



## From Survival to Revival: The Riga Summit 2015 and the revised ENP

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With the European Parliament's July report on the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) calling on the Commission to 'go back to basics', this article argues that such a move would be counter-productive and that instead, the ENP needs to move towards the future and break away with the historical elusiveness of this overarching policy. The Riga Summit serves as an illustration of what will not suffice if the EU is to strengthen or even maintain its role in its neighbourhoods. The revision of the ENP is described as a 3Dimensional process which needs to yield a concrete and forward-looking new ENP. The recommendations put forth herein map out what a truly revised ENP would entail.

On 21-22 May 2015, the EU and its six Eastern neighbors gathered in Riga for the fourth Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit. In contrast to the previous EaP Summit, the Vilnius Summit of November 2013, this year's summit enjoyed much less visibility and much less public attention. While this may be a consequence of the intended low-key profile of

the event, meant to reconfirm the non-expansive and non-coercive approach of the EU towards its Eastern partners, the silence following the summit has been, in fact, transforming 'Riga' into the 'non-event' that others predicted and, consequently, cautioned against.<sup>1</sup>

Picking up on this development, this policy brief takes issue with the current revision process of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and argues that the Riga Summit, labeled as a survival summit<sup>2</sup>, can serve, in retrospect, to inform the current revision process of the potential pitfalls that may emerge, in order to diminish the risk that the ENP review is carried out for the sake of the revision itself, which would ultimately result in a non-revised policy.

Thus, ironically, the Riga Summit has the potential to become, in retrospect, the 'Revival Summit' for the entire ENP, due to its role in drawing the alarm on the low ambition level which the revised ENP may result in. This policy brief aims at providing clear recommendations as to how the revision process of the ENP can avoid falling into the trap of generating yet another non-revised policy.

## REVISING THE REVISED

The first ENP revision process took place over the course of the second half of 2010 and the first months of 2011 and resulted in the overly ambitious ‘A new response to a changing neighbourhood’, already suggesting that ENP revisions are processes of a *responsive* nature.

Thus, expectations that the ongoing revision will produce a meaningful response to current challenges do exist, in particular among some of the EU’s neighbours, and the EU can’t afford to put forth anything short of what it has promised to design - more specifically, a new ENP. Yet, policy revision is always context-dependent. Thus, in order to understand what the revision of the ENP aims to achieve, the question of timing must be reckoned with *a priori*.

The ENP resurfaced in the international spotlight due to the rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances and growing instability in the EU’s neighborhoods. However, while the changing environment at the EU’s borders is often invoked as the sole cause of the current revision process, it would be misleading to ignore intra-EU dynamics: with a new cabinet of commissioners in office and a five year term ahead, the European Commission has embarked upon ambitious projects and multi-faceted plans for action or reforms. Thus, there are several overlapping motives for a revision of the ENP, including the non-negligible fact that Commission President Juncker, after having declared the review of the ENP a major objective of his Commission, is under pressure to deliver sooner rather than later.

A credible policy can only be one whose design has not been altered for the sake of change and which does not sideline, nor compromise on any of its goals, for the mere purpose of disguising *de facto* inertia. Thus, a revised ENP has to be informed by the

shortcomings of the current approach, by the expectations and views of the partners concerned and last, but not least, it must lay out a clear vision for future relations between the EU and all of its neighbors and partners.

## THE CURRENT ENP REVISION PROCESS: A 3-DIMENSIONAL DYNAMIC

The first half of 2015 has been a crucial period in the evolution of the ENP, as three dynamics promising to directly contribute to the current ENP revision process were taking place simultaneously, albeit not in a correlated fashion.

1. At the center of the revision is the recently concluded consultation process, initiated and carried out by the Commission and the EEAS, drawing also on the input from civil society actors from both within the EU and eastern and southern neighborhood countries. The channeling of national position papers by the Member States into this process is to be welcomed as it signals their general willingness to engage with the revision as such. At the same time, however, it contributes to perpetuating the power inequality between civil society actors in ENP partner countries and EU Member States’ governments which have their staff and representatives in the EEAS and thus greater leverage to influence the course of action;
2. A second dynamic which has been complementing the open consultation have been the deliberations in the European Parliament’s AFET Committee as regards the Report on the review of the ENP, which has been voted in the EP plenary during July 2015 and which represents the EP’s position on the revised ENP. This position remains deeply problematic as it calls for the "ENP to go back to basics", without, however, taking into account the in-built problems in the very basics of the ENP;

3. Thirdly, on the ministerial level, the Riga Summit and the Barcelona Informal Ministerial meeting with the southern ENP partners of 13 April 2015 both served as platforms to discuss expectations of the new ENP and as a means for the EU to collect input from its governmental partners. However, as the Riga Summit is, from a technical point of view, separate from the ENP revision process, as it took place under the auspices of the EaP framework and would have taken place regardless of the revision process. In contrast, the Barcelona meeting was specifically organized with a view to gather input for the revision of the ENP. Thus, by virtue of the absence of an informal ministerial meeting, similar in nature to that which took place in Barcelona, an official EaP summit, the Riga Summit, was perceived as a surrogate ministerial meeting destined to generate feedback.

