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New EU Members and the ENP: Different Agendas, Different Strategies

The European Neighbourhood Policy is a policy the main aim of which is to create a ring of stable, friendly and democratic countries surrounding the European Union.¹ While this notion is generally accepted across the Union, major differences persist regarding how this affable state should be reached. Indeed, while some believe that this goal can be achieved without full membership of neighbouring countries, others forcefully disagree, claiming that membership must remain an open option for those who fulfil the Union's criteria.

It is new EU member states that are usually seen as the most emphatic bloc of proponents of further enlargement.² Consequently, new members are often attributed with almost metaphysical unity in their attitudes towards the East – they are all supportive of further enlargement, they are all very critical of Russia, and they are all dissatisfied with the ENP in its present form.

There is no doubt that on a general plane, all the above statements are more or less correct. Yet once we begin to explore the ten Central and Eastern European EU member states in more detail, we soon discover striking differences – both in their approach to the East and in their assessment of the ENP. The main focus of this article is, therefore, to explore the influence of the new members on the ENP at greater length, thus shedding more light on issues that would seem incomprehensible from a more superficial perspective. It suits the purpose of this article best to modify the division of new members introduced by Elsa Tulmets,³ thus creating five categories of the East Central European EU members:

1. Poland
2. The remaining three Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia)
3. The Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)
4. The Balkan members (Bulgaria and Romania)
5. Slovenia

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The hope of the author is that in this way it will become obvious that these countries' objectives vary substantially, both in the degree of importance they attach to the ENP and the geographical focus. While all these countries are more or less supportive of further enlargement (cf. Figure 1), they all have different favourites. For instance, the high support for the Moldovan membership in Romania may be viewed with mixed feelings in the Czech Republic. Similarly, while some new members have been promoting the EU's Eastern policy for almost a decade, others are true newcomers, and it is still difficult to assess their long-term influence. Moreover, the analysis of these five groups of countries makes it clear that two contending strategies of coping with the neighbourhood are emerging – the older "northern" strategy and the newer "southern" strategy, each with a different agenda, a different approach and a different attitude to external players.

Poland – the Regional Power

The only country that expressed a serious interest in shaping the ENP before 2004 was Poland. Indeed, some political analysts even believe that the whole Eastern Dimension of the EU's external relations was "a Polish invention".⁴ Be that as it may, Polish Foreign Minister B. Geremek had already coined the term "Eastern Dimension" in 1998.⁵ His proposal was picked up by his successor, Minister Cimoszewicz, who pre-

¹ European Commission: *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 11 March 2003, COM (2003) 104 Final, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf.

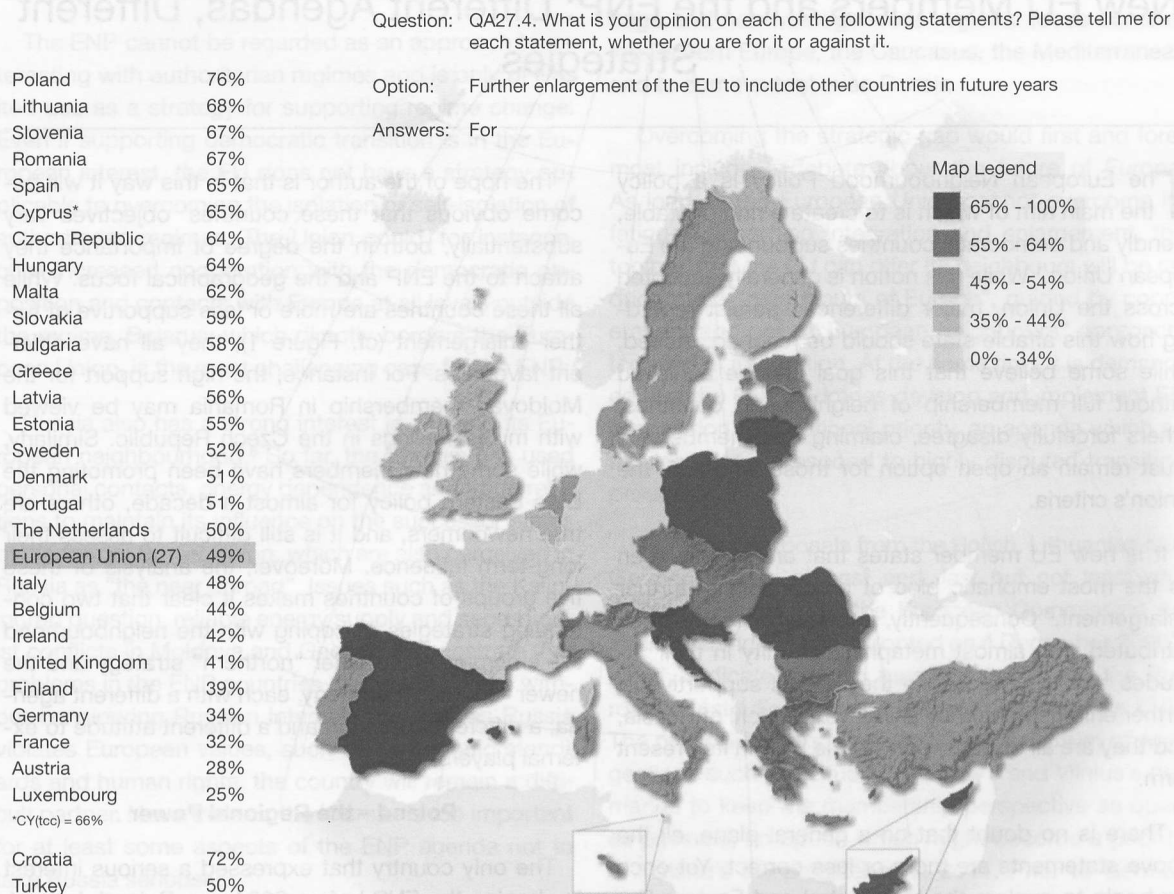
² A nice example is the document mentioned in footnote 1.

