



## European Neighbourhood Policy: Implications of the strategy

Dr. Jayaraj Amin

Department of Political Science, Mangalore University, Karnataka, India

### Abstract

In 2004, the European Union (EU) rolled out its novel “European Neighbourhood Policy” (ENP) to promote stability, security and prosperity in its neighbourhood in the backdrop of ‘coloured revolutions’ on its doorstep. The policy aimed to promote European political and economic values, such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and a market economy, in the neighbourhood. It offered sixteen ‘partner’ countries liberalised entry into EU markets and economic assistance through Association Agreements. The coupling of partners’ system with EU values and norms was presumed to erode the psychological boundary between the EU and its neighbours, ensuring greater security and stability in the region. The ENP is periodically reviewed to make it more effective and inclusive. The ENP offered ‘everything but membership’ to the partners. However, despite the best efforts of the EU, the ENP has not realised its objectives fully. The EU’s normative hegemon role and soft power strategy have had a limited impact on the implementation of the EU’s preferred political values by its partners. This article analyses the background of the ENP, its core principles and implications, suggesting the need for greater democratisation and inclusivity.

**Keywords:** European Neighbourhood Policy, EU values, association agreements, regional stability, shared interest

### Introductions

Responding to the developments in its neighbourhood and to provide an institutional framework to deal with the neighbours, the European Union (EU) launched an innovative and ambitious “European Neighbourhood Policy” (ENP) in 2004. It aimed to foster stability, security and prosperity in the EU’s neighbouring regions, both in the South and in the East<sup>[1]</sup>. The policy sought to build a “circle of friends” who would pursue EU laid norms, benefit from development aid, and contain the unrest in the region. These policy perspectives and the extent of realisation of the goals are put under scanner in different quarters, which calls for closer scrutiny of ENP. Hence, in the fitness of things, it would be pertinent to understand the context of ENP adoption and its nature before its evaluation.

### Background

The Rome Treaty (1957) establishing the European Communities (EC), the forerunner of the EU, offered membership to any ‘European’ Country provided it accepted the EC’s integration structure. In the initial enlargement of the EC/EU, countries having a similar political and economic structure of the EC/EU from Western Europe joined the EC/EU, and there were not many adjustment problems. However, with the end of the Cold War, most Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) that historically did not share the liberal and market economy traditions of the West applied for EU membership. Admission of these qualitatively different countries required a clear position on the part of the EU to ensure stability and its liberal identity intact.

The EU now introduced “Copenhagen Criteria” (1993) requiring applicant countries to commit to democracy, rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities and a functioning market economy with an ability to adopt the EU’s body of law (*acquis communautaire*) developed since the 1950s<sup>[2]</sup>. The Helsinki European Council (1999) further

prescribed that the prospective countries should settle their disputes peacefully and resolve any outstanding border disputes first<sup>[3]</sup>. However, the developments were not on expected lines. There was criticism that in 2004, ten CEECs that were not yet ready were admitted to the EU, and many other CEECs are in line. Adding to the worry was the onset of the Yugoslavian crisis and the question of a stable neighbourhood, coupled with concerns of increasing drug trafficking, organised crime, etc. and an ‘enlargement fatigue’. A new boundary line was developing with clear differences in living standards, environmental standards, and social indicators like public health between the ‘insiders’ (affluent EU) and ‘outsiders’ (EU neighbourhood), threatening the very fabric of the EU. So, the stable neighbourhood was a priority now for the EU, which was viewed as possible with the spread of EU norms and values linked with EU incentives<sup>[4]</sup>.

The result was the launching of ENP in 2004 in the backdrop of ‘Colour revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004, respectively. ENP was reviewed in 2011 with a focus on “deep and sustainable democracy” following the “Arab Spring” and conflicts on the EU’s doorstep - Libya, Syria and Ukraine. The second major review in 2015 prioritised stability and laid more “differentiated” approach to meet the specific needs of partner countries. From the €8.488 billion funding during 1999-2006, the ENP budget was raised to €15.40 billion in 2013-2020<sup>[5]</sup>. It further rose to €19.3 billion in 2021-2017 (through *Global Europe* instrument).

### Core Principles

The novel ENP was conceived as a substitute for enlargement. It offered the partner countries “sharing of everything but institutions” (extension of EU benefits but no membership). Since stability of neighbourhood was seen as important, ENP brought within its frame 16 neighbours (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco,

Palestine, Syria, Tunisia in the South and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine in the East). The ENP encouraged them to accept EU preferred values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, respect for minorities, market economy, as well as security and foreign policy issues, including conflict resolution, terrorism, drug trafficking, proliferation of arms, etc. The ENP also adopted a tailor-made approach or framework through which countries made their own choices for their national development. Along with bilateral agreements, ENP offered 'Association Agreements' (AAs) to partner countries that provided road map for domestic reforms in social, political and administrative arenas.

