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POLITICAL ASPECTS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

by

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REPORT

“Political aspects“ may be interpreted to mean an exploration of the interests and perceptions of the major players. It also implies to expose the gap between what you find on the EU website and in real life. Although the views presented here are based on inside knowledge and involvement in projects and initiatives in the new neighbourhood, they reflect only the author’s personal standpoint.

Integration or Enlargement?

I will try to show that these concepts are not incompatible, but that on the contrary, NP (as a part of an enlargement strategy) actually can deepen integration. Although NP is a part of EU foreign politics, it is an easy part, compared to the minefields in domestic EU integration.

What is NP (Wider Europe?)- NP is a somewhat vague term with a moving target. Turkey will stop to be a neighbour at the end of a road begun last December with the decision to begin negotiations. Romania and Bulgaria have concluded their pre-accession talks. Macedonia is to start talks on 1 October this year. In terms of regional priorities, there clearly is a Near Abroad and a Farther Abroad for the Union. The post-Soviet states Russia, Ukraine, Moldavia, Belarus and the Balkan states Serbia/Montenegro, Macedonia, as well as Bosnia are Near Abroad, while the Caucasian, and the North African/ Mediterranean regions are areas of interest, but come in second. Israel, which has hitherto blocked European political advances hitherto, may emerge as a major partner in the medium term. But it is doubtful, to say the least, to what extent the present government will allow any other government, let alone the Union, to influence its policy towards the Palestinians and thus to fiddle around with Israel’s security.

Origins of NP: Technically, Enlargement necessitated a package of new policies for new neighbours. This was laid down in the Communication on Wider Europe (March 2003). The Barcelona process which framed the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995) was a major predecessor. In reality, however, it was the Yugoslav secession wars, which demonstrated the necessity to enlarge the enclave of peaceful development to encompass unstable regions in the neighbourhood. They have reminded the Europeans painfully of their weakness and inability to control crises in their immediate neighbourhood. NP is the political component of European security.

Unsurprisingly, the main focal point of NP is security: Illegal migration, terrorism, organized crime, proliferation, trafficking. A more hidden agenda is a long-term security concern, namely safeguarding energy supply.

The *underlying strategy* is based on the theory of democratic peace, according to which democracies do not wage war among each other. The envisaged “ring of friends” will not threaten the Union nor each other. The Union is aware of the fact that the promise of membership is the single most important incentive to renounce parts of one’s sovereignty and adapt legal and economic systems to EU standards. The naïve assumption about an overriding interest in peace that brought the UN into being is realized on a regional level. In Europe, common values and common experience has sufficiently diminished belligerence and led to pronounced preference for peaceful methods of conflict solving. Future integration is Europe’s “soft power”. A neighborhood policy backed by prospective membership also has the potential to defuse the internal integration problems (e.g. of Moslem groups).

Holding out the prospect for future membership also implies the avoidance of a credibility gap. Such a gap threatened to open in the case of Turkey. Refusing the Turks' long-standing membership drive again would have had consequences not only for the EU-Turkish relationship but would also have emasculated Europe's "soft power" over prospective new members, above all over states ruled by elites who profit from the status quo. For this group of people, some tough decisions are involved (such as the extradition of war criminals or a serious fight against corruption) and they will accept conditionalities only if they can profit from a deal at the end of the day *and they can trust the EU's promises*.

Against the backdrop of this view, future membership is held out for Turkey, which is considered a key but volatile ally, but not explicitly promised (although not explicitly excluded) to the Ukraine, which is regarded less important and more stable. Among the Balkan states, the eventual integration of Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria seems to be the relatively easiest task. For Bosnia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro the attraction of a possible future membership must be upheld because of the nuisance potential of these states. There is a non-policy in relation to the Kosovo/Kosova. It is true that European "soft power" was unable to prevent the carnage in the Balkans. But Yugoslavia was not offered a membership perspective, its provinces were not encouraged to compete for a place on the integration bandwagon. The Union had no neighbourhood policy, let alone a security policy.

The three Soviet successor states eligible for membership pose different problems for the Union. These issues are all linked to the problematic relationship with Russia. Russia's foreign policy imperatives are geostrategic. In the event of Ukrainian NATO membership Russia would become indefensible, a possible loss of Belarus would eliminate Russia's last reliable ally in the region. Both events would trigger a response in Moldavia/Transnistria, where the separatist movement gives Russia some political leverage. The US State Department is obviously preparing for a new roll back engineered by Condoleezza Rice's new team of old Russia hands. The Russian reaction is adumbrated by the plan to sell weapons to Syria; which is an act of retaliation for Israeli/US intervention in the Ukrainian presidential campaign and support for anti-government forces in Russia. It is a significant action that crosses a line which up to this point has been scrupulously heeded.

The EU has no proactive geostrategic vision. Instead, it grapples with a set of concrete problems, such as illegal migration and the integration of the migrant communities or energy supply. In the final analysis, this is what makes the Union snap to attention. Democratization programs, conflict management, studies about the social compatibility of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline are undertaken against the backdrop of this overriding interest.

