

The EU, Russia and the European Neighbourhood Policy: The Case of Moldova

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Introduction

On May the 1st 2004 the European Union underwent an enlargement that was by far the biggest it has seen and, indeed, is ever likely to experience.¹ To date, a great deal of time and energy has been devoted to analysing – and speculating about – the internal repercussions that the “Big Bang” enlargement will have on the Union. But every enlargement has also affected the way the EU conducts its external relations and foreign policy, and the current enlargement has been no exception.

This FORNET Plenary panel will discuss one such effect, namely the advent of new eastern neighbours – Belarus, Ukraine and, after Romania’s possible accession in 2007, Moldova – that are bordering the enlarged Union. However, and instead of scrutinizing the overall European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) concept – which has already been done on two different occasions within the FORNET framework² – the

¹ In December 2002 the Copenhagen European Council decided on the accession of ten new members: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia. The previous “records” are from 1973 and 1995, with three new members on both occasions.

² In the FORNET Plenary in Brussels in April 2004 and in the “WG on the CFSP and Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution” meeting in Sofia in October 2004.

session seeks to take a more in-depth look at one particular case of EU's new neighbourhood: The case of Moldova.

Moldova and the ENP

In 2004 the Union made the decision that in the aftermath of its “Big Bang” enlargement most of its neighbours, both old and new, would be subsumed under the rubric of European Neighbourhood Policy. Already in March 2003 the Commission had produced a communication, which clearly stated that the new policy is meant for countries that do not currently enjoy the perspective of EU membership.³ Instead, the EU offers enhanced relations based on shared values between the EU and its neighbours. According to the communication, the aim is closer integration between the EU and its neighbours. The mechanism is simple: in return for effective implementation of reforms (including aligning national legislation with the EU *acquis*), the EU will grant closer economic integration to its partners. The approach is twofold: first, the EU wants to tap the full potential of the already existing PCAs, namely the gradual harmonization of legal norms with the EU *acquis* and the creation of a free trade area, and only then go beyond that with the prospect of realizing the so-called four freedoms (persons, goods, services, and capital) within the “Wider Europe” that would include the southern shores of the Mediterranean, Russia, and everything in between.⁴ The paper also envisages a process that is based on clear differentiation between countries and regular monitoring of the progress.

The concept was further developed with the Commission's strategy paper in May 2004⁵ and the first batch of neighbourhood action plans were negotiated during the summer and autumn of 2004. Moldova was one of the frontrunners in this process and

³ *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*. COM(2003) 104 final, 11 March 2003, available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf, downloaded 11 April 2005.

⁴ Since then Russia has been removed from the ENP. Instead, the EU is developing its relations with Moscow in the framework of a “strategic partnership” based on the notion of so-called four “common spaces.”

⁵ *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, Communication from the Commission, at http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy_Paper_EN.pdf, downloaded 12 April 2005.

the action plan was mutually adopted in the meeting of the EU–Moldova Co-operation Council in February 2005.⁶

The Moldovan challenge to the ENP

Moldova can be seen as a challenging case for European Neighbourhood Policy for at least two, partially interconnected factors. Firstly, and since the brief civil war in spring 1992, the country has been torn in two: in the West, sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania, lies the Moldova proper and on the eastern bank of the River Dniestr the breakaway region of Transdniestria. The division of the country is the root cause of its other problems: lack of efficient government and consequently good governance, endemic poverty, and political instability. Moldova is currently the poorest country in Europe and a chronic source of illegal migration, sex slaves, small arms and other illegal contraband into the Union's territory. The Transdniestrian leaders in Tiraspol have turned the breakaway region into a veritable kleptocracy and a vehicle of their personal enrichment. After the accession of Romania, Moldova and its many challenges will be residing on the EU's doorstep with a vastly increased potential of spilling over to the Union's territory. It is thus in the Union's own best interest to seek a change to the current impasse in Moldova. But the challenge is not that just of gradually integrating the country into European structures, as the EU must first engage itself in the tasks of basic state-building as well.

This task is, however, made difficult by the existence of the second factor, namely the fact that Russia as an external party has enjoyed a disproportional influence over Moldova's internal affairs and especially over the attempts at resolving the conflict over Transdniestria. In fact, the Transdniestrian 'government' in Tiraspol exists largely due to the Russian economic support and troops residing in the region.

Russia's strong role in the region has been a disincentive for the EU to get involved in the conflict and with Moldova in general. On one hand this has been visible on the

⁶ The text of the action plan is available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/Proposed_Action_Plan_EU-Moldova.pdf, downloaded 11 April 2005.

bilateral EU–Russia level, where the EU has had problems in raising the issue to the joint agenda between Brussels and Moscow. On the other hand this has also left its mark on the EU–Moldovan relations, where the Union’s lack of enthusiasm vis-à-vis the hopes of Moldova for more aid and deeper political relations has been apparent. Recently, the EU has started to take more active measures on Moldova, such as appointing an EU Special Representative for Moldova and preparing to open a Commission Delegation in the country. These can be seen as steps in the right direction, but then again, these structures are only the very prerequisites for a meaningful presence in the country, and not a guarantee of a more coherent and effective policy. The lack of EU’s lustre in Moldova so far is well reflected, for example, in the recent article written by Graeme P. Herd in which he argued that the Moldovan (security) politics is a tale of three cities: Tiraspol, Kyiv and Moscow – but not Brussels (nor Chisinau)!⁷

Points to be discussed:

- how should we assess the new neighbourhood action plan with Moldova? Does it really reflect a serious engagement with the country and can it be seen as an adequate answer to the challenges facing the Union?
- does the new action plan present Moldova with big enough carrots? Are there really “tantalising benefits”⁸ on offer for Moldova and are they robust enough to warrant the expectation of Moldova as an element of “a ring of friends” around the Union that would gradually be bringing its legislation and regulations in line with the EU? And more to the point, are these objectives of relevance in the first place when we are after all talking about a deeply divided society and a *de facto* failed state?
- How should we assess the role of Russia in this process? Recently President Voronin and the Moldovan government have drifted to a collision course with

⁷ Graeme P. Herd, “Moldovan Security Politics: The Tale of Three Cities,” *Connections*, vol. III (4): 13–20.

⁸ The Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner used these exact words to describe the ENP in the EU–Moldova Co-operation Council in February. See http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/moldova/intro/bfw_220205.htm, downloaded 12 April 2005.

Moscow and started looking for a closer relationship with the EU in a manner similar to President Yuschenko's Ukraine. How does this affect the role of the Union? Does this create an opening and a demand for increased activism, or could the EU be faced by a situation where the Russian sensitivities have to be taken into consideration if Moscow starts viewing the two as being on a collision course over Moldova?

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