In exchange for reforms, neighbours received tariff-free entry to some or all EU market access (in industrial goods or agricultural products), visa facilitation for free movement of people, financial aid or technical assistance. The Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), which came into being in 2014 (merged in 2021 with the 'Global Europe' financial instrument), assured incentives and rewarded best performers and also offered faster and flexible funds to them. So the ENP sought economic harmonisation by removing trade barriers and providing access to the EU market while ensuring adherence to the EU legal norms and standards (non-adherence led to deprivation of benefits). The EU regularly monitors the progress in implementing the reforms through annual progress reports, modelled on those for enlargement countries<sup>[6]</sup>.

The 2015 review of the ENP added 3 joint priorities for cooperation- Economic development for stabilisation, security and migration and mobility<sup>[7]</sup>. The focus of the review in the context of the Arab Spring and disturbance was to address the changing geopolitical realities by shifting the focus from 'everything except membership' that was increasingly becoming less attractive to a more pragmatic position of 'more for more' (more support to reforms). The EU also accepted 'differentiation' (rather than a one-size-fits-all approach) that recognised different aspirations of partner countries, enabling it to offer tailor-made partnerships with each partners. Joint Documents (i.e. Partnership Priorities, Association Agendas or equivalents) are set together with each country, focusing on 'shared interests', allowing a sense of 'ownership' and 'flexibility' in tailoring support to each partner country's ambitions. Greater involvement of EU member states and shared responsibility are also among the key principles of the ENP<sup>[8]</sup>.

However, all follow-ups have to be within the broad policy framework set up by the EU. The ENP is complemented by three regional initiatives: the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership. The UfM and the Eastern Partnership are multilateral and involve shared institutions (Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, Euronest, regular summits)<sup>[9]</sup>. In a nutshell, the ENP sought to promote security and stabilisation, on the one hand, and European values and rules, on the other, to make it possible to expand the security community of which the EU forms the hub, but without actually expanding the Union itself.

### Implications

The ENP is a policy measure that aimed to contain unrest, stabilise the region, and minimise inequality between the core (EU) and its periphery. It was an effective response to

'enlargement fatigue' afflicting the EU, creating a new 'ring of friends'. It enticed the recipients with the advantages of the EU market without membership and ensured the compliance of EU preferred values in the neighbourhood, preventing ideological rift with the EU and damage to the EU interests. The EU's preferred values like democracy and rule of law are seen as important for EU security, and the ENP was instrumentalised to secure peace and security in the region by ensuring advancement and echo of the EU values in the neighbourhood and promotion of EU interests, including security.

However, its soft power approach through ENP is not without problems, both in theory and practice. As a normative hegemon, the EU in ENP tacitly portray the image of neighbours as inferior in ideas and values, and hence, requires the pursuance of its values in the neighbourhood<sup>[10]</sup>. Further, the Europeanisation of its values through conditionalities impresses domination, and in the making of ENP policies, the neighbours hardly have any role in negotiations<sup>[11]</sup>. In 2016, as part of the EU's Global Security Strategy, the ENP 'resilience' model, in the context of influx of refugees and humanitarian disasters across Europe, provided for involvement of local authorities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders but within the framework of strict EU norms<sup>[12]</sup>. This top-down approach of the EU has created discomfort in many of the ENP partner countries and groups/parties within those countries<sup>[13]</sup>. With the incentive of membership missing, the ENP has limited impact in fostering big democratic change in all partner countries, and for countries like Moldova and Ukraine, ENP was an arduous choice between a rock and a hard place in the backdrop of the Russian carrot and stick policy.

The partner countries have also complained of a lack of adequate financial and technical support for democratic reforms. 'More for more' will succeed only when the ruling class is inclined to adopt the European model, but in the absence of the promise of membership, the offer has not made much difference. The elites in partner countries often are not interested in the reforms suggested by the EU, and the diverse, pluralist countries and varied societal responses have made the reforms tardy. The Chinese support, migratory pressures and rising security threats from terrorism and Islamic radicalisation have their contribution in affecting the application of the ENP, especially in the southern neighbourhood<sup>[14]</sup>. Besides, there is a limited and a lack of uniform awareness of what constitutes shared values in the neighbourhood<sup>[15]</sup>. Disappointment at the results of the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine and of the Arab uprisings in 2011 and 2012 has put into question some of the fundamental assumptions underlying the ENP<sup>[16]</sup>.

Moreover, expecting EU standards from partner countries that are still struggling with their basic economic needs makes the expectations of ENP unrealistic. In some states, the real problem is not implementing democratic rules, but the process of state-building<sup>[17]</sup>. With tighter regulations of the EU's external action, particularly concerning immigration, the socio-cultural dimension of the partnership is overlooked in favour of economic and political interdependence<sup>[18]</sup>. The role of the EU Commission in monitoring implementation seems to undermine the ENP principle of partnership and joint ownership<sup>[19]</sup>.