³ As a result, the article's structure is similar to Elsa Tulmets: *Postavení nových členských států v Evropské politice sousedství, Mezinárodní politika*, 4/2007, pp. 11-13. However, the content of the article is entirely this author's. See also Petr Kratochvíl, Elsa Tulmets: *Checking the Czech Role in the European Neighbourhood*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Working Paper 2/2007.

⁴ Iryna Solonenko: "Eastern Dimension" of the European Union – Invented Policy with no Clear Prospect, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2005, http://www.boell.de/downloads_uk/SolonenkoJEAS05.pdf.

⁵ Bronisław Geremek: *Wystąpienie ministra spraw zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Bronisława Geremka na otwarcie negocjacji Polski o członkostwo w Unii Europejskiej*, Brussels, 31 March 1998, <http://www.zbiordokumentow.pl/1998/1/2.html>.

Figure 1
Support for Further Enlargement



Source: Eurobarometer 67, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb_67_first_en.pdf.

sented a more detailed account of Polish preferences regarding Eastern Europe.⁶ Even though this proposal deviated in some respects from the Wider Europe initiative,⁷ it covered Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, but it excluded Russia. This was almost identical to the Eastern Dimension of the ENP shortly after its incep-

tion (i.e. after Russia refused to participate and before the countries of the Southern Caucasus were included).⁸

All these activities were closely related to the newly rediscovered Polish self-understanding as a regional power whose main tasks include the democratisation of Eastern Europe, particularly in Belarus and Ukraine. Modernisation and democratisation of the region gradually developed into Poland's foreign policy priority no. 1, with most of its attention focussed on Ukraine.⁹ Part and parcel of the historical reconciliation between Poland and Ukraine has been, however, Polish advocacy

⁶ Non-paper with Polish proposals concerning policy towards the new Eastern neighbours after EU enlargement 2002, <http://www.mfa.gov.pl/Non-paper,with,Polish,proposals,concerning,policy,towards,the,new,Eastern,neighbours,after,EU,enlargement,2041.html>; Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz: The Eastern Dimension of the European Union. The Polish View, Speech by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Conference "The EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy", Warsaw, 20 February 2003, <http://www.polishembassy.ca/files/The%20Eastern%20Dimension%20of%20the%20European%20Union.pdf>.

⁷ European Commission: Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, op. cit.

⁸ Cf. Elsa TuI mets, op. cit.

