

Statement by the Committee on Foreign Affairs

2014/15:UU18

Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy

Summary

In this statement, the Committee considers the joint consultation paper Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy (JOIN (2015) 6 final), as published by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission on 4 March 2015.

The Committee considers that the primary objective of the neighbourhood policy must be to promote democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, gender equality and sustainable economic development in order to achieve stability, security and well-being in the EU's neighbourhood.

The Committee notes that developments in its neighbourhood have changed the preconditions for European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Committee considers that it is of central importance that neighbourhood policy be designed in such a way that it has maximum impact. In the light of this, the Committee welcomes the review of the neighbourhood policy. The Committee also emphasises how important it is that the implementation of the neighbourhood should continue during the review process.

The Committee emphasises that developments in the EU's neighbourhood have increased the need for a comprehensive approach towards its neighbourhood. The Committee therefore stresses the importance of actively striving to create synergies between the neighbourhood policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy and other policy areas that have external dimensions.

The Committee is of the opinion that financial support, deep and comprehensive free trade agreements, as well as partnership for mobility, will constitute fundamental instruments of the neighbour policy also in the future. Furthermore, the regional dimensions of the ENP are of central importance. The Committee considers that the regional perspectives of the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) promote exchange and integration between the partner countries in each of the regions and strengthen the ownership aspect of the individual countries. The regional approach also entails the opportunity to adapt relations with the EU based on the conditions and ambition of each particular region.

The Committee takes a positive view of differentiation in the light of the fact that the partner countries have different levels of ambition regarding their relation to the EU. The Committee emphasises that countries that are able and want to go further in their reform efforts should be offered a closer political association with and gradual integration into the EU's internal market and that the countries in the Eastern Partnership that are geographically located in Europe should have the right to apply for membership of the EU as soon as they meet the necessary criteria. The Committee considers that a membership perspective for countries geographically located in Europe is important for mobilising political actors, administration and society in a direction conducive to reform. The Committee would like to underline in this connection the fact that the EU and each of the partner countries have a sovereign right to independently define how the partnership develops.

In relation to partner countries that have a lower level of ambition as regards their relations to the EU, the Committee considers that it is important that the EU should make an effort to demonstrate the positive effects of closer alignment with the EU in order to stimulate the development of relations. The Committee considers that, regardless of the extent of relations with a partner country, it is important that the EU in its relations with the country highlights fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality. The Committee stresses that support via civil society is an important channel to promote these fundamental values. This particularly applies to partner countries whose governments fail to carry out reforms to strengthen democracy and increase respect for human rights.

The Committee notes that the joint paper states that the neighbourhood policy is most effective when collaboration is directed at areas where there is a clear common interest in deeper relations and cooperation. The Committee considers that a revised neighbourhood policy with a clearer focus on interests would entail positive effects in terms of for example strengthened ownership on the part of the partner countries. At the same time, the Committee emphasises that increased focus on common interests must not result in a degrading of the basic foundation on which the neighbourhood policy rests – that is democracy, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality – in deference to for example security cooperation and counter-terrorism activities. The view of the Committee is that progress regarding the former is a precondition for being able to deal effectively with the latter.

The Committee emphasises that increased respect for women's rights, women's participation in politics and gender equality are of central importance to peace, security, democracy and sustainable development and must therefore be clearly highlighted within the framework of the forthcoming communication on the neighbourhood policy. The Committee also stresses how important it is that the ENP should promote such things as sustainable economic development and strengthen cooperation on environmental and climate issues.

The Committee considers that the neighbourhood policy should be designed in such a way that the EU can adapt its policy depending on changed conditions in any one particular country or region. The Committee emphasises how crucial it is that the incentive-based foundation of the neighbourhood policy remains in place and underlines how important it is that there is a clear link between the implementation of reforms in the partner countries and the extent of EU support. In this context, the Committee stresses that the principle of 'more for more' is of central importance for the creation of incentives to implement reforms in the partner countries. The Committee notes that there may be reason to carry on a discussion on how the conditionality of the cooperation can be better adapted to the preconditions for the bilateral relation in each particular case. Countries with more far-reaching cooperation with the EU ought to expect to be scrutinised more frequently and thoroughly by the EU than countries for which relations are more limited.

The Committee agrees with what is stated in the consultation paper regarding the importance of improving strategic communication on the objectives and direction of the neighbourhood policy in both the partner countries and the EU and that this is an important task when it comes to furthering the sense of individual responsibility of the partner countries. In order to improve the visibility of the neighbourhood policy, it is particularly important to broaden the EU's collaboration with actors such as civil society. The Committee also considers that the national parliaments can serve as important bridge-builders between the EU's and partner countries' decision-makers and societies and that this should be taken into account in the formulation of a new neighbourhood policy. The Committee also notes that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, PA-UfM, and the corresponding assembly within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, are important institutions for promoting the implementation of neighbourhood policy.

There are two reservations in the statement (Sweden Democrats and the Left Party).