Therefore, despite the EU's attempt to take a soft power approach to the neighbours, hard power considerations seem

to dominate, and over the years, strategic interests have taken precedence over liberal values in a transactional partnership<sup>[20]</sup>. Adding to the EU dismay, the instability and unrest both on the southern (Palestine-Israel, Syria) and eastern (Ukraine, Armenia-Azerbaijan) sides see no end. ENP location within the wider frame of EU foreign policy is therefore contested as the ENP remains caught in ‘conflicts between practice and principle, security and democracy, interest and values’<sup>[21]</sup>.

### Concluding remarks

Events in the EU neighbourhood, in particular the Ukraine crisis, wherein Armenia and Azerbaijan refused to toe the EU line, indicate that the ENP has not been able to make much headway in partner countries. Further, as the EUROMED survey points out, while trade integration has positively impacted the partners, the EU’s efforts to promote democracy and human rights have not made much progress<sup>[22]</sup>. The condescending EU attitude and conditionalities, coupled with the lack of membership possibilities and the EU’s focus on politico-economic and strategic aspects to the neglect of socio-cultural specificities of partners, appear to have inhibited internalisation of EU political values.

Therefore, it is essential that the EU intertwine political and economic development along with sociocultural aspects, with adequate space and consideration to the voice of the partners through dialogues and joint strategies based on consensus. ‘More for more’ strategy succeeds only when the partner is willing to undertake reforms, and hence, the diverse aspirations and their need for EU support need to be recognised. For instance, Israel, Egypt and Ukraine or Moldova may have different motives for linkages with the EU. The EU need to be sensitive to these aspirations and, if need be, provide ‘more for less’ considering their specificity or strategic imperatives. Without a democratic process and inclusivity in the real sense, the ENP will not be a sustainable policy in the long run.

### References

1. EEAS, European Neighbourhood Policy, Strategic Communications, 29-07-2021, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-neighbourhood-policy\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-neighbourhood-policy_en); European Parliament, “The European Neighbourhood Policy In-depth analysis”, 2017, 6-10. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/595865/EPRS\\_IDA\(2016\)595865\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/595865/EPRS_IDA(2016)595865_EN.pdf),
2. EUR-Lex Access to European Union Law, “Accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria)”, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html>
3. “Helsinki European Council 10 and 11 December Presidency Conclusions”, 1999. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell\\_en.htm#](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell_en.htm#)
4. Council of Europe, The European Neighbourhood Policy: avoiding the emergence of dividing lines between the European Union and its neighbours, South Programme II, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/south-programme2/eu-neighborhood-policy.html>
5. European Parliament, n.1, 22.
6. Michael Leigh, “The European Neighbourhood Policy: A suitable case for treatment”, in Sieglinde Gstohl and Erwan Lannon, eds, *The Neighbours of the European Union’s Neighbours*, Ashgate, 2014, 207
7. EEAS, n.1.

8. Ibid
9. European Parliament, n.1, 1, 13-20
10. Ben Tonra, “Identity construction through the ENP: Borders and Boundaries, Insiders and Outsiders”, in Richard G. Whitman and Stefan Wolff, eds, *European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective Context, Implementation and Impact*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 51-71. Rikard Bengtsson, “Constructing Interfaces: the neighbourhood discourse in EU external policy”, *European Integration*, vol. 30, No.5, December, 2008, 605-612
11. Geoffrey Edwards, “The construction of ambiguity and limits of attraction: Europe and its neighbourhood policy”, *European Integration*, 2008:30(1):52.
12. Diogo Ferreira, “Take it or leave it: A brief analysis of European Neighbourhood Policy”, 2024. <https://esthinktank.com/2024/04/08/take-it-or-leave-it-a-brief-analysis-of-the-european-neighbourhood-policy/>
13. Ibid Jaume Castan Pinos The Conflicting Aims of the European Neighborhood Policy and its Secondary Effects, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2014:29(2):133-146, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2014.915703>
14. Hrant Kostanyan, ed., *Assessing European Neighbourhood Policy Perspectives from the literature*, CEPS, Brussels, 2017, 4.
15. Ibid, 54.
16. Michael Leigh, n.6, 208, 211-13.
17. Rafal Czachor, “The European Neighbourhood Policy- a critical overview of current results”, *EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POLICY NOTE* University of Nicosia, 2019:39:7. [https://www.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/EMP\\_N\\_39.pdf](https://www.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/EMP_N_39.pdf)
18. Diogo Ferreira, n.12
19. Geoffrey Edwards, n.11, 51.
20. Steven Blockmans, *The obsolescence of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Centre for European Policy Studies, London, 2017, 8-11, 21-27, <https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Blockmans%20-%20Obsolence%20of%20the%20European%20Neighbourhood%20Policy.pdf>
21. Ian Manners, “As you like it: European Union normative power in the European Neighbourhood Policy”, in Richard G. Whitman and Stefan Wolff, eds, *European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective Context, Implementation and Impact*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 30.
22. EuroMeSCO EUROMED survey, “The future of the European Neighbourhood Policy”, 2024, 12. [https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IE-MED\\_SURVEY14.pdf](https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IE-MED_SURVEY14.pdf)