

EXTENDING THE GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF THE ENP?: THE NEIGHBOURS OF THE EU'S NEIGHBOURS

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The idea of extending the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or the Middle East at large (GCC, Iraq, Iran and Yemen) is not new. Many debates have been held in the past to insist on the fact that this EU bureaucratic division was quite artificial and was in fact fragmenting the EU's overall approach towards the Arab world. With the progressive implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004, the southern and eastern Mediterranean has been integrated into a broader framework for cooperation including three Eastern European Countries (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) and later, three Southern Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). The so-called "Arab Spring" highlighted the interconnectedness of the Mediterranean with the Gulf while the military intervention in Libya brought attention to the existing links between North Africa and the Sahel region at large and more especially Mali.

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The concept of the "neighbours of the EU's neighbours" appeared for the first time within the 2006 communication of the European Commission on "strengthening the ENP"¹, the main idea being to "look beyond the Union's immediate neighbourhood" and to see if bridges could be built between the areas covered by the latter and Africa, Central Asia and the Gulf. In terms of potential areas of trans-regional cooperation, the European Commission referred to energy, transport, environment, research policy, the fight against illegal immigration and peace and security. However, until the 2015 ENP review these proposals remained on the shelf. During the consultation process for the review of the ENP, the concept, which was explored at academic level after the war in Libya,² re-emerged and the Joint Consultation paper of the High Representative and the European Commission stated that: "many of the challenges that need to be tackled by the EU and its neighbours together cannot be adequately addressed without taking into account, or in some cases co-operating with, the neighbours of the neighbours." In this regard, a series of questions were put on the table: "Should the current geographical scope be maintained? Should the ENP allow for more flexible ways of working with the neighbours of the neighbours? How can the EU, through the ENP framework, support its neighbours in their interactions with their own neighbours? What could be done better to ensure greater coherence between the ENP and the EU's relations with Russia, with partners in Central Asia, or in Africa, especially in the Sahel and in the Horn of Africa, and with the Gulf countries?"³

1. European Commission, Communication on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy COM(2006) 726 final, p. 11.

2. Lannon, E. (2014). Introduction: the 'neighbours of the EU's neighbours', the 'EU's broader neighbourhood' and the 'arc of crisis and strategic challenges' from the Sahel to Central Asia. In S. Gstöhl & E. Lannon. *The Neighbours of the European Union's Neighbours – Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, pp. 1-25.

3. European Commission and High Representative, Joint Consultation Paper, Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy, Brussels, 4.3.2015 JOIN(2015) 6 final, p. 4.

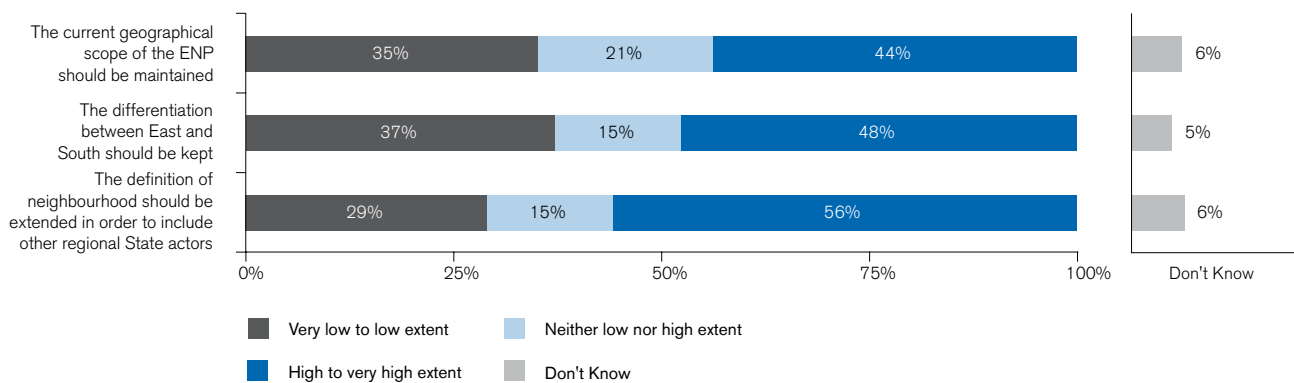
These issues have been addressed within the framework of the Euromed Survey and more particularly within the framework of questions 10, 11, and 13. Questions 10 and 11 are more theoretical as it seems very doubtful that, for the time being, the ENP as such could be extended to other regions but an extension of the ENP to a country like Iraq seems, in the longer term, possible. Question 13 is much more relevant in the framework of the current review of the ENP as it is feasible to build ad hoc bridges between the different regions at stake.

