

From: Bruno Vandecasteele

Replies to questions:

**Differentiation:**

***Should the EU gradually explore new relationship formats to satisfy the aspirations and choices of those who do not consider the Association Agreements as the final stage of political association and economic integration?***

It is still too early to consider 'next steps'. Many AAs are not yet implemented and economic integration does not happen as soon as DCFTAs are signed. I would suggest to first monitor the implementation of AAs and DCFTAs and consider possible further integration only in a few years.

***Is there scope within the ENP for some kind of variable geometry, with different kinds of relationships for those partners that choose different levels of engagement?***

Definitely yes. In this context, I would like to point to the notion of 'partnership'. In fact a 'partnership' is ideally an end state in which both parties share common goals and values, and take coordinated action to achieve these goals and protect these values. The countries in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood of the EU cannot all be called 'partners' all over the board. As the joint consultation paper outlines, the ambitions for integration are very diverse. Partnership can be strong in some areas and weak or non-existing in others. I would suggest to gradually leave the discourse 'partnership' and shift to this partnership as a goal, not as a starting point. This would be challenging because it is overwhelmingly present in the communication of the last years. However, on the long term the relations of the EU with third countries should become differentiated – not only in concrete action but also at the discursive level.

This being said, the neighbouring countries are no monolithic blocs. Some stakeholders (civil society organisations (CSOs), political parties, individuals, ...) may be closer to a partnership with the EU than others. The EU should engage with all actors – those in power and those in the opposition – even if these actors do not aim to strengthen relations with the EU. Engagement with all actors is crucial to remain informed about local, regional and national developments.

**Focus:**

***Do you agree with the proposed areas of focus? If not, what alternative or additional priorities would you propose?***

I agree with these areas of focus, but they should not necessarily be all pursued in the relations with each country. Ideally the partner countries' Governments and other actors (opposition parties, CSOs) would be asked about their preferred areas for cooperation, to check if this matches with the EU's stated areas of focus.

***Does the ENP currently have the right tools to address the priorities on which you consider it should focus? How could sectoral dialogues contribute?***

The ENP has the right tools, including political and technical dialogue in various formats, financial support, information and expertise sharing etc.

Sectoral dialogues can be hugely effective in discussing best practices (both from the EU and from the neighbouring countries), but also in identifying needs in terms of training, capacities and

(financial) resources to implement reforms where necessary. These sectoral dialogues should therefore be maintained and, where necessary, broadened and strengthened.

#### **Flexibility:**

##### ***How to streamline Action Plans to adapt them better to individual country needs and priorities?***

This is typically a question that should be answered by the neighbouring countries in the first place, which can then be followed by an assessment from the EU on the feasibility.

##### ***Is annual reporting needed for countries which do not choose to pursue closer political and economic integration?***

Annual reporting is needed for all countries. For countries that do not choose to pursue closer relations with the EU, this reporting can be lighter and less elaborate, but annual reporting remains a crucial tool for regular and systematic assessment of bilateral relations.

##### ***How to assess progress against jointly agreed reform targets when a partner country experiences significant external pressure, for instance armed conflict or refugee flows?***

There should be a possibility to re-evaluate jointly agreed reform targets in case of exceptional circumstances (of which external pressure can be one of the possibilities).

##### ***What tools would the EU need to respond more effectively to fast-changing developments in its neighbourhood?***

As mentioned above: a good working relation with all relevant groups of society, also with those groups that are not 'pro-European'. This is the best guarantee to be well-informed and to take the necessary steps in case of fast-changing developments.

#### **Ownership and visibility:**

##### ***Can the ENP deliver benefits within a shorter timeframe, in order that the value of the policy can be more easily grasped by the public? What would this require from the EU? And from the partner country?***

The benefits of the ENP are typically more long-term than short-term oriented. I do not think the ambition should be to deliver short-term benefits; rather, in communication with the public it should be emphasized that the EU typically focuses on long-term benefits which are more stable and often more equally distributed. The main tool for 'proving' this is of course to further facilitate and, where possible, liberalize the visa requirements for nationals of the neighbouring countries. In this way they can experience the benefits of reforms towards good governance, rule of law and free media. It can also be instructive in shaping expectations of reforms, in other words it can help defining what to expect and what not to expect from closer relations with the EU.

##### ***How can the EU financial support be recast in an investment rather than donor dynamic, in which the partner country's active role is clearer?***

Co-funding rules can be made stricter (i.e. higher share to be contributed from partner country or part of the grant in the form of a loan). This will eventually allow the EU to be present in more projects and programmes.