

European Neighborhood Policy: Principles and Perspectives for Cooperation

ENP: An Instrument or A Forum For The Development of Relations?

The new expansion of the European Union gave impetus to the EU ambition to become a powerful political and economic agent throughout the world, with a new stimulus. However, inclusion of any new member, especially Eastern, tends to entail new challenges within both internal and external relations. This was reflected in the de facto failure of the latest attempt to formalize the EU institutional fundamentals. This showed that a considerable amount of time is necessary for “developing” the concept of the “Wider Europe”. Therefore, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which is based on this concept, cannot be the same for all the neighbors, and suggests one and the same “size” to fit all, including the countries that have already promulgated their political positions as “towards Europe” and have institutionalized their relations within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Thus, within such a context, the perception of ENP becomes a complicated matter: yes, in politics we have taken a European direction, but the question is what issues does the European Neighborhood Policy address?

There were several countries that wildly hailed the new initiative and approved of the ENP Action Plans. However, when having taken a moment to reflect back, they found out that except for uncertainty, the whole initiative does not suggest anything else. Ukraine and Moldova, for instance, were suggested Action Plans that were devoid of local multi-lateral representation. These documents did not belong to these countries and did not reflect their local specifics. Europe simply put it upfront to a group of high ranking officials; still flattered by the polite smile of Europe, they signed them and then realized they need to clarify what it suggests to their countries and people; EU membership? The answer was too vague.

Thus, the hope that the ENP would provide a forum for developing closer relations with Europe, seems to have given away to the idea that it is simply an instrument to block easy access to Europe.

What Is The Piece We Want From The European Pie?

Is this how Armenia experiences ENP? Answers can differ, given how the question is approached. According to one of the perspectives, ENP is definitely a promising forum for the development of better relations with Europe. According to this, except political and economic prospects, the ENP suggests opportunities for:

- implementing internal reforms more efficiently, through the anticipated technical and financial assistance;
- mobilizing internal resources;
- enhancing EU integration practices in Armenian foreign policy; and

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- looking outside of the “regional box” and developing a political dialog with key partners, which may develop into positive practices of meeting international political obligations.

However, the opponents of this perspective raise counterarguments, noting that Armenia has never had any lack of financial resources to implement any project. They question the certainty that ENP involvement will ensure the internal mobilization of resources, since Armenia has not been successful so far at doing this.

In addition, those advocating the first perspective think that Armenia is ready for the negotiation process to start any time soon, after the Europeans postponed the process, which was due to begin in September, 2005. The Armenian delegation is clear on what concessions can be made, and where they should not be made. The opponents, on the other hand, believe that such a statement is groundless, since it is unacceptable to negotiate on behalf of a people when, in general, it is not sure what the whole process is about. Where is the public opinion? Is it reflected anywhere in the optimistic expectations of the first perspective? These are questions that have yet to be answered. Thus, the piece Armenians want from the European pie is not yet well-defined.

Assets and Liabilities

If Armenia were to participate in the bid for European integration, how would the assets and liabilities of the “company” be described to attract a favorable disposition towards the applicant?

Assets:

- willingness and readiness to integrate European standards;
- independence in defining and representing its interests;
- positive former practices in the European integration process; and
- presentation of well-balanced and realistic expectations.

Liabilities:

- assurance of a more participatory approach towards the development of the Action Plan;
- presentation of Europe to the Armenian public and, in general, increase public awareness regarding the European Union;
- effective preparation for the negotiation process: development of the team and a clear agenda; and
- formation of an official body (system) that will be dealing with the European policy projects in general.

Will we win the bid? It depends on how wise we will be in meeting our liabilities and showcasing our assets...

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on “European Neighborhood Policy: Principles and Perspectives for Cooperation”, which took place on September 19, 2005. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, entrepreneurs, and representatives of the international organizations.

The round table was organized with the support of the UK Department for International Development /DFID/.