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Question 10 was formulated as follows: "To what extent do you agree with the following proposals?"

- i) The current geographical scope of the ENP should be maintained;
- ii) The differentiation between East and South should be kept;
- iii) The definition of neighbourhood should be extended in order to include other regional state actors".

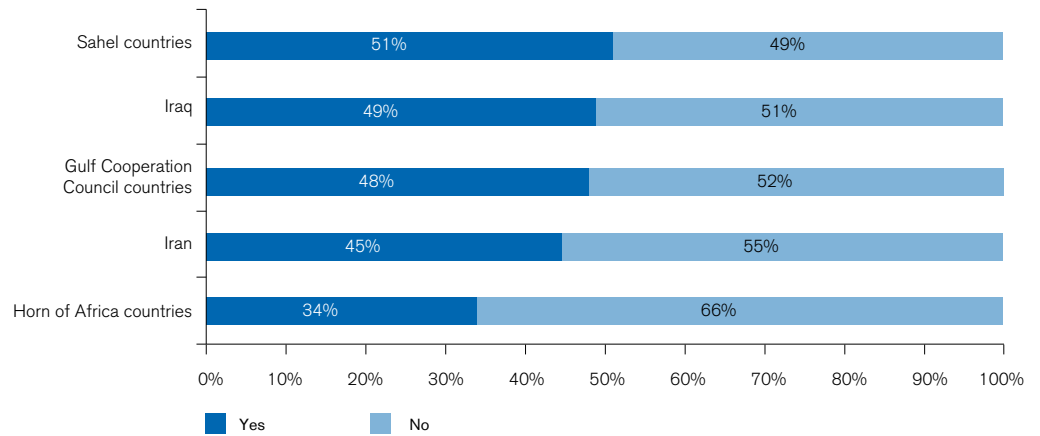
Graph 1: To what extent do you agree with the following proposals?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 10

Regarding the first sub-question, 35% of the respondents think that the current scope should not be maintained, whereas 44% are in favour of maintaining it. For the second question, 37% do not think the East/South differentiation should be maintained whilst 48% think the differentiation should be kept. For the third one, 29% do not think the ENP should be extended in order to include other regional state actors, while 56% are in favour. It is thus quite difficult to draw straightforward conclusions except that the respondents are quite divided on this issue. On the other hand, there is a relative majority of responses in favour of extending the ENP to other regional state actors. One should, in this regard, turn to question 11 (see graph 2) to understand the reason why.

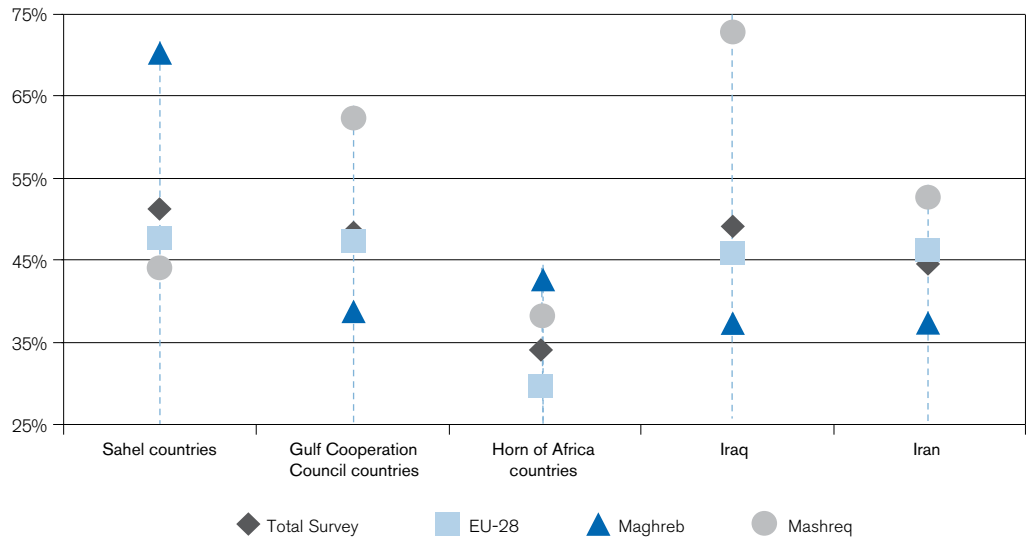
Graph 2: In case you think that the geographical scope of the ENP should be extended, which of the following should be included?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 11