The Joint Declaration emerging from the Riga Summit is remarkable for the fact that in each of the articles in the declaration the EU is either ‘reconfirming’, ‘reaffirming’, ‘restating’ or ‘reiterating’ in different ways its previous commitments. This could be interpreted as another sign of the unbroken prevalence of the status quo and thus of the ongoing stagnation in EU-neighbourhood relations. Yet, for the EU to live up to the promise that the consultation process will lead to a truly new ENP, Riga has to be regarded as a powerful reminder of what will not suffice.

Whatever form and shape the re-revised ENP will adopt, the emerging framework will, in this context, end up filling the gaps left empty at Riga. With such an ambitious, 3-D revision, destined to revive the ENP, the response generated needs to put forth new ways of doing things, without discontinuing established, though allegedly more technical-minded working practices.

## **‘DO’S’ AND ‘DON’TS’ FOR A NEW ENP<sup>3</sup>**

### ***1. Take realities on the ground for what they are***

The new ENP must properly engage with the realities on the ground. Even though support for further cooperation and integration into the EU is considerably high in several ENP partner countries a closer and more differentiated look at opinion polls demonstrates a different and more sobering picture. For example, according to the fifth and sixth wave of EU Neighbourhood Barometers of 2014, 56% of respondents in the eastern neighbourhood have a negative or neutral image of the EU whereas in the southern neighbourhood only 38% hold a positive view of the EU. This is important and cannot be neglected as perceptions condition and potentially constrain governmental partners’ legitimacy and their domestic room for manoeuvre to engage in supposedly wide-ranging ENP-induced reforms. The EU must become more visible in its neighbourhood and work on generating more tangible benefits for the partner neighbouring societies.

### ***2. Don’t go ‘back to basics’***

The alleged need to go ‘back to basics’ that the EP report on the revision of the ENP calls for, draws heavily on the enlargement logic. However, this is both misleading and problematic. On one hand, the ‘basics’ back in 2002 and early 2003 when ‘Wider Europe’ was concocted related to a neighbourhood that looked rather different than today’s. Also, the ‘basics’ were rooted in a false belief that the recipe for enlargement, namely that conditionality incentives generate lasting reforms, can be replicated even though the main carrot – EU membership – was missing. On the other hand, one of the many sources of the current geopolitical competition with the Russian Federation might even have emerged as a result of the perceived similarity of certain underlying logics of the ENP with the enlargement process. Thus, if the EU is truly

striving to present the ENP, and the EaP in particular, as a non-threat, the conceptual link between enlargement and the ENP has to be addressed in the New ENP.

### *3. Provide a road map*

The EU will invariably need to abandon the policy's underlying open-endedness. Playing for time is no longer an option, given that the neighbourhood is, in fact, a 'ring of fire'. Reform-willing neighbours need to be given a clear-cut road map. Only an end-goal will allow them to anticipate some light at the end of a rather long reform tunnel and help them justify vis-à-vis their own societies why costly and painful reforms need to be undertaken and will eventually pay off. Neither members of the Commission, the Council and the EEAS, nor representatives of national governments of EU member states have lately missed an opportunity to emphasize the centrality of Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) in the overall context of EU-neighbourhood relations. Yet, they have all stayed remarkably silent as to whether full implementation of these agreements is just a means to an end or already the end itself.

### *4. Apply the differentiation principle to the 'more for more' logic*

In the context of the current revision process, the 'more for more' principle, in conjunction with the 'less for less' logic, seems to be gaining increasing momentum. Additionally, growing voices are demanding that true 'differentiation' has to be put at the center of the re-revised ENP. Undoubtedly, this is sensible and overdue, although strictly speaking, these principles have been underpinning the ENP, at least conceptually, already since its inception and do not represent any new element in the design of the ENP.

However, it is in the way that these principles will be applied and understood that the element of novelty could be introduced. The

'more for more' principle might actually prove more effective in providing not only a tool to respond to changes in the neighbourhood, but also an instrument in the hands of the EU to display its ambitions and greater assertiveness. In other words, by giving more, under carefully defined and observed conditions, the EU might get more commitment for cooperation coming from its neighbours. The offer of 'everything but institutions', as Romano Prodi remarked in 2003, and the idea to create an 'EU-Neighbourhood Economic Community', as was discussed some years ago, thus need to return more saliently to the ENP's agenda.

