

**EUROPEAN UNION'S REGIONAL APPROACH TOWARDS ITS
NEIGHBOURS: THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY VIS-À-VIS
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP**

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Abstract

The enlargement process strengthens European Union's necessity to elaborate a more articulated relation with its new neighbours.

The content of numerous official documents – the Draft Treaty for establishing a European Constitution, the Security Strategy, and the Commission Communication *Wider Europe–Neighbourhood* – reveal the primary importance the EU reserves to the issue of security and its connection with neighbouring countries.

In the present work I am going to consider the new Neighbourhood Policy as an instance of region-building, stressing its distinctive elements, as they result in comparison with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's main characteristics – i.e. the special Neighbourhood Policy designed for Mediterranean countries.

After having identified the Neighbourhood Policy's key-features, I am going to suggest some theoretical interpretations.

1. Europe and its approach towards neighbouring countries.

European security, and its connection with its neighbourhood, is an issue of primary importance in the EU political agenda. Awareness of the matter can be found in several documents: in the Draft Treaty for establishing a European Constitution, for example, in which is stated that: “*The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring States, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation*” (art. I-56). The European Security Strategy presented by Solana, at the Thessaloniki European Union Council, sets as a strategic objective that of promoting “*a ring of well governed countries to the East of the EU and on the borders of the Mediterranean, with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations*”¹.

The Union, then, reserves a special attention to the relation with its neighbourhood, and in this framework we can include the elaboration of a *Neighbourhood Policy*, drawn up by the Commission², able to coordinate and to take in various experiences already established by the Union.

European integration history, in fact, makes clear how the Community/Union has always reserved a special attention for its relation with neighbouring countries. During its evolution some of them have become effective members. Others, instead, have been associated in a close and inclusive relation with the Union through the signature and implementation of several agreements whose content aims at inducing institutional, economic and social reforms as necessary pre-requisites of the entire region's peace, prosperity and security.

¹ European Security Strategy, (June 2003), *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, presented by Javier Solana at the Thessaloniki European Council

² *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003), 104 final, Brussels, March 2003

Interesting cooperative attempts are represented by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (signed with Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, between 1994-1995), the Stabilisation and Association Process, (started in 2000 with the aim to bring peace, prosperity and democracy in the Western Balkans), and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The last was launched in 1995 to affirm the strategic importance of the Mediterranean even if European attention appeared to be more focussed on the East of the Continent

Practically, the Union, utilising a wide range of instruments (such as trade and custom unions' agreements, financial aid and technical assistance, cooperation in different fields), typical of a *civilian power*³ (Duchene, 1973: 19), has elaborated a security agenda, which directly regards its neighbours, in which Europe appears to be interested in realizing those reforms (economic, institutional and social), which are necessary to assure Neighbours' Stabilisation/Union Security.

Resuming, through Missiroli's proposed distinction⁴, over the past decades the European Union has pursued two distinct approaches towards its immediate neighbours: an approach aimed at integration proper, i.e. at bringing neighbouring countries directly into the EU, and a second approach aimed, first and foremost, at stabilisation.

The first policy approach makes use of conditionality as the instrument with which to obtain integration, that is the affirmation of an explicit link between behavioural conformity to the Union fixed criteria and accession process. The integration goal is based on the membership incentive: extending the Union's norms, rules, opportunities and constraints to successive applicants has made instability and conflict on the Continent decreasingly likely.

The second approach – stabilisation as a goal – is based on fostering regional cooperation and broad partnerships (regionalism). It is the approach EU employs in the Mediterranean, which takes the form of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or in the Balkans, through the Stabilisation and Association Process, and it is the same approach used with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements.