51% of the respondents are in favour of extending the geographical scope of the ENP to the Sahel. On the other hand 66% are against extending it to the Horn of Africa; 52% are against the ENP extension to the GCC and 51% are against its extension to Iraq and 55% to Iran. Unsurprisingly, it is the respondents originating from the Maghreb that are strongly in favour of extending the ENP to the Sahel (70%), whereas 74% of those from the Mashreq are in favour of an extension to Iraq and 62% in favour of an extension to the Gulf (see graph 3). In other words, geographical proximity matters more than a country belonging to the League of Arab States (with the exception of Mauritania in the Sahel).

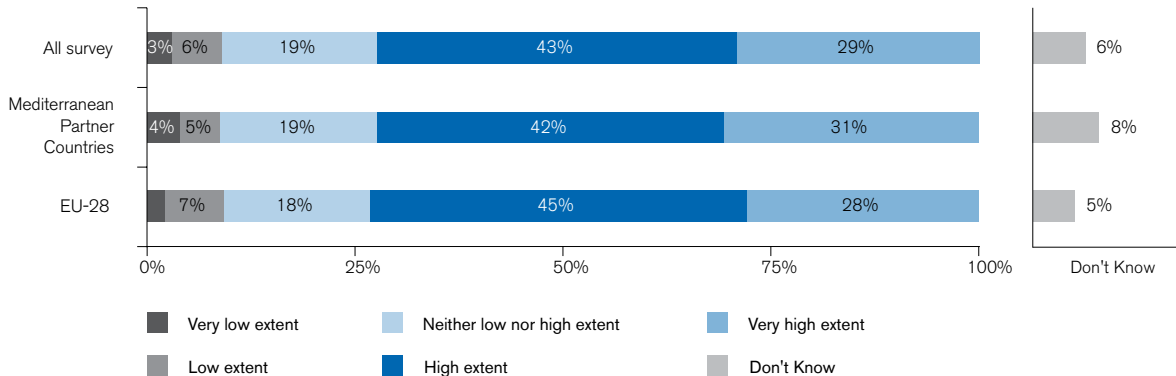
Graph 3: In case you think that geographical scope of the ENP should be extended, which of the following should be included? (the graph below displays the % of YES answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 11

Question 13 asked: “To what extent should the ENP facilitate more flexible ways of cooperation with neighbours of the neighbours?” Here the answer is more straightforward as, in total, 72% believe the ENP should facilitate more flexible ways of cooperation with the neighbours of the EU's neighbours. For the EU-28, 74% are in favour, a figure almost the same as for the MPCs (73%) (see graph 4).

Graph 4: To what extent should the ENP facilitate more flexible ways of cooperation with neighbours of the neighbours?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 13

It is interesting that the open question “to what extent should the ENP facilitate more flexible ways of cooperation with neighbours of the neighbours?” generated a number of interesting comments. The latter have been summarised hereinafter and regrouped under three main headings: “Which methodology is to be followed?”; “Which kind of actors should be involved?”; and “What are the main potential areas of trans-regional cooperation?”.

Which Methodology Is to Be Followed?

In terms of methodology, there is a strong consensus among respondents, summarised by one of them: “we should develop partnerships based on mutual respect and common interests” and “prevent ritualised and technocratic discussions that do not match our common ambitions and political realities both within the EU and in partner countries, and look into more innovative formats of engaging with partners bilaterally and regionally.” Many answers indeed stressed the need to be “less bureaucratic” (or even “Brussels-centred”) and more “issue-focused” in order to promote “Project-based cooperation” and especially more “joint projects”.⁴ The need for a more decentralised approach has been underlined several times in the responses as well as the use of “bottom-up approaches” (“speaking first with local people”). The association of observers to dialogues and the need to better associate local and regional actors has also been underlined. The emphasis is put on the need to promote a “regular” political dialogue in a more “flexible” manner in order to identify “common issues and interactions between the neighbours and their neighbours.” Dialogue between CSOs and political leaders and governments is also mentioned several times and a respondent proposed the creation of a “structured strategic dialogue” stressing that “geographical distance should not be primary criteria for engagement and interaction.” Most proposals emphasise the need to have “regular” and “flexible” meetings at all levels “taking into account the social, political and economic features of each country.” It is stressed that if the EU must be more flexible, its approach should also be more rigorous,

