

Statement 2015/16:UU5 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy

Summary

In this statement, the Committee on Foreign Affairs considers the joint communication Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (JOIN (2015) 50 final), as published by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission on 18 November 2015.

The Committee notes that there have been significant changes in the neighbourhood since 2011, when the latest review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was conducted. Russia is challenging the ENP in Eastern Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa are characterised by conflicts and an acute refugee situation. The Committee therefore welcomes a new review of the ENP and emphasises that the review should result in a neighbourhood policy that is better equipped to deal with the above-mentioned challenges and, at the same time, promote the development of relations with, and reforms in, partner countries.

The Committee also welcomes the work of the High Representative and the Commission with the review and brings to mind that the Committee, in its statement 2014/15:UU18 participated in the consultation process prior to the drawing up of the communication Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (JOIN (2015) 50 final).

On the whole, the Committee shares the view of the central role of the neighbourhood policy in promoting prosperity, stability and security in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and North Africa, as expressed during the consultations. The Committee emphasises that the ENP should also continue, in accordance with the Treaty on European Union, to have the universal values on which EU cooperation is based as its point of departure.

The Committee welcomes the ambitions expressed in the communication to further strengthen the ENP, for example as regards security-related issues and migration. With regard to migration, the Committee notes that the communication contains proposals both to promote legal migration, and to counteract irregular migration. The Committee also considers that the ENP should serve as a broad partnership where security-related issues and migration are two of many important components.

The Committee considers that it is positive that the communication proposes that the regional dimensions of the ENP should be further strengthened. The Committee emphasises that, in this context, an ambitious strategy is required to develop the Eastern Partnership (EaP), with the aim of broadening and deepening this partnership. The EaP should be based on mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, including minority rights, as well as principles for market economy and sustainable economic growth. It is of central importance to the credibility of the EU to ensure a continued focus on countries which have taken an explicit stand for integration with the EU by means of special agreements. The Committee stresses that, in line with the principle of "more for more", there should be a more explicit membership perspective for the partner countries which are geographically located in Europe, and which carry out political and economic reforms. A condition for such an effort is that the EU's commitment to reforms is long term and that the EU offers extensive support, including development cooperation, for partner countries wishing to develop closer ties with the EU. The Committee also points out how important it is that the EU and the partner countries deepen cooperation as regards energy security.

On the whole, the Committee supports the intentions in the communication to achieve a clearer focus within the framework of the ENP on prevention and management of crises. The Committee notes that a stabilisation of the Neighbourhood is of critical importance but also underlines that long-term, stable development must be based on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Committee stresses that support to civil society in the partner countries is an important channel through which to promote these values.

The Committee especially welcomes the fact that gender equality issues, including UN Security Resolution 1325, have been clearly highlighted in the communication, and notes that this is an important change compared with the communication A new response to a changing neighbourhood (COM (2011) 303), where gender equality issues were given a lot less prominence.

The Committee further supports the ambition in the communication of seeking renewed commitment from the less-interested partner countries on the basis of the EU's values and interests, but underlines, at the same time, that this must not entail that the policy as a whole takes these countries as a point of departure. The Committee stresses that the ENP must be able to offer renewed and strengthened relations with the more-interested partner countries, in line with their ambitions. As stated by the Committee above, it is of central importance to ensure an explicit membership perspective for the partner countries which are geographically located in Europe, and which carry out political and economic reforms.

The statement includes two reservations (from the Sweden Democrats and the Left Party).