After having stressed this distinction, and clarified Union's approach towards its neighbours in this paper I would like to discuss about the stabilisation approach, in particular I am interested in applying it to the forthcoming Wider Europe region (i.e. the region that will result from the imple-

³ *The European Community's interest as a civilian group of countries long on economic power and relatively short on armed force is as far as possible to domesticate relations between States, including those of its own members and those with States outside its frontiers. This means trying to bring international problems the sense of common responsibility and structures of contractual politics, which have been in the past associated exclusively with 'home' and not foreign, that is alien, affairs.* Duchene F.,(1973), *The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence*, in Kolistam M. e Hager W., *Nation Writ Large: Foreign Policy Problems Before The European Communities*, London, Macmillan

⁴ Missiroli A., (2003) *The EU and its changing neighbourhoods: stabilisation, integration and partnership*, in *Partners and Neighbours: a CFSP for a Wider Europe*, Chaillot Paper n.64, Paris, Institute for Security Studies

mentation of the new European Neighbourhood Policy). Specifically I am going to consider the Wider Europe-Neighbourhood Policy (WENP) as an instance of region-building. In order to better explain the Wider Europe region's characteristics, it will be compared to the Euro-Mediterranean region (i.e. the region that results from the implementation of the Barcelona Declaration). The comparison between the two initiatives will be helpful for the proposals of some theoretical interpretations of the WENP region-building project.

2. Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Neighbourhood Policy

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership can well be considered a special neighbourhood policy. It means a complex of mechanisms, agreements and institutions drawn to address the strategic objective of building security throughout European neighbourhood. Scope of the initiative, in fact, is to turn the Mediterranean into an *area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity*⁵. Mediterranean policy is challenged at present by European initiatives aiming at defining a new and comprehensive Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), as envisaged in the Commission Communication of March 2003. Implementation of the new Neighbourhood Policy, in fact, is going to impact on Mediterranean countries too, since the latter are identified as recipient countries together with Russia and the Western Newly Independent States (WNIS), i.e. Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus.

It is worth remembering, however, that Neighbourhood is not going to *override the existing framework for EU relations with Russia and the countries of the Western NIS, and the Southern Mediterranean. Instead, it would supplement and build on existing policies and arrangements*⁶. It means that the EMP and the Neighbourhood Policy are not mutually excluding projects. At the same time, ENP cannot be considered a simple mechanism of coordination of existing initiatives involving neighbours. It should be intended, in fact, as a policy with its own specificity, i.e. ENP is something else with respect to the running regional projects, able to bring them an added value.

As said before, I am going to utilize EMP's experience to analyse the forthcoming features of the new region EU is going to create with its neighbours.

The act of comparing the EMP to the Neighbourhood Policy, however, can be criticised with respect to different arguments.

A first objection could be based on the assumption that European Mediterranean policy can be judged by the results achieved since the signature of the Barcelona Declaration (1995). The sec-

⁵ Barcelona Declaration, adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of 27-29 November 1995

⁶ *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood*, 2003:15

ond policy, instead, is a policy *in fieri* that can be judged on the basis of the intentions that can be revealed from the preparatory documents.

Second, it is worth noting that the first refers to a specific group of countries, Mediterranean countries, that, despite internal differences, presents a higher degree of homogeneity, if compared to the degree of homogeneity of the Wider Europe countries' group. It is particularly difficult, in fact, to assimilate those States that lying at the eastern border of the Union with those facing the Mediterranean Sea.

Despite the above-mentioned theoretical objections, I sustain the utility of comparing the EMP and the Neighbourhood Policy to more easily trace the main characteristics of the latter.

I suggest to start listing the specific features of the EU's experience in the Mediterranean that can be resumed in the following aspects:

- A regional integration process based on the premise to develop a sense of co-ownership to the initiative among the regional constituent parts. Practically the EU tried to make partners feel as *equals*, it tried to avoid Mediterranean partners' perception of a unilateral European initiative. These aims have been pursued fostering sub-regional cooperation and balancing a bilateral and a regional approach;
- A comprehensive security concept that implies taking in due consideration different security dimensions. It means attributing the same importance to different fields of activity: political and security, economic and financial, social and cultural cooperation;
- The relation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In reality, Barcelona Declaration supports the separateness of the Partnership from the conflict. However, it is not possible to deny its negative effects over the Barcelona Process.

The above-mentioned points represent the key features of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Now I am going to analyse these aspects separately, underlining differences and analogies with respect to the new Neighbourhood Policy. At the same time, I will try to stress in which respects the EMP appears to be more far-reaching than the Neighbourhood project, and in which respects, instead, the latter appears to be more ambitious than the Mediterranean initiative.

2.1 Regions and regional integration process

As concerns the first feature, that is region-building process, International Relations literature is characterised by a strong variety of interpretation of the phenomenon, and by definitional

ambiguities. In order to proceed I find useful to list some interpretations and to assume some working definitions.