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4. See complementary results in the same direction that can be found in question 12 on proposals to redefine the neighbourhood, particularly 12.3 (EU initiatives should be less bureaucratic) and 12.4 (EU initiatives should be issue-focused).

i.e. based on precise, global and scientific analyses of the various issues at stake, especially regarding immigration, terrorism and climate change.

Flexibility is mentioned many times by respondents.

Flexibility is a concept that has been mentioned many times. Most of the respondents stress that a step-by-step approach is needed and that, first of all, the ENP must be consolidated and improved. Then the dynamics among the neighbours should be identified as well as their common interests, concerns and aspirations. Initiatives should be developed “taking into account the different situations” and should be “more adaptable to the local needs” and Action Plans should be “tailor-made”. One respondent wrote that for “those countries not willing to subscribe to ENP values different formats for political cooperation” should be envisaged. Another expert stressed that flexibility should be applied to the “tempo of reforms and not to the nature of reforms to be accomplished.” Concepts like “variable geometry schemes”, “ad-hoc” groups and co-operations regarding “topical issues”, “triangular cooperation” (EU, its neighbours and their neighbours) have been emphasised as well as the need to focus on “technical cooperation” and “tailor-made bilateral relations”.

As far as conditionality is concerned, different views have been put forward. Some would like to end the “more for more” approach. One respondent wrote that the EU and its Member States should “stop intervening in the internal affairs of each country, and stop linking aid with the question of human rights.” However, the majority of respondents clearly plead for a stricter approach in order to “promote the core values of the EU, the respect for human rights, rule of law, social and economic developments.”⁵ Sector policy dialogue and cooperation in different fields are important elements of the ENP to also bring the neighbours of the neighbours closer to EU policies and standards. A respondent stressed the need to “be intractable on democracy and secularism.” Another underlined the necessity to take into consideration “the national context without sacrificing the principles of democracy, equality and equity” and a third insisted on the fact that “there are principles and criteria that are fundamental and should be strictly applied.” Several respondents are in favour of a “more incentive-based approach.” One respondent proposed granting “additional incentives for countries engaged in regional groupings.”

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The need to “concentrate on selected issues and a more limited number of objectives with clear measurable results” has been mentioned several times. Also the neighbours of the EU’s neighbours should be integrated “in a long-term strategy of global human development and (one should) not only cooperate with them on a security basis.” The latter could also benefit from an extended eligibility “in some programmes where cross-border cooperation may have a positive impact” but it “depends on the type of cooperation foreseen. If it denotes externalisation of border control measures and migration (mis)management further to the South, absolutely not.” The need to promote co-ownership and mutual responsibility has also been put forward. Finally, a respondent suggested promoting “an increased complementarity between the ENP instruments and the Lisbon Treaty’s toolbox in other fields such as the CFSP/CSDP.”

Which Kind of Actors Should Be Involved?

Many responses do focus on the need to associate more and better with civil society at large.

In this regard, many responses do focus on the need to associate more and better with civil society at large (NGOs, CSOs, private sector, trade unions, employers’ organisations, media and universities) and to involve “less bureaucratic clerks” and have “more practitioners who may understand the needs of the challenging regions.” There is a general consensus for associating in different ways the CSOs in the decision shaping/making processes through meetings, forums, conferences, in an ad hoc manner if necessary. One respondent recommended to develop a policy for improving exchanges of researchers and promote PhDs.

5. Q.7 asked if EU values are applied through the ENP. The answers were mainly negative (43%) showing a general scepticism, greater in the case of respondents from MPCs than from EU countries.

Also “international organisations like the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), African Union and the Council of Europe should be involved.” One respondent proposed considering that “Morocco and other partners are in fact cooperating with African countries. This should be taken into account to support cooperation initiatives in a broader context.” Another suggested developing “EU-GCC-North Africa cooperation to strengthen production/employment in North Africa.” It has been also underlined that “Turkey can also play active role” while “coordination with the US is beneficial.” Finally, one respondent pleaded for “defining an ‘Arab policy’, now completely non-existent” and added that “this implies a radical change in the policy towards Israel.”