⁹ Cf. Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz: Polska w zamęcie świata, 2004, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/12,czerwca,2004,r,-,Polska,w,zamęcie,świata,-,artykul,Ministra,W.,Cimoszewicza,w,Gazecie,Wyborczej,1450.html>.

of Ukrainian EU membership. In this context it is quite understandable that Poland has vigorously opposed all attempts to cast the nascent ENP as a substitute for enlargement. This sentiment is still common in the political discourse of many older EU member states (for instance in the countries of the Southern wing such as France, Italy and Spain, but also in Austria or the Benelux countries). Similarly, it is clear that for Polish diplomacy, the extension of the new Neighbourhood Policy to also include the Mediterranean countries was a heavy blow. Since membership for these countries was ruled out, the chances of "accession perspective" being mentioned in the ENP-related official documents decreased to zero.¹⁰ As a result, Poland's attitude towards the ENP transformed from outright enthusiasm into somewhat restrained approval.¹¹ Nonetheless, Poland still remains the country with the most vested interests in the Eastern neighbourhood both politically and economically, and its leading role in the region is unlikely to change. What is likely to change, however, is the way in which Poland's role is perceived by other new member states (see below).

The Visegrad Countries – Big Potential, Modest Results

The remaining three members of the Visegrad Group (besides Poland), the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, all have a strong interest in furthering good relations with their Eastern neighbours. Both Hungary and Slovakia share a common border with Ukraine, and all three countries have either sizeable Ukrainian minorities in their territories or members of their own ethnic group in Ukraine. Naturally, this makes Ukraine a top priority for the whole Visegrad Group. However, the attention of the V4 was diverted to issues related to EU integration during most of the 1990s; this was, perhaps necessarily, paralleled by a neglect of the Eastern European space.

As a result, it has been only in recent years that Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic started to return to the region. They did so mainly on a bilateral basis (Poland in the first place), but recently the Visegrad Group is focused on coordinating more activities for the East. The reason for this is that in the past, Visegrad cooperation was used mainly as a

tool for advancing the common position of these four countries during the EU accession negotiations. However, its rationale was exhausted after the enlargement – hence, the focus on the Eastern dimension of EU foreign policy seems to be the best bid for the organisation's new main priority.

Yet the Visegrad Group encounters a number of problems: First, the coordination in the group greatly depends on the rather fluctuating level of political tension among the four countries. For instance, Slovak-Hungarian disputes over the rights of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia¹² or Czech scepticism towards the organisation¹³ rendered the V4 incapable of any significant action for prolonged periods of time. Second, unlike Poland, the three smaller Visegrad countries wish to maintain good relations with Russia, and sometimes they are even willing to sacrifice their ties with other East European countries. Finally, all four countries have their own priorities – clearly, Poland prefers a role of leadership rather than consensus seeking among Group members; Hungary concentrates on closer ties to Western-Ukrainian regions,¹⁴ and Slovakia's priorities (especially vis-à-vis Russia) change frequently too. While the Czech support for the Eastern neighbours has been relatively consistent at the level of rhetoric, its foreign policy measures unfortunately show the opposite (for instance introducing visas for Eastern neighbours earlier than required by the EU).¹⁵

As a result, the V4's contribution to the ENP has been rather unfocussed and shaky. Yet strengthening the Group's role is still its main priority. Bearing witness to this statement are the repeated attempts to forge a common strategy on the ENP one recent example is the Czech (still unpublished) non-paper for the ENP (later adopted by the other three V4 members and supposed to kindle more support for the Czech position on the ENP prior to the Czech EU presidency in 2009).

¹² On Slovak-Hungarian tensions and their impact on the V4 see "Row harms Slovak-Hungarian ties", BBC News, 31 August 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5301412.stm>; or "Visegrad Four dispute over Benes Decrees", Czech Radio, 27 February 2002, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/24446>.

¹³ For a sceptical Czech view of the V4 cf. Rozhovor prezidenta pro polský deník Gazeta Wyborcza (Interview of the President for the Polish Daily Gazeta Wyborcza), 9 April 2003, <http://www.klaus.cz/klaus2/asp/clanek.asp?id=9Qd9VMOnp34B>.

¹⁴ Cf. New Europe 2020: Visions and Strategies for Wider Europe. Hungary's contribution to the EU New Neighbourhood Policy, speech by Gábor Zupkó, <http://www.tukkk.fi/pei/NewEurope/Zupko.pdf>.

¹⁵ Petr Kratochvíl, Elsa TuImets: Checking the Czech Role in the European Neighbourhood., Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Working Paper 2/2007.

¹⁰ Cf. Petr Kratochvíl (ed.): The European Union and its Neighbourhood: Policies, Problems and Priorities, Prague 2006, Institute of International Relations.