We could start by adopting international region's definition given by Nye. According to him, a region can be defined as: "*a limited number of States linked together by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence*"⁷. So it derives that regionalism is "*the formation of interstate groupings on the basis of regions*".

In order to define international regions, some authors refer to criteria such as geographical proximity, common bonds (ethnic, linguistic, cultural, historical and social) and a sense of identity, which is emphasized by external States' behaviour (Cantori and Spiegel, 1970:6-7). Many authors tried to identify criteria which need to be fulfilled in order to talk of an international region: Russett's criteria (1967:11) – social and cultural homogeneity, political attitudes or external behaviour, common political institutions, economic interdependence, geographical proximity –, or Thompson's (1973) necessary conditions: geographical proximity, regular and intense relations among regional units, common perceptions of the regional sub-system. Nye (1971) distinguishes micro-economic organization involving formal economic integration from macro-regional organization, concerned with controlling conflicts. Deutsch (1981:54) defines a region as a set of countries distinctly interdependent over a broad range of different dimensions. This is often but not always indicated by a flow of socio-economic transaction and communication. In the 1990s Adler and Barnett's work on security community, substituted Deutsch behavioural approach to regional integration with a constructivist standpoint.

In order to explain *region-building* process International Relations literature makes reference to power distribution in the international system (realist and neo-realist theories, for example, explain regionalism as a return to a multipolar balance of power system - Waltz, 1993), economic interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 1977), cultural affinity (Huntington, 1996), intensity of transactions and flows of communication (Deutsch's security communities), intensity of security, political and military interactions (Buzan's security complexes, 1991), membership of regional institutions.

Regional integration processes, then, have been interpreted through the lens of various theoretical perspectives, with results that have contributed to strengthen the subject's definitional ambiguities. According to Fawcett and Hurrell's studies (1995) we can state that in the actual international system region-building presents some specific characteristics: first, the economic dimension's prevalence. At the same time, there is a great mixture of economic, political, social and security issues. Practically region-building is a multi-dimensional process, and economic regionalization can

⁷ Nye J.(1968), *International Regionalism*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co.

be considered as a first step in order to achieve wider political and security objectives. A further characteristic is represented by the fusion of developed and developing countries in a single regional integration scheme. We can cite Mexico and its inclusion in the NAFTA (North Atlantic Free Trade Area), but in a list of examples we can easily put regional integration process between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries, in the framework of the EMP.

In the European Union language, fostering regional cooperation and partnership has been widely used as a practice to cope with the Union security concerns: security issues linked to migration – drug trafficking or organised crime - energy security matters, not to speak of possible spill-over effects from regional conflicts.

At this point, we should wonder about the characteristics of regional cooperation the Union supports in the Mediterranean area, and in the Wider Europe region too.

The EMP can be considered as an instance of *regional security partnership*⁸ (Attinà, 2002), a format able to evolve towards the form of a *security community*⁹, during time. This evolution is marked by the results achieved in the three Partnership's pillars, and it will be possible thanks to the intervention of common institutions, political elites, civil society, and owing to the complementary tracks: the bilateral and the regional agenda.

If we pass from a theoretical point of view to an empirical assessment of Mediterranean region-building process, an overall judgement cannot be really positive: Barcelona experience teaches us how difficult is to eliminate reciprocal diffidence and cultural incomprehension among the constituent parts of a region. It witnesses how much efforts are required to make partners feeling as equals, especially with respect to the European Union's cohesiveness. Barcelona's main achievement is the awareness of the importance of fostering sub-regional cooperation among partners and developing a common identity between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Diffidence, however, still persists, especially in those partners which interpret European involvement in the Mediterra-

⁸ *Regional security partnership is the name given to the security arrangement of an international region that originates from the consensus of the states to cooperate on the reduction of violence and enhancement of stability and peace in the region by making use of different types of agreements and mechanisms like formal security treaties, security international organizations, joint action agreements, multilateral dialogue processes, peace and stability pacts including confidence-building and preventive diplomacy measures, and also measure for influencing the domestic structures and process of the countries at risk of internal violence. A regional security partnership does not exclude any relevant power of the international politics of the region. It includes almost all the countries of a region and also extra-regional powers. In Attinà F., (2002), Security cooperation at the regional level: from opposed military alliances to security partnerships. Is the Mediterranean region on the right track? Jean Monnet Working Paper n.45*

