

ASSESSING THE EU'S POLICIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: PRIORITIES OF THE ENP

MICHAEL A. KÖHLER

Director Neighbourhood, DG Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid

The EU cannot provide support for the political process unless partner countries are willing to reform.

Once again, the results of the Euromed Survey, which has now gone into its 5th year, provide a very interesting set of findings, presenting a unique insight into the perception of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) by both EU countries as well as its partner countries. The Survey gives plenty of food for thought as it carefully and critically scrutinises the ENP's performance.

The findings show that the respondents' opinions endorse to a large extent the policy approach of the ENP. In question D1 respondents were asked to "select and arrange [a set of policy] areas according to what [they] believe should be the priorities of the EU in the near future" regarding its Euro-Mediterranean policies. The majority of responses send a positive signal, as they show that a high demand seems to exist for EU support for democratic political as well as institutional and administrative reform. In fact, the ENP is already acting upon this demand, as the EU is building partnerships with its southern neighbours in order to accompany and support their reform agenda and foster democratic political transition. In addition, the ENP programming for the years to come foresees strong support for reform efforts towards democratic values, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as the capacity-building of and partnerships with civil society actors.

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Nevertheless, the dynamism for political transition and democratic reforms which was prevalent in the southern neighbourhood in 2011 has largely disappeared in 2014. Where partner countries are unwilling to reform, the EU has no possibility to provide support for the political process. This point underlines the caution that needs to be applied when measuring the impact of ENP measures. The ENP must be understood as a partnership with its neighbours within which mutual commitments are preconditions for success.

In question D3 respondents were asked to "assess the impact of [certain] measures of the ENP on the Southern Mediterranean countries." The results presented indicate an overall trend of assessing the ENP measures' effectiveness as rather low – a finding which should provide motivation to repeatedly verify whether the ENP is designed the right way. One very interesting observation to be made is that countries in the Mashreq seem to rather positively assess the impacts that ENP measures have on the ground, while countries in the Maghreb make rather pessimistic assessments. The EU tries to respond to partner countries' specific needs by differentiating its assistance package for each partner. Nevertheless, in this regard it should not be overlooked that countries making up the Maghreb or the Mashreq region differ significantly even with each other in the reform process, commitment to EU partnership or perceptions of EU assistance.

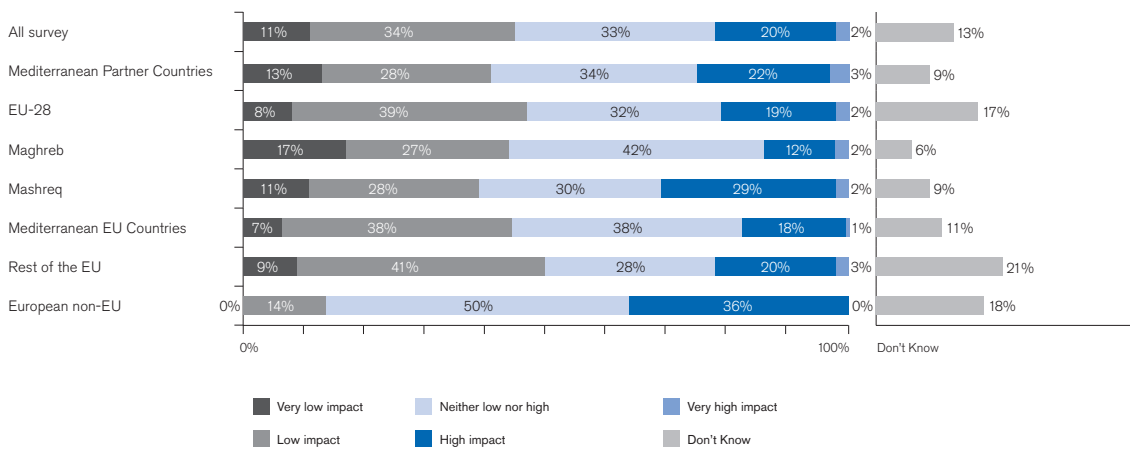
To qualify the findings of question D3 to an extent, it should be kept in mind that certain ENP measures which respondents were asked to assess are not yet or have only recently been implemented. One of these measures is the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). It needs to be stressed that so far no DCFTAs have been signed with partner countries in the southern neighbourhood, and negotiations are only being held with Morocco and, hopefully soon, Tunisia. Similarly, declarations on mobility partnerships have been signed

solely with Morocco in 2013 and with Tunisia in 2014. Therefore, it is understandable that misperceptions exist on the ground as to the effectiveness of these policy measures.

Within the framework of question D3, the Support for Partnership, Reform, and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) programme has generally been assessed as having low effectiveness. Indeed, the financial amounts handled under the more for more programmes, such as SPRING, might not be very significant given the partner countries' economic size and performance. Regardless, the division between partner states receiving and those not receiving allocations under SPRING does send a strong political signal to the southern neighbourhood, and partner countries recognise the added value that the award of this programme entails. In line with the more for more principle, SPRING provides incentives to partner countries to step up their political reform plans, by offering additional financial assistance in return.

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Graph 1: Assessing the the impact of the following measures of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) on the Southern Mediterranean countries: Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth (SPRING)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 5th Euromed Survey

In conclusion, it is still too early to ultimately judge the impacts of certain measures under the revamped ENP following the Arab awakening of 2011, as their effects still have to unfold. At the same time, the EU can only grant very limited meaningful support to southern neighbourhood countries, as long as local governments do not put reforms in place and show political willingness to commit to a partnership with the EU. Regardless of these limitations, in order to create more attractive incentives for political transition in the southern neighbourhood there is only one promising approach: political coordination among European actors in the southern neighbourhood needs to be stepped up, and joint programming on the EU level between EU Member States, EU institutions and European financial institutions must become a priority. These cooperation exercises could also include other important actors in the Middle East, such as Arab states and donors.

As long as local governments do not show their commitment to partnership with the EU, EU support will remain limited.

The EU has already taken the first steps in this direction. I am convinced that EU assistance can promise vigorous effects if it forms part of coordinated approaches, is implemented in genuine partnership and plays an instrumental role for the whole European Neighbourhood Policy approach.