¹¹ Cf. Piotr Buras, Karolina Pomorska: Poland and the European Neighbourhood Policy, in: The New Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union, Foreign Policy in Dialogue, Vol. 6, Issue 19, 2006, pp. 34-43.

The Baltic Countries – Small but Trenchant

Although the three Baltic Countries are no heavyweights (unlike Poland), their influence in the Eastern European region is surprisingly strong. One reason for this is that Eastern Europe and Russia still remain their main focus for foreign policy activities outside of the European Union. All three of them have repeatedly expressed their wish to keep the prospect of membership open for Ukraine, Moldova and other post-Soviet countries,¹⁶ and the ENP is of “utmost importance” for them.¹⁷ Also, popular support for further enlargement is consistently high in all three, and Lithuania ranks only second after Poland with more than two thirds of its populace expressing pro-enlargement attitudes (cf. Figure 1).

While support for Ukraine is both historically and geographically understandable, it is important to note that many “Eastern” activities of the Baltic countries have a second, hidden component – that of reducing Russian influence in the region. For instance, the priorities of the Baltic Assembly, an international organisation promoting cooperation among the three countries, not only include “implementing the ENP in Eastern European countries”¹⁸ but also “strengthening the reliability of energy supply”.¹⁹ The Baltic countries also insist that one of the main goals of the ENP should be to solve frozen conflicts, virtually all of which are directly or indirectly related to Russia.²⁰ Most tellingly, there are strong ties between the Baltic countries and the GUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), which are seen as the most West-leaning countries of the CIS.²¹ In this effort, the Baltic countries are also joined by Poland.²²

¹⁶ E.g. Minister of Foreign Affairs pays official visit to Kiev, 1 November 2003, <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/ukraine/news/press-releases/template-embassy/?pg=3219>; Address of President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus “Future of Europe: Lithuanian Perspective” at Ecole des Sciences Politiques de Paris, 7 October 2005, <http://www.president.lt/en/news.full/6056>; Joint Declaration by the President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves and the President of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko, 12 December 2006, <http://www.president.ee/en/duties/statements.php?gid=85607>.

¹⁷ Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kristiina Ojuland at the event “Dialogue with a new Member State: Estonia” in Vienna, 28 September 2004, http://www.vm.ee/eng/kat_140/4828.html.

¹⁸ Priorities for the Baltic Assembly, 2006, http://www.baltasam.org/images/front/_pdf/priorities.pdf.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cf. Ureas Paet: Thinking Forward, speech at the European Affairs Institute in Dublin 2006, http://www.iiea.com/images/managed/events_attachments/IEA_Paet_speech.pdf.

²¹ Cf. Foreign Minister meets with ambassadors from GUAM countries, 1 March 2007, <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/ukraine/news/press-releases/template-embassy/?pg=9017>.

²² Cf., for instance, the list of Polish priorities in EU-25/27 Watch, No. 4, January 2007, http://www.eu-consent.net/library/EU25Watch/EU-25_27%20Watch%20No.%204.pdf.

Undoubtedly, the links of the Baltic countries with the CIS would have existed even if the ENP framework were not in place. However, the Baltic countries have recently started to use the ENP as the main vehicle for activities towards the region. This is also why the Baltic countries voiced their wishes to include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia into the ENP’s framework and enthusiastically welcomed them when this happened.²³ To support these countries even further, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Antanas Valionis, officially declared his support for the prospective membership of the Southern Caucasus.²⁴ In turn, Estonia boasts a special partnership with Georgia, counting it among the three priority countries of Estonia in the region (together with Ukraine and Moldova). For example, in 2004 Georgia received approximately one third of all of Estonia’s development aid.²⁵

To sum up, the Baltic countries have succeeded in finding their niche in the EU’s external policies where their value is clearly visible. This niche consists of mainly traditional partners in the Western part of the CIS, but it also includes the countries of the Southern Caucasus. However, the corner stone of a more solid success (regarding, for instance, the resolution of the frozen conflicts in the region) would require reconciling their strategies with sometimes outright antithetical measures taken by the biggest player in the region – the Russian Federation.

Bulgaria and Romania – New Blood in the ENP?

Although Bulgaria and Romania are “newbies” in the Union, their impact on the ENP is already quite palpable. Two main reasons for their (potential) influence stand out: the focus on the Black Sea and on the frozen conflict in Transnistria.