What Are the Main Potential Areas of Trans-Regional Cooperation?

Respondents identified a number of potential areas of trans-regional cooperation, summarised below:

In the political and security fields:

- Promote mediation, and (frozen) conflict resolution;
- Regional security projects aimed at fighting terrorism, organised crime, and in particular human trafficking, drug trafficking and arms smuggling;
- Take into consideration border issues in a comprehensive framework;
- Develop “science diplomacy”.

In the economic, trade and financial domain:

- Promote triangular economic cooperation and trade;
- Promote economic cooperation, intra-regional trade, redefining trade agreements;
- Encourage the establishment of free trade areas with other neighbours;
- Allowing for a larger space for cumulation of origin specifically if MPCs are part of FTAs with regional partners;
- Combine geo-economics with social issues (migrations);
- Promote job creation (enhance employment as knowledge of traditional craftsmanship, using the products on site, working on better education);
- Develop environmental and energy cooperation (especially more water, conventional and renewable energy cooperation);
- Develop regional road networks;
- Promote EU investments;
- Enhance closer cooperation on development aspects;
- Improve the ownership of programmes fostering partners’ involvement in the programming processes;
- Work on the absorption capacity of the partners;
- Allow for statistical data harmonisation;
- Promote twinning agreements and adequate trainings;
- Trans-border initiatives through EU delegation cooperation;
- Create joint focal points of needs and cooperation areas;
- Create co-development basin based on complementarity.

In the human and social areas:

- Educational and cultural programmes;
- Migration, especially mobility and visa facilitation (notably for medium sized company personnel);
- Employment policies;
- Enhancement of living conditions;
- Access to basics needs (medical, schools, food);
- Humanitarian assistance and political asylum;
- Doctoral trainings and common research, granting scholarships and hosting foreign scientists and academics, developing educational exchanges;
- Exchange programmes using NGOs;
- Integrate religious considerations and multi-cultural differences.

According to the Joint Communication on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy⁶ the “new ENP will now seek to involve other regional actors, beyond the neighbourhood where appropriate, in addressing regional challenges.”⁷ In this regard, migration, security and energy have been prioritised. This is certainly a good initiative that could be enlarged to other areas of cooperation, as identified by the respondents of the Euromed Survey.⁸ On the other hand, it looks like the issue of the neighbours of the EU’s neighbours will be increasingly taken into consideration as a cross-cutting issue. The respondents of the Euromed Survey identified a number of potential areas of cooperation that could also be taken into consideration, notably at socio-economic levels. It is also noticeable that the respondents focused less on the security dimension (CFSP/CSDP) compared to the proposals of the High Representative and the European Commission.

In terms of methodology, the Joint Communication stressed that the EU “will use Thematic Frameworks to offer cooperation on regional issues (...) to provide a regular forum to discuss joint policy approaches, programming and investment that reach beyond the neighbourhood,”⁹ Turkey being mentioned explicitly in this framework. This is in line with the proposals of the respondents that insisted on the need to promote regular dialogue and to be quite flexible regarding the formats of these multi-level dialogues.

However, one major difference is that the majority of the respondents insisted on the need to be strict regarding conditionality, whereas the Joint Communication mentioned the fact that there “will no longer be a single set of progress reports on all countries simultaneously. Instead, the EU will seek to develop a new style of assessment, focusing specifically on meeting the goals agreed with partners.”¹⁰ If flexibility is also applied to conditionality this might indeed generate a double standard perception that could undermine the EU’s credibility in its wider neighbourhood. The Euromed Survey respondents are apparently very much aware of and concerned about this key issue.

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6. European Commission and High Representative, Joint Communication on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Brussels, 18 November 2015, JOIN(2015) 50 final.

7. JOIN(2015) 6 final, p. 3.

8. For other proposals, see also: Gsöhl, S., & Lannon, E. (Eds.). *The European Union’s Broader Neighbourhood: Challenges and opportunities for cooperation beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy*. Oxon: Routledge, 2015, 348 p.

9. JOIN(2015) 50, p. 18.

10. Ibid., p. 5.