⁹ Deutsch and his associates defined a security community as a *group of countries that has become integrated. It means the attainment, within a territory, of a sense of community and of institutions and practices strong enough and wide-spread enough to assure for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful change* (Deutsch, 1957: 5). Adler and Barnett (1998: 30) redefined security communities as *transnational regions comprised of sovereign States whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change*. These expectations are driven by the development of trust and the formation of a collective identity. *Trust and identity are reciprocal and reinforcing: the development of trust can strengthen mutual identification, and there is a general tendency to trust on the basis of mutual identification* (Adler E. and Barnett M., (1998), *A Framework for the Study of Security Communities*, in Adler E. and Barnett M., *Security Communities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 45)

mean as an action aiming first and foremost at the satisfaction of its own security needs more than at the solution of economic and social issues which matter them most.

As concerns regionalism envisaged in the Wider Europe Communication, it seems to be much less regardless of partners' perceptions about European project than the EMP. This assumption is supported by the prevalence of bilateral over regional dialogue, and, consequently, by the preference for a differentiated rather than a holistic approach. Regional relationships will be based on the agreements signed by the Union on one side and each country on the other, with all the unbalances deriving from that, which are going to be accentuated by the lack of sub-regional cooperation. It will result in a fragmented regional scheme in which is difficult to support the idea of belonging to the same community/region.

To say the truth, developing sub-regional cooperation and a sense of joint ownership are issues introduced, with particular emphasis, in the recent European Neighbourhood Policy *Strategy Paper*¹⁰. The *Paper*, however, refers to existing fora (such as the EMP) in order to strengthen the initiative's regional dimension. It does not suggest, however, any specific – in the sense of “new” and “proper of” – ENP's instrument – whether it be an institution or a decision-making procedure. Doing so, ENP's “specificity” and “added value” disappear and the new policy is reduced to a mere coordination instrument of the running regional projects in place with neighbouring countries.

Moving from these assumptions it is difficult to envisage the realization of a security community¹¹ in the Wider Europe. This statement is supported, beyond the just-mentioned arguments, by at least one significant explanatory reason. Security communities are not spontaneous creations: they result from the activities of agents (political elites, individuals, regional and transnational institutions) who need material and ideological resources for developing political reasons and willingness able to build collective identities (“cognitive regions”¹²).

In the Wider Europe Communication there is no an adequate attention towards agents – political actors, institutions and civil society. Regionalism of the March Communication, for instance, is characterised by a minimum, if not completely absent, level of institutionalisation. There are no provisions for institutions responsible of Neighbourhood Policy's implementation. Regional integration process in the Mediterranean, on the contrary, provides specific organisms, assuring the initiative's regional dimension and guaranteeing the effective participation of the southern Mediterranean partners.

¹⁰ *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, Communication from the Commission, COM (2004), 373 final, Brussels, May 2004

¹¹ According to the meaning explained in the previous footnote

¹² Adler E., (1997), *Imagined (Security) Communities: Cognitive Regions in International Relations*, Millennium, 26, 249-277

Let's think to the Euro-Mediterranean Conferences of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in which all partners take part, and to the Euro-Med Committee constituted by the European troika¹³ and a representative from each partner country. The institutional scheme of the EMP comprises, furthermore, a series of ministerial meetings with the Ministers in charge of specific cooperation matters, and periodical meetings of the Senior Officials on Political and Security Questions (in relation to the issues of the first basket). To these organisms we have to add the new Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, launched at the Ministerial Conference held in Naples, 2-3 December 2003.

It is clear then that the regional integration process in the Mediterranean has an institutional dimension that the Wider Europe regional integration project doesn't pursue.

Speaking about the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Adler (1998:189) sustains that: "*behind the EMP and related efforts lies the [...] idea that the most promising –perhaps only- way to achieve long-term security, economic welfare, political stability, and peace in the Mediterranean area is neither an elaborate system of alliances or collective security system, nor a functional scheme of economic integration, but the socio-cultural process of constructing a region*"¹⁴ whose success depends on "*political and social engineering of a Mediterranean 'we-feeling' or collective social identity*"¹⁵.