Conversely, as far as the 'less for less' logic is concerned, civil society (projects) must not fall victim to any state of play of governmental cooperation between governments of ENP partners and the EU. Instead, negative conditionality should rather revolve around trade preferences, and their suspension. In fact, the EU's neighbours are more dependent on preferential EU market access than vice versa or, as in the case of energy suppliers Algeria and Azerbaijan, desperately need the oil and gas rent for regime survival.

### *5. Expand functional governance cooperation*

The ENP has been serving as a considerably powerful tool to increase democracy-related features through the 'back door'. Be it in the field of customs, aviation, the environment or mobility – in all these supposedly technical areas, functional governance cooperation between the EU on one hand and governmental partners on the other has led, in fact, to greater accountability, greater transparency and increased public participation. Obviously, this has not yet had a major impact on the nature of political systems in the neighbourhoods. But in conjunction with the expansion of such cooperation to other seemingly technical areas, trickle-down and spill-over effects are bound to also reach other

governance-related areas that will then gradually impact upon polities.

EU institutions and member states' governments are well advised to build upon this important finding.

### *6. Maintain and strengthen further a political focus*

The war in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia has reminded policy-makers in Brussels and EU Member States' capitals of the need to ensure stability and security beyond the EU's borders. While this may eventually stimulate further advances of the CFSP, it must not erode the political dimension of the ENP. If the EU, and with it the re-revised ENP, aims at being perceived by societies in the neighbourhood, by the neighbours of the neighbours, and also by the public in EU member states themselves as a credible 'force for good', the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, good governance and universal values and freedoms need to stay at the heart of any future approach towards the neighbourhood.

### *7. Place extra emphasis on conflict reconciliation*

The future ENP must move beyond mere declarations for supporting conflict resolution, in particular when one party to the many conflicts, i.e. Russia, does not show any meaningful political will to engage in such resolution efforts. Thus, the EU through the EaP should also pursue measures aiming at promoting reconciliation between the different communities competing for separate identities – in Ukraine, but also in Moldova and the South Caucasus. In this sense, the current revision process is an opportunity to bring to the same table a number of stakeholders and conflict parties, at least from within the neighbourhood, with a view to engage them in devising new channels and mechanisms for

reconciliation at the community level.

### *8. Place migration and mobility schemes at the heart of the new ENP*

Mobility schemes will continue to be important in the new ENP, not only because talks and negotiations in this regard are ongoing, but because without them, the 'common area of shared prosperity' cannot really come into being. Schemes of circular migration for summer work could be granted to young students from ENP countries, in the absence of the possibility to grant them work visas. For example, the 'Work & Travel' program of the US could be replicated, and it could provide young people in neighbouring countries with a direct contact with the EU. Such a measure would generate powerful cultural remittances, the importance of which cannot be underestimated if the EU were to become more visible in the public discourse in neighbouring societies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Focusing once more on admittedly catchy phrases such as 'more for more' and 'less for less', and engaging in a discourse that revolves around the alleged need to go 'back to basics', the EU risks oversimplifying complex issues and overriding concrete promises in the cloudy skies of the broad vocabulary it has so far used in designing the ENP. Given that the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods are exposed to ever-changing developments and are slipping from crisis to crisis, this is not the time to simply repackage 'old wine in new bottles' but rather enter into a 'back to the future' mode.

The EU needs to ensure that it truly upgrades its engagement in order to obtain more engagement by the neighbours – East and South – in return. To do that, commitment is crucial and bringing all 28 EU member states on board is key. This needs to be accompanied



by overcoming intra- and inter-institutional turf wars and by making the EU's presence in the neighbourhood more visible and coordinated with EU member states' representations. Though these are just some minimum measures, they would make an ultimate difference to enhance the EU's credibility as a regional and international actor and, as a result, the effectiveness of the ENP's next edition.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Amanda Paul, 'The Riga Eastern partnership Summit Should not be a non-Event'. Available online: [http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub\\_5599\\_the\\_eastern\\_partnership\\_riga\\_summit\\_should\\_not\\_be\\_a\\_non-event.pdf](http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_5599_the_eastern_partnership_riga_summit_should_not_be_a_non-event.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Edgars Rinkēvičs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, February 26th 2015 as quoted by Euractiv. Available online: <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/riga-host-eastern-partnership-survival-summit-312466>

<sup>3</sup> See also Tobias Schumacher, 'How to make the European Neighbourhood Policy fit for purpose'. Available online: <http://www.europesworld.org/2015/06/25/make-european-neighbourhood-policy-fit-purpose/#.VZvQT0SXqzg>