Recently, it has become quite fashionable to talk about Black Sea cooperation, and the accession of these two countries increases the EU’s presence in the region quite markedly. Multilateral cooperation in the region takes place in several forms – in the Organisation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation, The Black Sea Forum and the so-called Black Sea Synergy (under the umbrella of the ENP)²⁶ in all of which the two countries actively participate. Importantly, regional

²³ Cf. the chapters on Lithuania and Estonia in EU-25 Watch, No. 1, December 2004, http://www.eu-consent.net/library/EU25Watch/EU-25_Watch-No1.pdf.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2006, Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, <http://www.evi.ee/lib/valispol2006.pdf>.

²⁶ Cf. European Commission: Black Sea Synergy – a new regional cooperation initiative, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 11 April 2007, COM (2007) 160 Final, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf.

cooperation is supported by several key players, e.g. Germany, keen to keep its ENP Plus strategy alive²⁷ and the European Commission, which believes that the ENP (often criticised for being narrowly bilateral) could be given a more multilateral slant this way.²⁸

The growing attention to the cooperation in the Black Sea region is, however, a mixed blessing for some countries, particularly for Poland. If this region becomes the primary focus of the ENP's Eastern dimension, a substantial geopolitical shift will take place. First, the move southward will decrease the role of Poland and the Baltic countries. Also, so far being the most fervent ENP players in the East, they do not geographically belong to the region and their expertise in the region (unlike in Belarus and Ukraine) is rather limited. Second, while virtually all Eastern ENP partners are present in the region, Belarus is the sole exception, and it could become even more isolated and disappear from the EU's political radar. Third, a Black Sea centred approach brings several "external actors" back into play – most importantly Russia, self-excluded from the ENP several years ago. Also, Turkish participation should not be ignored. It is rather telling that in the Black Sea Synergy communication, the European Commission includes several countries as participants that are not Black Sea littoral states (e.g. Greece, Moldova, Armenia etc.) but does not include Poland.²⁹

Another reason this region is important for the ENP is that one of Europe's few remaining frozen conflicts, i.e. Transnistria, is also located in this region. It is true that several new member states claim that Moldova (and the Transnistrian conflict) is one of their main priorities in the area (Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia and others), but the geographical, historical and ethnical proximity makes Romania a particularly relevant actor in the conflict's resolution. As a result, notwithstanding the currently rather muted support for Moldovan membership from Romania, it is hardly imaginable that Romania would not push for Moldova's accession in the future.

Slovenia – Not So Eastern European

The Slovenian case is proof that East-Central European new member states cannot be generalised when

²⁷ Iris Kempe: Was sind die Pfeiler einer "Neuen Ostpolitik" im Rahmen der Deutschen EU-Präsidentschaft, *Caucas Europe News*, 19 March 2007, http://www.caucas.com/home_de/breve_contenu.php?id=230.

²⁸ Cf. European Commission: On Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 4 December 2006, COM (2006) 726 Final, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com06_726_en.pdf.

²⁹ European Commission: Black Sea Synergy – a new regional cooperation initiative, op. cit.

Table 1
Differing Preferences and Strategies

	Importance of the eastern dimension	Main geographical focus	Start of involvement	Relation to Russia
Poland	Top priority	Ukraine, Belarus	Before 2004 enlargement	Tense
Baltics	Top priority	Ukraine, Belarus, Southern Caucasus	Mainly after 2004	Tense
Visegrad (-Poland)	One of several priorities	Ukraine, Moldova	Mainly after 2004	Cautious
Bulgaria+ Romania	One of several priorities	Black Sea, Moldova	Mainly after 2007	Good
Slovenia	Less important	Both South and East	Mainly after 2004	Good

discussing the ENP. In several respects, the Slovenian position resembles that of Southern European EU members such as Italy. In particular, Slovenia places considerable stress on the ENP's Southern dimension and on its own active participation in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.³⁰ In addition, Slovenian relations with Russia are, unlike those of most other new member states, more or less free of tension. Slovenia also comes closer than other new members to a "Russia-first" policy.³¹

Conclusion

The above analysis shows that it is highly misleading to treat all new EU member states as a bloc with identical preferences and similar strategies for attaining them. Aside from the general willingness to enlarge the Union further, there is hardly any issue related to the Eastern dimension of the ENP where consensus rules among them. Not only do the countries assess the importance of the ENP for their foreign policies differently, but they also focus on different neighbours. The results are summarised in Table 1.