Paraphrasing Adler we can state that: *behind Wider Europe initiative lies the idea that the most promising way to achieve long-term security, economic welfare, political stability and peace in the neighbourhood area is a functional scheme of economic and legislative integration in accordance to a differentiated and benchmarked approach, in which the need for the development of a sense of we-ness, is neither excluded nor explicitly affirmed, but simply absent. The success of the initiative depends on the degree in which different identities/communities tackle common threats and problems related to regional instability and insecurity, on the basis of the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*.*

In the long-term period the lack of a sense of common identity, of belonging to the same region, of co-ownership, of common institutions, could induce neighbours to negatively perceive their asymmetrical relation with the Union. Thus is probably going to mine the foundations of the Neighbourhood Initiative over time.

¹³ the current and incoming presidencies, the High Representative for the CFSP, the Commission

¹⁴ Adler E.,(1998), *Condition(s) of peace*, in "Review of International Studies", 24, 5

¹⁵ *Ibidem*

2.2 Comprehensive security

The second identified characteristic of the EMP is the *comprehensive* security concept adopted in the Barcelona Declaration. The EU is used to concepts like that of comprehensive and cooperative security – in order to get regional stability – because of the successful experience of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the so-called Helsinki Process. 1995 Barcelona Declaration, for instance, is based on the model of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act that incorporates distinct yet interrelated pillars or baskets – dealing with political and military issues, economic and financial matters, human and cultural cooperation. It means that the Barcelona Process' overall goal will result from the complementary of actions carried out in different baskets.

In the Wider Europe regional integration project the Union doesn't renounce to a comprehensive approach, like that of the EMP. Political issues, in fact, are strictly linked with social, economic and environmental concerns. In the Commission's perspective, in fact, is of primary importance to assure "*political stability, economic development and the reduction of poverty and social divisions*" (Commission Communication, 2003:3).

A comprehensive and cooperative security concept, then, is strictly linked to the development of trust and confidence among the units that constitute a region. Thus implies further attention towards dialogue between cultures.

In the Barcelona Declaration a specific chapter – the third one - is dedicated to the issue. In Naples (December 2003) Euro-Mediterranean Ministers launched the project of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation "*aiming at increasing dialogue and common understanding between cultures and civilisations*".

In the Wider Europe Communication you can read: "*The importance of dialogue between civilisations and free exchange of ideas between cultures, religions, traditions and human links cannot be overemphasised*"¹⁶ and just *en passant* it refers to the necessity of developing a cultural dialogue that aims at eliminating mutual incomprehension and at developing a sense of belonging if not to the same community at least to the same project.

Fortunately, in the latest Communication (*ENP Strategy Paper*: 19) the Commission stresses the importance "*to stress mutual understanding of each others' cultures, history, attitudes and values, and to eliminate distorted perceptions*" as the appropriate way to strengthen societal links.

¹⁶ *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*, Commission Communication 2003: 12

2.3 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

We start now analysing the third characteristic of the EMP: i.e. its relationship with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This conflict, in fact, constitutes an interesting case study for judging the Union's effective capacity of intervention in regional conflicts, which involve its neighbours.

With respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the Community/Union can be proud of its coherent position held over time: starting from the famous Venice Declaration (1980) the Union has always supported specific principles (two States for two peoples, respect for Security Council Resolutions, condemnation of the use of violence, whatever the side it comes from) so as to reach a satisfying agreement among the parties.

The Union's *declaratory* policy, which is often criticized by both its detractors and by those who claim a more active Union in world affairs, must be assessed in the general framework that comprises various instruments Europe employs for the conflict solution.

The EC is, first, together with its Member States, the main financial donor for Palestinians¹⁷. Beyond it, it has always enlarged the range of instruments at its disposal in order to actively participate in the process of conflict solution. Let's think to the appointment of the Special Envoy, Miguel Moratinos in 1996, followed by that of Marc Otten July 2003, and to the institution of a High Representative for the CFSP so as to raise the level of the Union's political participation at the negotiating tables. The Union, then, has always tried to reinforce its international role in the Middle East area supporting a plurality of multilateral initiatives such as the Madrid Conference (1991), and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995). To say the truth, Barcelona Declaration separates the Partnership from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, affirming the principle of "separateness" between the two. Anyway, we cannot deny the existence of a mutual connection.

