastern partners risks missing its objectives **both** as regards the needs and interests of the target countries, **and** as regards the EU and its member states. As so far developed the EaP, like the preceding ENP, has limited purchase on the countries concerned and has not yet made much of a contribution either to the longer-term stabilisation of the region or to dealing with short-term conflicts and crises. The French presidency-led response to the Russian-Georgian crisis of August 2008 may have

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mitigated tensions for a while, but the underlying problems remain unresolved. In addition the succession of overlapping initiatives towards the region have been propelled too much by the desire of this or that EU government to be in the spotlight or to be seen as the sponsor. There is disappointingly little evidence of a cumulative sense of collective and purposive EU responsibility towards the region. Indeed the reactions to the Moldovan elections crisis seems to illustrate quite the opposite – as the Romanians have been pulled into strident bilateral tension with the Moldovan Government and in response have made the extraordinary offer of

Romanian citizenship to an unknown number of Moldovans, maybe a million who would then gain rights as EU citizens, quite a challenge for other EU countries.

Of course the EU and all EU countries have an interest in having a stable eastern (as southern) neighbourhood. But they have yet to find the tools to achieve this – they need either to be much more modest and low-key, recognising that to create excessive expectations is counterproductive, or they need to be more ambitious and more strategic, then investing more attention and more resources. As the EaP currently stands it falls between these two stools.

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Selected Further Reading:

- Jens Bastian, [Falling Behind Again? Southeast Europe and the Global Crisis](#), ELIAMEP Thesis 2/2009, Athens, March 2009.
- Deniz Devrim and Evelina Schulz, [Enlargement Fatigue in the European Union: From Enlargement to Many Unions](#), Working Paper 13/2009, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 2009.
- Christoph Hillion and Alan Mayhew, [The Eastern Partnership– something new or window-dressing?](#), Sussex European Institute Working Paper No 109, Falmer: SEI, 2009.
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- Per Magnus Wijkman, [Frihandel för fred. Exemplet Balkan](#), Nr 37 Pocketbiblioteket, SNS Förlag, Stockholm, 2009.

Editor

Janis A. Emmanouilidis
Stavros Costopoulos Research
Fellow

49 Vas. Sofias Ave.
10676 Athens Greece
T +30 210 7257 110
F +30 210 7257 114
emmanouilidis@eliamep.gr

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