The geostrategies of Turkish accession are obfuscated by issues like Cyprus, the Kurdish question, migration, torture or gender equality. But what is at issue here is the possible integration of the major US ally in Southern Europe and Central Asia into a genuinely European security system. The US cannot tolerate a rift with Turkey and they will continue to pressure the EU to renounce such a system. Together with "New Europe" the US actively tries to promote the establishment of a "democratic" cordon sanitaire between Russia and the new EU members.

Energy: The EU Commission Green Paper (2001) states that in the coming 20-30 years, 70% of Europe's energy needs will have to be imported.

Turkey will be the most important energy hub for EU states. It lies in the proximity of 70% of proven world reserves of oil and gas and has concluded agreements with states in the Caspian basin as well as the Middle East. It is for this reason that the preservation of Turkey's stability is of utmost importance for the EU. A full integration seems to be the ideal solution, the viability of which is, unfortunately still in doubt.

The choice of Turkey as the Union's main partner in energy supply may increase the rivalry with Russia, but not necessarily so. Already now, Russia delivers gas to Turkey over the Blue Stream pipeline. Russia's main export terminal (Novorossiisk) is still dependent on Turkish goodwill to let the tankers pass the Bosphorus straits. There are periodic warnings that Turkey would not accept the transport of Azeri oil through its straits underline this situation (E.G. Turkish Energy Minister Hilmi Guler in Sep 2004). The completion of the US-sponsored Baku-Tbilisi – Ceyhan pipeline (a pipeline designed to circumvent both Russia and Iran) will radically alter the picture that prevailed when INOGATE was signed (1999). But Russia may consider to reverse the oil flow from Novorossiisk to Baku and deliver its own oil to Ceyhan. To all appearances this is the only scenario that could make Baku/Tbilisi/Ceyhan profitable.

The international landscape: Changes in the European neighbourhood will prompt a new division of labour among IOs (EU, NATO, OSCE) The role and position of the EU will also be affected by global changes such as the disintegration of the Western Camp.

OSCE membership as such is no incentive for political change. OSCE can offer almost no financial support, no visa regime, no large-scale projects. It only has the weak sanction to expose recalcitrant member states on its various forums.

NATO: Despite its cold war heritage, it is still one of the most important transatlantic forums. Nevertheless, NATO is no longer functioning as a unit in its own right. The decomposition of the Alliance started long before the War on Iraq. The US makes use of selected NATO members in order to support its global military objectives. Power projection in the Middle East has become the top priority linked to objectives such as the fight against terrorism and the control of oil production and delivery. The reduction of US military presence in Germany and Great Britain reflects this global strategy. The transfer of US troops to the new European NATO members has the additional advantage of lower dislocation costs. Simultaneously, Russia is to be held in check from three sides.

Implications for Stability in the Southern Caucasus.

Solution of frozen conflicts – international mediation mechanisms employed to this point (OSCE; UNAMIG,EU) have not delivered. Parties to conflicts seek alternative routes (e.g. UN, NATO or Venice Commission for Arzach/Gharabagh, replacement of CIS Peacekeepers by International Force etc). But new situation: unabashed roll-back policy is well on the move along the Ankara-Baku-Tbilisi axis. Georgia as regional trailblazer. Moscow tries to counter by meddling with election campaigns (Abkhazia, Azerbaijan). Cross-pressure is on Armenia to stay in the Russian fold or follow US coattails. Russia is desperately fighting to retain control in the region; US advancing by leaps and bounds. Next steps: closing of Russian bases in Georgia, Armenian elections, diminishing dependence from Russian energy.

But energy could be a factor of peace if it were not used as a weapon by the oil producers in the region. The EU could have an important role in this by facilitating a compromise that would permit Azerbaijan to embark on the road towards the peaceful exploitation of its

energy resources; which is currently blocked by the Karabakh conflict. Participation of all three states in energy distribution is a major prerequisite of stability in the Caucasus. The liberal view that oil trade automatically leads to political stability eclipses the fact that none of the three South Caucasian states, let alone Russia; has democratic institutions which could control investment flows and functional; multi-sector economies. Outside players such as Turkey; the US or Russia have an ambiguous record when it comes to conflict resolution. Right now; the danger is real that geostrategic competition in the region spills over into a “Great Game” and another round of instability.

The place for the EU in a global perspective: The EU is a global payer, but not yet a pan-European player (let alone a global player). In the area of foreign politics, its image is still one of a bunch of maverick states. By and large, it is seen by the US as a nuisance and snafu entity. The US does not act unilaterally: if it is in its national interest, it prefers multilateral approaches. For the US; global democratization and the development of market economies is an extension of a successful US model.