First, the EMP has had the great merit of attributing to the Palestinian Authority the same status recognised to the other partners, and, at the same time, it has made of Israel a partner accepted by Arab countries. The EMP, then, has provided all partners with a permanent forum for dialogue.

These merits, however, cannot hide the EMP's limits: it has not been able to stop violence nor to develop confidence among the parties involved in the conflict. Even the EMP task of providing a permanent forum for dialogue is fading away: Marseilles (2000) and Valencia (2002) Ministe-

¹⁷ Data released by the European Commission (www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/mepp/indexi) indicate that in the period 1994-98 the Community has provided for the 50% of the international financial aid for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

rial Conferences have been boycotted by the Syrian and Lebanese delegations as a protest against the Israeli use of violence in the occupied territories.

European efforts, then, are politically important but the limited results achieved till now have weakened Union's action efficacy and credibility. The Union appears incapable of adopting those decisions that could mean making relations harder with both Israelis and Palestinians. The Union, for instance, doesn't support measures such as embargo on arms selling to Israel, or revision of Israeli preferential agreement – in order to exclude goods coming from settlements in the occupied territories, or adoption of economic sanctions against the National Palestinian Authority, blamed for supporting terrorist activities.

The Union must further take in due consideration American policy in the area. The USA, in fact, are recognised as the mediator *par excellence* and as the only guarantor of any eventual agreement among the parties. This has undoubtedly weakened the Union negotiating role.

From September 2000 on, for instance, I mean from the beginning of the second Intifada, the only agreements reached have been concluded under the US auspices: Sharm-el-Sheikh and Taba negotiations (October 2000, and January 2001), the Mitchell Plan (May 2001), the Tenet cease-fire (August 2001). With the publication of the road map (April 2003) and its participation to the Quartet, the Union aimed at raising its political profile in the solution of the conflict, but the continuing violence and the latest Sharon's initiatives, do not allow us to think positively about this new peace plan.

Resuming, then, European performance in the Middle East provides the image of a Union that is still far from being a regional pacifier.

What's, then, about the Union's role in regional conflicts' prevention and management, so as envisaged in the new Neighbourhood Policy? The answer to this question appears to be more and more relevant considering that in the Wider Europe region, beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there are other areas of tensions: Western Sahara and Moldova-Transdnistria.

Let's see what is the content of the new Neighbourhood Policy as concerns regional conflicts: *"A shared neighbourhood implies burden-sharing and joint responsibility for addressing the threats to stability created by conflict and insecurity. The EU should take a more active role to facilitate settlement of the disputes over Palestine, the Western Sahara and Transdnistria [...] Greater EU involvement in crisis management in response to specific regional threats would be a tangible demonstration of the EU's willingness to assume a greater share of the burden of conflict resolution in the neighbouring countries. Once settlement has been reached, EU civil and crisis management capabilities could also be engaged in post-conflict internal security arrangements. Additional sources of funding for post-conflict reconstruction and development would be re-*

quired”¹⁸. The Commission, then, claims a Union’s more active role in regional conflicts prevention and management, when regional stability is at risk.

The High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, expresses the same request: “*As a Union of 25 members, spending a total of 160 billion Euros on defence, we should, if required, be able to sustain several operations simultaneously. We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention. We should think particularly of operations involving both military and civilian capabilities*”¹⁹.

Practically, from the aforementioned documents’ analysis, it is possible to reveal a new consciousness: a civilian power, like the Union is, wants to provide itself with the instruments that allow it to be recognised as an effective regional power.

Probably, with reference to the “*active role*” Union claims for itself in the Wider Europe, the new Neighbourhood Policy appears more innovative and ambitious than the EMP. In the EMP Europe excludes itself from the Arab-Israeli conflict, supporting the realization of a lasting peace in the Middle East based on the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and on other multilateral initiatives already in place. In the Wider Europe, on the contrary, Europe assumes a concrete responsibility as concerns conflict solution in its neighbouring countries.

The new strategic role, envisaged both in the March Communication and in the Solana’s Security Strategy, is a really innovative aspect in the framework of relations set up, till now, with neighbouring countries. This element, especially if compared to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, reveals a more conscious approach towards neighbours’ concerns that constitute their political priorities.

