

Summary UU5

In this statement the Committee on Foreign Affairs considers the Communication A new response to a changing neighbourhood (COM (2011) 303) from the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Contributing to democratic development and economic integration in the neighbourhood is one of the EU's most central foreign policy tasks. The EU faces an important challenge in continuing to contribute to an open Europe with a special interest and engagement in developments in the Union's neighbouring countries. This includes a further development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which includes the Eastern Partnership and the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean region. Increased trade, mobility across borders and common regulatory frameworks contribute to prosperity and security and also inspire democratic development. The partnership with our neighbouring countries should be designed in such a way that it leads to the greatest mutual benefit.

Events in the Southern Mediterranean and the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy conducted in 2010 show that EU support to political reforms in the area have generally had limited effect.

In the opinion of the Committee, the EU needs to learn from previous mistakes in the ENP and should formulate a new policy focusing, to a greater extent, on support to democracy. For neighbouring countries and their citizens, the advantages of intensified cooperation with the EU must be made clearer. The ENP should be designed in such a way that citizens in neighbouring countries can see clear examples of the positive effects that closer relations can contribute to.

The Committee is convinced that EU citizens do not want a poor, unsettled and unstable neighbourhood. In addition to the actual reform of the ENP, it is important that leaders in the EU and governments in EU member states inform EU citizens that more far-reaching support to and exchange with the neighbour countries is necessary.

The reformed neighbourhood policy must show a clear correlation between, on the one hand words and agreements and, on the other hand, concrete actions and implementation as well as follow up of results. The EU and partner countries must agree on clear follow-up mechanisms which include criteria that must be fulfilled for (continued) support to be granted. The EU's actions must be clear and predictable and linked to conditions.

EU support to countries covered by the ENP should increase. This should be achieved by means of redistribution. With increased economic support and if the EU member states develop a uniform view of the neighbourhood policy, the Committee considers that there will be greater opportunity to serve as a source of inspiration and to influence reform efforts and policies in the neighbouring countries.

In the opinion of the Committee, the new neighbourhood policy should be based on mutual accountability and on a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The support should be considerably more differentiated than it is today. This could mean that countries that can and want to take their reform efforts further are offered a closer political association and successive integration into the EU's internal

market. The Eastern Partnership countries, which are situated in Europe in geographical terms, should be entitled to apply for membership as soon as they fulfil the necessary criteria.

In the opinion of the Committee, the EU should exercise an influence in all aspects of the reformed neighbourhood policy, in order to promote gender equality and strengthen the role of women. Gender equality is a central development goal in itself. Increased gender equality can strengthen productivity, promote a development that benefits the next generation and lead to more representative institutions. Measures to promote firmly-rooted democracy should also strengthen women's rights and promote their political participation. Such support can take many forms and should not only have the goal of increasing the proportion of women, but also to strengthen women's influence. The neighbourhood policy should be designed to support the ambition of expressing gender equality in the partner countries' constitutions.

The Committee considers that the EU should draw up and publish reports on an annual basis about the human rights situation in the EU's neighbouring countries, but also in other countries in the world. By publishing human rights reports, countries' lack of respect for human rights or progress in the field can be brought to the surface. This can serve as a source of inspiration for reform efforts in other parts of the same region, or in the world.

The EU should consider the possibility of developing benchmarks to grade countries covered by the ENP as regards, for example freedom of media, freedom of association, independence of the judiciary, corruption and implementation of elections.

In the opinion of the Committee, not just the European Parliament and parliaments in the partner countries, but also national parliaments in the EU member states, can serve as important bridge-builders between our societies, and this should be highlighted in the new ENP.

Civil society is a precondition for democracy. The actors of civil society, including political actors working for democratic change in their countries, such as political parties, unregistered NGOs, independent journalists, human rights activists, trade unions and other parties to the labour market can be important in implementing development measures. This should be taken into account when democracy support is distributed.

The Committee considers that negotiations should be held with neighbouring countries concerning association agreements and far-reaching, comprehensive free-trade areas with parties that so wish and with the necessary preconditions. The EU should work to ensure that rural and agricultural development are prioritised in efforts to combat poverty. The aim must be to stimulate increased production, sustainable food security and sustainable economic development in the cooperation countries.

The EU can do much more than it does today to facilitate contacts between people. For people from the neighbourhood who are given the opportunity to visit the EU, the exchange of experience from the visit can serve as a source of inspiration for democratisation and modernisation. Research and grant programmes targeting young people should be made more extensive. Through visa simplification agreements, mobility can be promoted between partner countries and the EU, for example for students, researchers and business people, with the aim of strengthening neighbourhood relations.

The Committee considers it important that the EU, in its review of the ENP, makes the most of and reinforces existing structures for the promotion of democracy and human rights, including the activities of the Council of Europe.

Funding for the neighbourhood policy should be achieved by means of a cost-efficient and restrictive budget policy. New expenditure for the neighbourhood policy in 2012 should be funded by means of actual redistribution within the existing budget under expenditure heading 4. The Committee rejects the idea of funding by means of margins and flexibility instruments as this would involve increased fees for member states. It also rejects funding stemming from reflows as this conflicts with established, healthy budget principles.

A redistribution of EU funds for external relations should be considered, in particular as regards the EU's multi-annual financial framework after 2013.

The statement contains reservations.