It is also noteworthy that with the latest wave of enlargement, two different conceptions of the ENP in the East have started to crystallise. The older conception is advocated by the "northern tier" of new members clustered around the Baltic Sea: they focus mainly on Ukraine and Belarus and are highly critical of Russia's behaviour in the region. Therefore, their ties with ENP partners are often, at least partially, motivated by common feuds with Russia (e.g. Georgia) and are predominantly bilateral. The newer conception is strongly

³⁰ Ana Bojinović, Petra Roter: contributions in EU-25 Watch, No. 1, December 2004, http://www.eu-consent.net/library/EU25Watch/EU-25_Watch-No1.pdf.

³¹ Cf. the stress laid on Russia in *ibid.*

preferred by the "southern tier" of new members, i.e. mainly Romania and Bulgaria: the main attention concentrates on the Black Sea Region, and it is strongly multilateral and of a more inclusive nature (encompassing Turkey and Russia). The newer conception also effaces the distinction between members (Romania, Bulgaria), candidates (Turkey), ENP partners (Moldova, Ukraine, Southern Caucasus countries) and third countries (Russia) more effectively.

In conclusion, not only do the new members sometimes differ in their preferences and geographical focus, but they also stand for different visions of future arrangements in the region. It is too early to predict which of these two conceptions will prevail in the end or whether they will eventually merge, but it is already clear that the Eastern ENP is gaining new momentum and will undoubtedly remain one of the most innovative EU policies for years to come.

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EU Relations with the Southern Mediterranean Neighbours

The EU policy towards the countries of the Mediterranean area, already known both as the Barcelona Process and as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), has been renamed the policy of the Euro-Mediterranean Neighbourhood Space. In November 1995, the European Community, the governments of the member states, and those of Cyprus, Malta and ten Mediterranean countries from North Africa and the Middle East area signed two documents, the Barcelona Declaration and the EMP Work Programme, designed to open a new process of cooperation in three broad areas. Separately presented in the three Chapters of the Declaration, the areas were: politics and security; trade, economy and finance; society, human relations and culture. In 2003, the Barcelona Process was said to be *strengthened* by its absorption into the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the new EU programme designed to build strong and viable relations with all the countries of the areas surrounding the EU's borders.¹ Actually, the launching of the ENP caused discontent in the governments and social sectors of the Mediterranean partners because it changed important aspects of the EMP, such as the multidimensional and multilateral dimension, in favour of the asymmetrical model that had marked past relations between the EU and its southern partners.

Cooperation programmes are hardly new in the Euro-Mediterranean space. Since the early 1960s, a large number of bilateral agreements and collective projects have been produced and reformed by the European Union in order to overcome inadequacy problems and search for better outcomes. For this reason, at the

time of its inauguration, the Barcelona Process was cheered as an innovation because it was the first time ever in the history of Euro-Mediterranean agreements that policy-makers solemnly promised to undertake simultaneous actions in such different sectors as those of the three Chapters. The execution of the ambitious cooperation programme was assigned to a light structure of various bodies which were mandated to act in a flexible and progressive manner. The only exception to the flexible cooperation model was the loudly spoken, primary goal of the Process, i.e. the instauration of the Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone in the year 2010. It is worth adding here that defining cooperation as "partnership" was also a novelty. In fact, the term epitomised the common will to abandon the uneven, past relations between the European states as donors and the Mediterranean partners as receivers.²

No international organisation and international legal instrument has been created to direct the EMP, which has always been based on political rather than legal documents. The Barcelona Declaration was the first one. The last important one was released on 28 November 2005 by the Barcelona Summit celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Partnership. In compliance with the Work Programme objectives, various initiatives and implementation programmes have been launched. Responsibility for the execution of the pro-

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¹ Fulvio Attinà, Rosa Rossi (eds.): *European Neighbourhood Policy: Political, Economic and Social Issues*, Catania 2004, The Jean Monnet Centre "Euro-Med"; Raffaella Del Sarto, Tobias Schumacher: *From EMP to ENP: what's at stake with the European Neighbourhood policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?*, in: *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2005, pp. 17-39; Sharon Pardo, Lior Zemer: *Towards a new Euro-Mediterranean Neighbourhood space*, in: *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2005, pp. 39-78.