

The European Neighbourhood Policy has failed because of its own contradictions and small budget. But the Arab spring offers a renewed opportunity for the EU to reinvigorate the programme.

Apr 17 2012

For many, the Arab Spring graphically illustrated the European Neighbourhood Policy's failure in its aims to promote security and prosperity in the European neighbourhood, and that it should now be disbanded. [Julian Kirchherr](#) argues that the new democracies emerging in some Arab Spring countries offer an opportunity for the reinvention of the policy if the European Union continues to increase its budget and to introduce new measures to foster prosperity in the region.



Last month, [Giulia Pastorella argued on this blog](#) that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) ought to be quietly binned, and that, “of the many sticks and carrots which make up Europe’s soft power, the ENP has arguably been the least effective”. I agree with this judgement, though, I disagree with Pastorella’s conclusion. While the impact of the ENP has indeed been negligible, the European Commission has now undertaken an array of promising measures to revamp its neighbourhood policy. These efforts and this new dynamic must be taken into account – just as the new environment the EU now faces in its Southern neighbourhood. If the new post Arab-spring environment is adequately assessed, and all the EU’s proposed measures are implemented, the ENP will not be a policy which should be scrapped as soon as possible, but may actually be a successful one.

It is true that the Arab Spring was the most graphic example of the ENP’s ineffectiveness. However, it reshuffled the players in the Arab world and their strategic incentives – a great opportunity for Europe and its neighbourhood alike. Before the awakening of the Arab world, the EU faced a dilemma within its neighbourhood: On the one hand, the EU wanted to develop an area of stability (interests). On the other hand, it wanted to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law (values). However, both of these objectives could not be reached simultaneously – at least not in the short-term. To put it bluntly: Supporting stability in Libya meant supporting Muammar Gaddafi. Supporting democracy meant opposing Muammar Gaddafi.

The world of politics is a short-term

endeavour and it is driven by interests, rather than values. Despite all the discourses on the 'normative power Europe' – which Pastorella alludes to – voters do not value opposing regimes if this implies civil war (and military intervention), increased expenditures on development aid and migration flows. They prefer stability. And politicians – admittedly and for a variety of reasons, European politicians to a much lesser extent – seek re-election. Hence, any EU neighbourhood policy will always foster stability, which that is what the ENP did and why it never made any serious progress (or efforts) on any other dimension of its set of more honourable goals.



Credit Dan H Creative Commons: BY NC

Ironically, the core objective of the ENP, stability, was not reached either in the end. The European Commission had underestimated the level of frustration in the Southern Mediterranean – just as the political leadership in the Arab Spring countries had. I believe that the main reason for this failure is that the European Union's tranquillizer for the population in the Arab Spring countries – cash – was not strong enough. The ENP's budget was a mere €11.181 billion to be spent from 2007 – 2013. To break these numbers down: The EU only offered [€1.80 per capita to Egypt](#) per year, and only €7 per capita to Tunisia. It is difficult to understand how such a budget is supposed to have any effects. The ENP failed because it was contradictory and because its budget was too small.

However, the future looks much brighter than the ENP's problematic past. The main reason is that the EU can now pursue the ENP's core objectives of stability and democracy, to a much greater extent and at the same time. Democracies are slowly developing in some of the Arab Spring countries and supporting these democracies means fostering democracy, human rights and the rule of law (values) as well as stability (interests). And the European Commission is catching up on this new environment; it has understood not only that its policy has failed (Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy: recently said that the ENP "[has clear room for further improvement](#)"), but also that there is now a great opportunity for a U-turn.

In May 2011 the European Commission released [its response strategy](#) to the new environment in the Arab Spring which can be boiled down to three core ideas: More money, more market access and more mobility. On top of the original budget pledged for the European Neighbourhood Policy, €1.24 billion were immediately added. Additionally, the European Commission has proposed an increase of the ENP budget to €18 billion for the period 2014 – 2020, a 50% rise. New initiatives such as the [SPRING programme](#) (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) will help to foster growth, and the long-term goal for the neighbourhood now is to create *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas* (DCFTAs). For greater student mobility, €66 million has been added to its [Erasmus Mundus programme](#) for South Mediterranean students

Is this really enough to make the European Neighbourhood Policy a success? Of course it is not. But the EU is now on the right track and the inherent contradiction of its ENP (values versus interests) is starting to dissolve because promoting values now implies promoting interests and vice-versa. A promising path dependency is starting off. The DCFTAs, for instance, could serve as a "[golden carrot](#)" for the Arab Spring countries, with the EU offering more market access for more institutional reforms (values) and at the same time exploring new market opportunities in its Southern Mediterranean

(interests). This new strategic scene and the European Commission's promising action to support the ENP, means that now it most definitely should *not* be quietly binned.

[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/l2gFHb>

About the author

Julian Kirchherr - LSE Public Policy Group

Julian Kirchherr studies Public Policy and Management at the London School of Economics (LSE). He joined LSE's Public Policy Group (PPG) in January 2012. He is primarily interested in elite theories, environmental policy, welfare economics, human resource management, digitalization and futurology. In his spare time, he runs a [career consultancy](#) and serves as the [editor-in-chief of Libertas](#), the magazine of the European Liberal Youth (LYMEC).



Related posts:

1. [Five minutes with Timothy Reno of the International Policy and Leadership Institute: "Transformation and consolidation of changes in the Arab Spring countries takes time." \(14.2\)](#)
2. [By building up the private sector and free market economies, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development will help to foster democracy in the Arab Spring countries. \(10.6\)](#)
3. [Despite its costs and limited effectiveness, the European Neighbourhood Policy's symbolic commitment to engage beyond the EU may mean that it is doomed to survive. \(14.1\)](#)