There is a lot of justified criticism for EU-sponsored projects, but the EU has decisive advantages over other donors and political players: For one thing, it has not only a funding policy, it can link policy and funding. Secondly, democratization and development projects can be conducted on the basis of a future or actual integration process, which makes the Union a unique model worldwide. Thirdly, The Union, which is a wild mixture of different societies with different traditions, cultures and development levels, has realized and will increasingly understand that a rigid application of standards is out of the question and that the enforcement of European standards has a time dimension and that variable velocities should be allowed for. Incidentally, this was obvious in the process which led up to the Balkan wars. The insistence upon impeccable free and democratic elections was a major factor in the rise of ethno-chauvinist parties.

The US dominant view on democratization is that Soviet Communism has created a mess that has to be cleared. A uniform model of democracy is held out for all the world. The European post-1945 development is frequently conjured up as a model (cf. Amb. Weiser's remarks, www.useu.be, 2.6.2004). As it happens, the US-style democratization often neglects the possibility of local solutions for universal problems, e:g: when issues such as sexual privacy or family values are concerned: Due to its position as the only global power, US policies are fraught with the hazards of mission creep. Mission creep has occurred in the Iraq, where power projection to Iraq's neighbours Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria was not only a major reason for the war, but also fairly successful. Meanwhile, however, (formal) democratization has taken precedence and this clearly contradicts counter-insurgency strategies. The elections in Iraq are bound to produce a Shiite regime which will be a far cry from any type of Western democracy. The democratization has practically ground to a halt but is preserved as a more and more suspiciously formal and official mission. Fighting insurgents and democratize is a different ballgame.

For Europe, mission creep has happened to an extent, in that economics clearly dominate all other issues. It is rarely remembered that Europe's initial mission was peace and stability. But there is no mission creep in neighbourhood politics. On the contrary, this is the area where Europe's initial ideas are still alive. In its foreign politics, Europe has no hard power to wield. It does not fight insurgencies. It projects soft power right from the start. And in contrast to Iraq, the contradiction between pragmatic interests and ideology-powered reform is manageable. Iraq is not going to join the US (or Europe, for that matter). Washington does

not have the choice to force moderation on recalcitrant members of the “axis of evil” by offering them a credible integration process. It will have to tolerate graft as the only force that is able to forge alliances across ethnic and sectarian boundaries. The attention and the resources of the jihadists have to be drawn away by US military presence in odd places. In these regions, there are no relevant successful experiments of democratization. By contrast, the new neighbourhood of the Union can study successful examples of transition such as the Visegrad states.

For the security policies of some new members such as Poland and some Baltic states, Europe’s security mission statement has not yet arrived. They see the only guarantee against a Russian attack in NATO protection. But this is a matter of time. As the perception of the impossibility for Russia to launch attacks against the West rises, Europe and its nascent security forces will be accepted as a guarantor of military security. Fortunately, Europe today is in a safe place.

The Union is able to project shared values, and it should do so. And it should do so in regions which are apt to share these values, now or in some not-too-remote future. It should be mindful of the boundaries of Europe. Europe at this time is testing its value boundaries and its force of promise in the attempt to come to grips with the integration of immigrants with an Islamic background. This is, so to speak the internal dimension of neighbourhood policy.

The West was held together as one camp by the Soviet threat. Since the end of the Cold War, differences and conflicts have come to the foreground. It is true that the US couldn’t care less about the constant European reproaches. It has also become apparent that the cost of saying “No” to the US has diminished. US “exceptionalism” (M. Ignatieff); its self-attributed position of an outlier, its self-centredness contributes greatly to the widening Atlantic gap.

Sundry Recommendations:

- A successful proactive neighbourhood policy can break the internal stalemate and unleash positive energies for internal reform. It can provide the Union with a unified vision which has been lost amidst the bickering for executive positions; convergence criteria and agrarian subsidies.
- Insistence on a strong voice in NP relations where US and European interests may diverge. NP should reflect European values; traditions and interests. It is Europe’s home turf; a place to shape the common destiny.
- OSCE should operate as transatlantic security forum, but its democratization and development capacities should be Europeanized.
- More pragmatism, less lip service to hoary principles which are way above capabilities (credibility gap!): Observance of the *ultra vires clause*: Some of the values must be adopted, some later, some cannot be embraced. For example, while it is certainly important to criticise Russian conduct in the Northern Caucasus and to draw Russian attention to the fact that already in light of the stream of refugees (Austria: around ten per day) from the war-ravaged areas, Chechnya is most certainly no internal Russian problem, there should be a credible and viable European alternative in place. What does Europe have to offer apart from humanitarian aid (which is important enough)?
- More effective project adjudication and monitoring to increase credibility

- Ukraine should be offered integration into an emerging European politico-military-humanitarian response security system instead of NATO integration. This would minimize an unnecessary geopolitical conflict with Russia.
- Frozen conflicts: In view of the fact that the strategies and mechanisms employed hitherto have not delivered; alternative strategies for a peaceful resolution must be put in place. Since territorial concessions or swaps are out of the question for the time being; the resolution of those issues must be suspended according to the Khazavyurt model. In contrast to the Chechen case; international presence and aid programmes are feasible and necessary. All affected regional players must be involved; A strategy that is based on an unabashed roll-back policy disregards Russia's nuisance potential and its ability to block conflict resolution.