CHATHAM HOUSE

The Annual Chatham House Members' Conference on
Global Futures 2010
Rethinking the European Union's Neighbourhood Policies towards the Middle East and North Africa

Session Three
Enhancing EU Stability: Labour, migration and development

Overview (on the record)
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The structure of my opening remarks takes its cue from the four main questions that this session is meant to address:

1. Could political instability and domestic upheavals in the Balkans and the MENA region spill over into the EU? What threats does this pose?
2. The Neighbourhood Policy looks to strike a balanced migration management strategy whereby illegal immigrants are kept out but highly skilled workers from neighbouring countries are welcome. How is this working in practice?
3. To what extent does the current shape of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy reflect its security needs?
4. What is the EU's role in tackling the Middle East peace process and how can it be enhanced?

1) Could political instability and domestic upheavals in the Balkans and the MENA region spill over into the EU? What threats does this pose?

This question addresses an important issue that has been driving much of the thinking behind the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a policy that seeks to promote democracy, prosperity and stability in the countries of the region.

My first point in answer to this question is that spill-over in the traditional sense of contagion where conflict in one country or region spills over into another is less of an issue in respect of the Balkans and the MENA region. Nonetheless, the fact that these parts of the EU neighbourhood remain politically, socially, and economically unsettled causes several problems for the EU, including

i) The need for continuing management of issues the EU is only moderately equipped to deal with successfully (capabilities, resources, political will) or that in fact do not lend themselves to the kinds of intervention that the EU is good at (promotion of economic reform and growth, education, youth exchanges and gender equality).

ii) Increased migration pressures (because of economic, political, social instability, and environmental decline, especially water scarcity).

iii) The consequences of a lack of intra-regional cooperation in the southern neighbourhood (and the political will to advance this process) and thus a lack of structures, processes and instruments to enable a more effective tackling of problems on the ground by those most affected.

iv) Instability and slow, if any, progress in terms of improving livelihoods which, in turn, increases the probability of radicalization among the population, aimed partly at their own governments, but potentially also at the EU, with mutually negative perceptions growing on either side and decreasing the likelihood of, for example, a common Mediterranean identity and policy agenda to emerge.

v) Even where political instability and domestic upheavals in the Balkans and the MENA region do not pose immediate and direct threats to the EU, they can act as 'facilitators' for problems from farther away, e.g., enabling transit for human and drug traffickers.

2) **The Neighbourhood Policy looks to strike a balanced migration management strategy whereby illegal immigrants are kept out but highly skilled workers from neighbouring countries are welcome. How is this working in practice?**

The short answer to this question is that it is not particularly well on either front for principally two reasons:

i) Local capacity and will to stem illegal migration remains relatively under-developed in terms of border management, as well as a dependency on remittances from migrants in the countries concerned.

ii) Attracting highly skilled workers from the region may bring some benefits to the EU, but has detrimental consequences for the region itself in that it deprives countries there of local talent that is desperately needed to achieve the democracy, prosperity and security that the EU prioritises in its Neighbourhood Policy.

3) **To what extent does the current shape of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy reflect its security needs?**

As almost any foreign policy, the ENP is security driven, especially if we apply a broader concept of security that extends beyond traditionally military notions of security. Stability in the Southern Neighbourhood is a key concern for the Union, as lack thereof is, rightly, seen as having a negative impact on the EU.

However, ENP objectives (prosperity, democracy and security in the Neighbourhood) and a wide range of programmes and initiatives to achieve them are, in traditional EU fashion, aimed at creating an environment in which conflicts can be resolved or prevented, radicalisation be minimised, understanding within Neighbourhood countries, among them, and between them and the Union be enhanced, and a cooperative and constructive problem-solving approach be adopted.

This may be considered as self-serving by some (and it does serve EU interests), but if successful, it also brings concrete and lasting benefits to the countries in the Southern Neighbourhood. But this is a big IF, and it thus also raises the question whether EU security needs are actually best served by the policies that currently make up the content of the ENP. In other words, are the promotion of political and economic reform effective policies in light of the EU's security needs? In the long term, certainly, but is the ENP devoting enough attention and resources to the short- and mid-term challenges so that investing in the long term makes sense?

4) What is the EU's role in tackling the Middle East peace process and how can it be enhanced?

The question for me here is a slightly different one, or, in fact, there are several prior questions that I think need answering:
   i)   Is it possible to enhance the role of the EU?
   ii) Is it necessary?
   iii) Will it have any positive impact, i.e., contribute to a resolution, or at least prevent further deterioration?

The EU may not be the main mediator in the conflict, but it has an important role to play nonetheless, primarily in two dimensions: in assisting on the ground, especially through humanitarian and development aid programmes; and as a market and source of investment, especially for Israel and some of the Arab states (particularly for oil and gas), and potentially more so for a future Palestinian state and its economy.

However, there is another problem. If the current peace process fails (or rather when?), the EU may be pushed into a more proactive role to 'manage' relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours and between Israel and the Palestinian territories, as well as among Arab states and the West Bank and Gaza. This will particularly be the case if a breakdown in the current process is followed by US disengagement. This would mean that the EU's role would be enhanced by necessity rather than choice. And it raises the question of whether the EU would be prepared for this, not least in terms of a common position among member states and within its institutions.

And if this is not gloomy enough an outlook for the region and the ENP yet, this last point reflects a much broader problem that the EU has in my view with regard to its ENP in general and with regard to the MENA region in particular. Since the beginning of a more structured engagement of the Union with the region, and most definitely since the launch of the ENP, there has been a proliferation of initiatives, programmes, and instruments targeted at the Southern Neighbourhood, but it is not always clear whether these are driven by 'process' and are masking a lack of policy substance, whether they reflect the complexity of issues that need to be addressed, whether they represent a comprehensive approach on the part of the Union, and/or they are an indication of the diversity, rather than unity, of interests and approaches across the member states and institutions of the EU.

Whatever the reason, to enhance the overall effectiveness of ENP on the ground and better serve the needs of the EU, its member states and citizens, the ENP needs to be both comprehensive and coherent, and it needs to be driven by a commonly shared definition of EU interests vis-à-vis the Southern Neighbourhood.