

EU NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY IN THE SOUTH AND EAST: IDEALISM AND REALISM. IS THERE A WAY TO BALANCE ONE WITH THE OTHER?

I- INTRODUCTION

When we question the possibility of having a balance between idealism and realism I understand having an equilibrium between a value-oriented and interest-driven policy.

The need to ask this question stems from the alleged "mistakes of the past". However before elaborating further on these I need to point out the structural differences between the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU.

II- THE STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Actually the difference was made clear by Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski when he said :

"that's where the difference lies, contrary to the Southern neighbourhood countries, the Eastern partners are not just neighbours of Europe- they are our European neighbours"

When compared with Southern Neighbourhood, the Eastern Neighbourhood countries have three major assets:

(1) they are relatively functional and predictable (so it is unlikely that they would become sources of major crises)

(2) the region has significant potential for grassroots democracy (over the past decade, mass protests against election fixing took place in each of the countries on at least one occasion, some of which ended in blocking attempts at deepening authoritarian practices)

(3) although their level of economic integration with the EU is lesser when compared with the Southern neighborhood, most of these countries have a European vocation (European identity),

for them EU is a "civilisational model" worth copying, and despite a lack of a clear perspective most of these countries feel that they have a right to become EU members.

(4) On the other hand Although the EU has not itself been regarded as a political model in the Southern neighbourhood , European values have been the core values driving the Arab awakenings "democracy, the rule of law, human rights and end to- corruption, civilian control of the army"

What is common to both neighborhoods is a decrease in the attractiveness and a sense of lack of credibility regarding the EU because of the current economic, political and institutional crises which have absorbed significant energy and resources.

III- ALLEGED MISTAKES OF THE PAST

When I come back to the "alleged mistakes of the past" :

In the Southern neighbourhood, EU is blamed by having put the emphasis on stability rather than transformation and cooperating with the old regimes in the past and hence for its failure in closing the region's income and democratic governance gap. Thus, for years, the EU has been criticized for the lack of consistency between its declared goals and actual policies in the southern Mediterranean.

In the Eastern neighbourhood, there seems to be four main problems which have reduced the effectiveness of the EU's actions :

- The EU has been unable to answer the question regarding the membership prospects of Eastern European countries or to determine clearly the goal which an integration not involving membership should seek;*
- the lack of membership prospects entailed both a significant reduction of financial support and an inability to make full use of the conditionality mechanisms,*

- *in the context of promoting its values, EU is blamed to be unable to resolve the dilemma of whether it should condemn authoritarian tendencies and support grassroots democratic movements or rather choose stability and economic benefits resulting from trade co-operation with Eastern European governments (regardless of their attitude to democracy),*
- *The EU also was unable to resolve the dilemmas linked to Russian policy, which in many areas opposed the goals and actions taken by it.*

IV- Given all these past problems that also reflect the idealism vs realism dilemma : EU is currently at an important and critical juncture at the implementation of the ENP.

In the Eastern front, *The current mood is that The European Neighbourhood Policy lacks the political will, consistency and especially the credibility, which it enjoyed in the re-unification process of Europe in the 1990s and there are signs of backsliding in some countries, which seemed to be on the track of democratic consolidation before. Currently DCFTA (deep and comprehensive free trade agreements) are on the agenda.*

These agreements would be crucial for an efficient Eastern Neighbourhood Policy as they can be a perfect example of striking a balance between idealism and realism. While economic incentives have been compromised by negotiations, EU needs civil society's support to ensure legitimacy and implementation.

Furthermore The EaP countries' experience of negotiating and implementing the DCFTA agreements can be a crucially important future model of EU's co-operation with the southern neighbours.

In the Southern front, *a number of countries overthrew their ruling autocrats, but the EU had no role in that. The EU revised the Southern neighbourhood policy in 2011, but the revision's output does not look very impressive.*

In particular, conditionality appears unlikely to work (in countries where reforms have been an endogenous product.) The current mood in the

Southern Neighbourhood is despair. The geopolitics of the Mediterranean region are changing and the EU risks paying a high price in terms of security, influence and access, if it opts for a passive approach.

V- CONCLUSION

Within this context how can we answer our question ? The possibility of a balance between idealism and realism in ENP?

I think the simple balance between interest based and value driven approach appears in the relation between ends and means.

The immediate concern of the EU is to have stability in its neighbourhood for its own security which is a realist objective. In order to attain this, EU should contribute to the creation of economically prosperous and democratic countries in its neighbourhood. This would be a litmus test for the attractiveness and transformative power of the EU and hence for its effectiveness as a global actor.

However, the past experiences of the EU prove that reaching this objective via interest-oriented or realist means is not possible. EU should translate its idealist pro-democracy and pro-human rights discourse into effective action now. This necessitates political engagement and strong and consistent support for the reforms towards establishment of European/universal values (democracy, rule of law human rights, fight with corruption).

Of course mutual accountability is a key to success here. The reforms towards democratic consolidation and economic development should be internalized. Thus encouraging a multi-stakeholder dialogue and developing an enabling environment for civil society in the partner countries are key issues on which the Union should focus its assistance to its neighbourhood. This necessitates developing projects that aim at grassroots-level capacity building, as well as creating efficient channels of communication with emerging social movements, civil organizations and economic actors.

I also would like to shortly touch upon particular steps needed to be taken by the EU in which we can observe a balance between idealism and realism :

In the case of Eastern Neighbourhood

EU should try to narrow the distance between membership and non-membership by gradually offering better access to the European market and policies & may be EU should come up with a new category for enlargement that is something short of full membership.

In the case of Southern Neighbourhood :

What is needed is more generosity and efficiency to foreign aid, market access - especially for agricultural goods - sensible immigration policies, (mobility partnerships, burden sharing) while strengthening conditionality and linking it directly to reform in partner countries.

People also refer to the potential benefits of co-operating with countries like Turkey to increase the efficiency of the neighbourhood policy, especially because of the country's source of inspiration role in the southern neighbourhood. Such a policy could have had an idealist aspect too. However Turkey's vulnerability is increasing as a source of inspiration, stemming both from the slowdown in Turkey's domestic political reform process, the instability of its economic performance and the way she has started to be perceived in the region.

The only area where it would be difficult to prevent the overwhelming role of realism is Russia's "unprecedented intervention" in the eastern neighborhood. This will remain one of the key challenges for the EU.

In order to attain all these EU should overcome its internal problems or try to minimize the impacts of its internal problems on the ENP. These problems are the euro crisis, institutional and political crises, the confusion of its migration and asylum policies and shortcomings in the construction of its foreign policy.

This is not an easy task at all, however if the EU can not implement an efficient neighbourhood policy made up of realist and idealist components it would unfortunately be a simple spectator overwhelmed by crucial regional developments.