

**- European Neighbourhood Policy -**  
**The importance of Regional Cooperation in the Context of ENP**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF  
EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY**

**BACKGROUND**

In the Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament concerning strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy (dated 4 December 2006), three fields were noted, where more active and coherent cooperation between EU and European Neighbourhood Policy countries could strengthen the implementation of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in general. These fields were the following:

- 1) trade and economical integration;
- 2) mobility and migration;
- 3) cooperation in resolution of regional conflicts.

The resolution of such issues in the dimension on the level of bilateral talks between EU and ENP countries is quite complicated. Therefore the tool of regional cooperation may be used.

In the meantime a lot of attention in the EU is devoted to the initiative of French President Nicolas Sarkozy to create a *Union of Mediterranean* that was officially launched on 13 July 2008. However, the initiative to strengthen regional cooperation in the framework of ENP

cannot be as a new one. It was mentioned and discussed in all the strategic documents that concern the ENP. For example, Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours* (from 11 March, 2003) underlines the importance of regional and sub-regional cooperation (and especially Southern dimension of it). On 12 May 2004, the European Commission in the *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper* stated that “...EU supports regional cooperation of the East and the South...”, as well as “...the participation of Russian Federation as a partner of EU on the basis of mutual interests and common will in the processes of regional cooperation should be encouraged.”

The promotion of regional cooperation is a key objective of the ENP, not only in the Southern but also in the Eastern neighbourhood. On 4 December 2006, in the Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament proposed to expand the cooperation in the Black Sea region as a tool for strengthening the ENP. This initiative may be effective and correspond to the goals of ENP if a broad geographical extension of Black Sea cooperation will not harm the concrete agenda of ENP. In any case, Black Sea regional cooperation may be regarded as a new stage of ENP implementation. The future of this initiative will depend on how successful the advantages of the initiative will be preserved and weaknesses eliminated.

## **STRENGTHENING OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ENP**

- 1) Regional cooperation initiatives supplement European Neighbourhood Policy – this broadens the possibilities to solve problematic situations in the framework of ENP.** The initiatives of enhanced cooperation in the framework of

ENP is an adequate format to solve such ENP issues that can not be solved on the bilateral basis between the EU and ENP states due to their complexity. However, these issues could be tackled by using multinational means, for example, the resolution of “frozen” conflicts is possible only in the wider - regional format;

- 2) Regional cooperation initiatives stimulate cooperation among Eastern and Southern dimensions of ENP countries.** The establishment of the regional cooperation format of ENP's Eastern dimension should enhance interregional cooperation between the countries of Eastern and Southern dimensions (Mediterranean Sea region countries - the participants of Barcelona process). At the same time, more focus on ENP's Eastern dimension can help to balance EU's attitude towards both - Eastern and Southern ENP's dimensions.

## **WEAKNESSES OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ENP**

- 1) The excessively broad agenda of regional cooperation.** Despite all the advantages of a regional approach to ENP, there is no evident added value that can be observed at the moment in some of the projects, for example, such as the Black Sea dimension. Therefore it is rational to initiate regional cooperation in the framework of ENP only in the event that it strengthens the collaboration between EU and ENP countries in the fields that are not envisaged in ENP Action Plans. In other words, there is no excuse for duplicating pre-existing ENP instruments.
- 2) There are no specific financial resources set for carrying out regional cooperation in the framework of ENP.** The funds of ENPI shall be used for the development of regional cooperation in the framework of ENP. However, proportions between the means devoted to Eastern and Southern ENP dimensions are not clearly set. It is also obvious that equilibrium between Southern and Eastern dimensions of

ENP in the financial sense is not maintained. The Eastern dimension is getting much less resources than it is needed to carry out effective programmes.

Besides, the financing of regional initiatives from ENPI resources is not a rational decision as ENPI, first of all, is devoted to the enhancement of bilateral initiatives between EU and ENP countries. In case clear accountability of regional project implementation is absent, support for the bilateral EU and ENP countries' projects could be reduced.

**3) Regional initiatives cover neighbouring states without ENP status.** For example, in the initiative of the Black Sea regional cooperation, it is suggested to enlarge the format of the Eastern dimension of ENP thereby embracing Turkey and the Russian Federation, which are *not* ENP partners. Hence, the initiative of the Black Sea regional cooperation embraces three different country groups: countries of the ENP Eastern dimension (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), EU candidate-country Turkey and Russian Federation, which has a special cooperation agreement with the EU. Such a format for cooperation blurs the content of ENP and at the same time lowers the motivation of EU neighbours that are seeking EU membership to participate in ENP.

