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Understanding conflict. Building peace.

Submission to the 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy

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This submission provides recommendations for re-shaping the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) from a peacebuilding perspective, drawing on Alert's significant sectoral policy experience, as well as expertise within the regions concerned.

Originally conceived as an alternative to accession, the ENP has encountered significant challenges as a vehicle for providing stability, in the Arab Spring, conflict in Syria and Libya, and in Russian re-asserting its interests within its former sphere of influence.

The EU has received criticism for its inability to adapt the ENP framework and engage with this changed environment. The inherent tensions within the ENP are becoming more pronounced, such as between the short-term political interests of their governments, and what individual partner countries need to become more stable, secure and prosperous, as well as between the short-term interests of member states and the long-term benefits of more holistic, coherent approaches. Linked to that, there is a perceived trade-off between dealing with security issues in the short-term, with an emphasis on 'hard security' approaches aiming for immediate results, and dealing with them in a more complementary, comprehensive manner, which may take longer and be more politically risky within the EU.

Overall, this paper is premised on contextual realities and the need for a pragmatic approach. The fact is that many of the countries to both the east and south of the EU are tinderboxes within unstable regions, and must thus be handled with great care and attention. As a consequence, the EU neighbourhood partnerships should be designed to promote a combination of stability and progress in the EU's neighbours and within the EU, viewed through the combined lens of human security and the capacity of citizens and societies to flourish, economically, social and politically.

Recommendation 1: Avoid focusing on siloed, technical approaches to political challenges

The effectiveness of the ENP has been inhibited due to a lack of focus on underlying causes of instability. The current approach in the form of Association Agreements tries to apply technical approaches to fundamentally political challenges, ending up with an assortment of technical activities, often tackling different issues (e.g. economic governance, infrastructure, law and justice, security sector reform (SSR)) but which rarely add up to a mutually reinforcing approach.

It is essential that the EU look at the overall political economy of each partner country and identify a cohesive strategy which encompasses current and future drivers of conflict and what factors are needed and what opportunities are available to promote sustainable social and political stability. In other words, the EU should apply a progressive peacebuilding lens to the partnership objectives and interventions it develops.

Recommendation 2: Apply a conflict-sensitive approach

The ENP review team's consideration of conflict sensitive approaches is welcome but needs to be fully articulated and more broadly applied. A focus on conflict-sensitising activities perceived to relate to 'security' will not be enough to promote stability and societal progress. Going down this path falls into the trap of overly technical approaches and overlooks the interconnections between activities, interventions and context.

The ENP needs to apply conflict sensitivity at several levels. Firstly it needs to look at how its policy decisions and interventions impact at the regional level, and how regional conflict dynamics interact with these decisions. For example, there is a need to look at creating compatible models of cooperation in the eastern partnership. Creating a zero sum game between the EU and Eurasian Customs Union reinforced tensions within the region. Similarly, what will be the impact of an

increased focus on SSR in the Eastern Partnership? In MENA, regional approaches should consider the regional implications of the Syrian crisis (in particular in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey), and how this conflict and refugee crisis interacts with pre-existing local structural and governance issues. For example, the regional and cross-border movement and illicit trade of people, goods and weapons links to chronic socio-economic and political marginalisation of border regions (such as in North Lebanon and south West and East Tunisia), where communities feel they have few or no viable economic alternatives other than look across the borders for their livelihoods.

Secondly, it needs to be applied at the national and sub-national levels. It is important to avoid reinforcing governance structures that are oppressive or corrupt. For example, there is a live question about how the EU can strengthen Ukraine without reinforcing the oligarchical patronage networks which contribute to distrust in government and prevent a state-society contract from evolving progressively. Focusing on stability needs in Egypt may well have made it harder for the EU to follow up on former High Representative Ashton's active concern about expanding space for political freedoms.

Thirdly, there is a need to look at the conflict sensitivity of individual or sectoral interventions. For instance, how will infrastructure development impact on local communities' access to land and livelihoods, how will economic reforms reduce or produce inequalities such as between ethnic or religious groups, and what are the consequences of 'professionalising' a security force in the absence of strengthening capacity for civilian oversight?

It is important that conflict sensitivity is integrated from the beginning, prior to the point of agreement with the relevant government and stakeholders. This must flow into the design process and then be monitored throughout the life of the program to anticipate and respond to changing circumstances. This process of course needs to be underpinned by rigorous analysis shaped by input from both the partner government but also other stakeholders within the country.

Overall, understanding and focusing on where compound risks are emerging (e.g. effects of climate change overlaid with inequality, or political exclusion, or already existing identity-based conflicts) will help to design more tailored, focused approaches. Understanding compound risks will help the ENP become more adaptable and identify where it needs to draw on other EU instruments when gaps in the ENP response exist.

Recommendation 3: Engagement should be less state-centric

The ENP also needs to be less state-centric. This needs to happen at two levels. It needs to expand its vision to more fully consider regional and cross-border issues. It also needs to deepen its engagement to reach citizens, the private sector and civil society – essentially those beyond the government. This is critical if the partnership is based on the idea of creating incentives within society to adopt liberal and progressive values over time.

Regional strategies are essentially regional in name only. ENP engagement is generally undertaken on a country-by-country basis, with a national focus. Promoting stability in some countries will be challenging and probably unsustainable unless the regional dimensions of instability are identified and mitigated. As well as seeking to mitigate the internal impact of regional issues, there is also a need to engage with neighbours of neighbours in more flexible ways, through for example, incentives such as regional economic cooperation.