**4) Belarus is not included into any of the regional cooperation initiatives in the framework of ENP.** The exclusion of Belarus has had an undeniably negative effect on the implementation of ENP in that country. There is an increased risk that presently an isolated Belarus will distance itself even more from collaboration with the EU, because in addition to complicated bilateral relations with the EU as such, Belarus is also be eliminated from regional cooperation initiatives. It must be admitted that Belarusian inclusion in regional cooperation initiatives would be much more efficient than mere EU – Belarus relations, as it would exclude a lot of sensitive political questions which Belarus is not interested in pursuing solely at a European level.

- 5) The inclusion of the Russian Federation in regional cooperation initiatives in the framework of ENP reduces its functional importance.** The regional cooperation initiatives raise the dependence of ENP Eastern dimension's agenda on the agenda of EU-Russian relations. It reduces the importance of EU-East European countries relations in comparison with EU – Russian relations. At the same time it expands the influence of the Russian Federation over ENP and minimizes the motivation of ENP Eastern dimension countries to take an active part in it. As some ENP participating countries in the East use ENP cooperation to counterbalance the influence of the Russian Federation the abovementioned dynamics lower their interest in ENP membership.
- 6) The present format of regional cooperation does not correspond with the needs and requirements of ENP Eastern dimension countries in their relations with the EU.** The essential reason is that ENP is being strengthened by extensively broadening the co-operational format, but not by deepening the substance of cooperation between the EU and different ENP countries (for example, strengthening the cooperation and facilitating the solution of "frozen" conflicts using ENP means). The possibilities to strengthen ENP Eastern dimension lies not in the creation of new cooperation formats, but in strengthening (deepening) the existing ones.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Basing on the analysis above, YEPP suggests:

- 1. Giving a new political impetus to the strengthening and streamlining of the Eastern Partnership following the example of the enhancing political dimension of the Mediterranean region.** We think that it should go beyond the current ENP and offer more profound integration with the EU as well as create a permanent formula for multilateral cooperation. Regional format also will give a

sustained offer for Belarus, which has not been embraced by any of the EU initiatives so far, to reinforce co-operation with the EU.

**2. The regional cooperation initiatives in the framework of ENP have to have clear priorities on the fields of cooperation.** Regional cooperation in different regions first of all has to include those fields, where the cooperation between the EU and ENP countries on the bilateral level is not effective. In other words, regional cooperation should supplement but not replace existing individual cooperation formats between the EU and its ENP partners. The main subjects of regional cooperation could be energy, transport, environment protection and other issues. Special attention should be paid to the resolution of "frozen" conflicts. Regional dimensions, which could also include the Russian Federation, would speed up the resolution of these conflicts.

**3. The participation of Belarus in the regional cooperation initiatives should be considered.** Belarus at the moment does not belong to any of the regional cooperation initiatives; however it remains a formal partner of ENP. The exclusion of Belarus from the initiatives (for example, Black Sea initiative) limits the possibilities of its political cooperation with the EU. Therefore the options how to involve Belarus in the abovementioned initiatives should be discussed. One of the most realistic fields where Belarus could be included is new Eastern partnership initiative. Energy or other sectors of policy important for this country could be considered as a sphere of mutual interest. If Belarus is not incorporated into any regional cooperation initiative, selective strengthening of ENP can take place. This way Belarus would stay aside. At the same it is important to note that EU countries keep up selective engagement policy related to the Republic of Belarus: to cooperate on the working level and to raise the issues of the democracy and human rights in all convenient circumstances. Further steps of EU-Belarus relations,

including the activation of ENP in Belarus, depend upon concrete steps towards the improvement of situation in the human rights' field and respect for the rule of law in the Republic of Belarus.

**ENP regional cooperation initiatives shall improve the possibilities of ENP countries to move closer towards EU integration.** Full EU membership of European countries within ENP has no strong pathway so far. Therefore the relations between ENP countries and the EU should be based on intensive practical cooperation. Having in mind that the priority fields in the regional cooperation agenda could be the sectors of energy, transport or environmental protection, the regional cooperation initiatives could become an additional impetus to strengthen the cooperation between the countries of EU and ENP.

*Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting, 6 September 2008*