Engaging beyond the state will be essential. At the core of many challenges in Europe's neighbourhood is the absence or breakdown of the state-society contract. It will be increasingly

important to access and engage with citizens, civil society, political and religious groups, diaspora networks, non-state actors, and the private sector, traditional and informal structures, through programme design and inclusive dialogue. There is also a need to consider sub-national disparities, often not a focus for national governments, and engagement with the institutions that operate in these spaces.

A particular challenge for the ENP has been how to deal with unrecognised or disputed territories. Often, these lie at the heart of conflict dynamics but current policies have been ineffective in reaching and engaging with such entities. To this extent, the ENP has had little relevance when it comes to dealing with stability issues in the Caucasus. As such, providing support to reform certain institutions in Georgia at the same time as avoiding engaging with 'de facto' authorities in Abkhazia or South Ossetia has contributed to growing divergence in paths, allowing increased Russian institutional presence in those entities and reduced prospects of the type of political resolution that the EU supports.

Recommendation 4: Contemporary security challenges require a multifaceted response

In defining the ENP broadly and forging partnerships individually, it will be important to avoid falling into the trap of adopting the dominant theme of the day, whether this is with regard to Russia, ISIS or migration. This leads to a reactive approach. For example, Eastern partnerships should take account of but not be defined by Russia. Similarly, in relation to the Mediterranean, migration is an issue but not the only or definitive one. The approach needs to focus on addressing the underlying challenges to peace and stability, which are different in each place.

There is also a need for more holistic, long-term approaches to security challenges within the EU and in the European neighbourhood. Issues such as radicalisation, violent extremism, transnational organised crime and mass migration cannot be dealt with through security responses alone. Such efforts require a complementary approach that pairs such responses with efforts that tackle the multiple and interconnected root causes associated with these issues.

For example, in Tunisia, development assistance which aims to remove some of the social, political, and economic drivers of violent radicalisation over the medium term can be paired and mutually informed by shorter-term measures designed to limit the risk of harm to Tunisians and Europeans from violence- and these can be linked to programmes devised and implemented with members of the Tunisian diaspora in France, the UK and Germany.

Indeed, the EU is in a unique position to engage international expatriate and diaspora networks. Diaspora communities are critical conflict and development actors through their prominent role in the transfer of financial, social and political support. Diaspora communities can play a unique role in building peace. The EU can support this by facilitating dialogue, supporting their policy advocacy efforts and advising on conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. The role of diaspora is particularly relevant for Lebanon, with a diaspora population of approximately 14 million and also for Syria. A role which is often under-examined is the role diaspora play in engaging with national and regional politics, including financing political groups and state institutions (such as the Lebanese Army). An example of Alert's work with diaspora within the EU is the Syrian Platform for Peace (SPP).¹

Inclusive approaches to security in Tunisia and Lebanon should also address socio-economic and political marginalisation of communities on the periphery, such as on borders which have been under supported and developed by the centralised state, or in a situation where the state is absent.

¹ <http://www.international-alert.org/media/launch-syrian-platform-peace>

In these vacuums and with little support, disengaged communities turn to illicit trade across borders (such as between Algeria and Tunisia) to support themselves. Genuinely inclusive approaches would look beyond partner states to create space for civil society and communities, including the most marginalised and non-formal security providers, to engage them in decision-making and provide civilian oversight of security sector.

There will be instances where partner governments are simply unprepared to engage through the ENP on issues critical to their own stability. In these instances, and to promote a comprehensive approach, it will be necessary to draw on and apply other tools of EU foreign policy, including CSFP, CSDP, the EEAS and DEVCO, in a complementary way. The need for this approach is further reinforced by the understanding that greater challenges to European security, such as its difficult relationship with Russia, should not be left merely to the ENP to play out, but should be addressed in a more comprehensive, integrated manner.

The ENP should also carefully consider its own comparative advantage within the security sphere. There are other players probably better equipped to engage in collaboration on what is often called hard security, such as SSR, including individual member states, but also organisations such as NATO. Such an approach will also minimise the risk of supporting governments that act against European values of democracy and human rights, which is a common concern for some member states.

Ultimately, the ENP should reflect a human security approach and look at all dimensions of individuals' security needs and wellbeing, which encompass both their safety on the streets, their national security against external aggression, and the strength and accountability of their government institutions. This will help strike an appropriate balance between responses to local, national and regional security challenges.

Conclusions

Overall, it is time to re-think how the EU supports its interests in its neighbourhood. For the EU, development in the neighbourhood and security should be understood and acted upon as one and the same. Achieving this will require deeper political engagement at regional, country and local levels, which engages a broad range of actors.

The ENP requires a different, more coherent approach than it has so far had – politically more astute, better informed, combining short-term and long-term outcomes and factoring in the trade-offs between them, and making it conflict sensitive throughout. The EU should enhance its internal, organisational integration and its capacity for informed, political action. The foundations for this are solid analyses of the local and regional contexts that help the ENP be less state centric and better focused on human security.

Recognising the member state politics behind the scenes, the ENP should nevertheless seek to move away from the position that there has to be a trade-off between individual EU member states interests in specific countries in the neighbourhood and the long-term development of the region. There will be complementarity where member states give the ENP and EU more broadly, the latitude to act in a more cohesive strategic manner.