3. Theoretical interpretations of the Wider Europe-Neighbourhood Policy

Resuming, we can list some characteristics of the new Neighbourhood Policy, taking in mind that it is considered as an instance of region-building. It is, in fact, an initiative aiming at establishing a form of regionalism characterised by the following elements:

- A high degree of heterogeneity among the regional units. It means that the dynamic of interactions among countries involved will be ruled by bilateral agreements signed by the Union, on one side, and each neighbour, on the other, in a hub and spoke scheme;
- Progressivism in enhancing regional cooperation, in the sense that it will evolve according to the results achieved. They will be measured on the basis of specific

¹⁸ *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood*, Commission Communication 2003: 12

¹⁹ Solana J., *European Security Strategy*, 2003:13

benchmarks, i.e. precise and verifiable parameters, that can be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively;

- Lack of an institutional dimension. Region-building is not supported by regional forums or institutions, which can guarantee the partners' effective participation in the new policy's elaboration and implementation;
- Burden-sharing and joint responsibility in addressing regional conflicts among all partners. The Union, then, as major partner, should play a more active role to address these matters;
- An asymmetrical political and economic interdependence among regional constituent parts, which is aggravated by a limited sub-regional cooperation among neighbours and by the lack of regional institutions in charge of safeguarding mutual interests.

Starting from these points, I am going to suggest some theoretical approaches useful for explaining the Union's attitude towards its neighbours.

An interesting analysis results from the application of Waever's imperial metaphor²⁰.

According to the author, the European Union, as traditional Empires did, appears to be engaged in a pacification and stabilisation process of its frontiers, through which the Union exports its norms and rules in a radial manner.

As starting point, Waever assumes the so-called English school, specifically Wight (1966,1977) and Watson's (1992) studies. The last one, in particular, identified a spectrum of options useful for explaining the international system's organization: it ranges from the extreme of the absolute independence among the systemic units to the extreme of the direct rule (Empire), passing through the intermediate positions of hegemony and dominance.

Different forms of the international system's organization can be arranged on a temporal continuum, or on a spatial dimension which is articulated in concentric circles, in which the inner represents the imperial dominance and the outer rings the intermediate forms. Waever utilises these concentric circles for explaining European regional organization, specifically the levels on which Europe bases its security (a concept of security "that emphasizes environment, ecology and identity" together with a "renewed interest in the rather classical military concerns"²¹- Waever: 68).

The first level of European security, represented by the inner circle, regards the maintenance of stability in the core of the system. The second level, takes place in the relation between Europe

²⁰ Waever O. *Imperial Metaphors: Emergent European Analogies to Pre-Nation-State Imperial Systems*, in Tunander O., Baev P., Einagel V., *GeoPolitics in Post Wall Europe: Security, Territory and Identity*, London, Sage 59-93

²¹ *Ibidem*

and its near abroad that Waever identifies with the group of candidate countries. Considering the completion of the enlargement process (May 2004), we can focus on the relation between the Union and neighbouring countries. At this level the Union's security objectives are realised through the tool of asymmetrical interdependence. It is clear, in fact, that the EU shares with its neighbours the costs of economic, political and social interdependence which globalization process imposes to the different parts of the international system. The problem is that very often these costs are more expensive for neighbours than for Europe, it means that neighbours are more vulnerable than Europe in their relation of mutual interdependence. It is sufficient to think about Mediterranean countries heavily dependent on European market in order to place their exports of textile or agricultural products, and on technical financial assistance, and on foreign direct investments.

At this level, then, the EU exercises a strong power of attraction on its neighbourhood, taking advantage from its economic and commercial power. Neighbours will result linked to the Union but in a position of asymmetrical interdependence, and since this asymmetry is an elevated source of power (Keohane and Nye, 1977: 11), this will be translated in a European policy of stabilisation of its frontiers which makes use of an approach based on an unbalanced relation in favour of the Union.

Waever's interpretation, subsequently, could be an adequate scheme for explaining the new Neighbourhood Policy. This policy, in fact, lacks in the impulse to the development of sub-regional cooperation, which can be considered as the only way in which asymmetry can be balanced. Lack of an institutional dimension, furthermore, that is the absence of fora in which the parity among partners is assured and their participation at a decisional level is guaranteed, is another factor that aggravates the unbalance between the Union and its neighbours.

Waever's interpretation inevitably leads to the following question: why neighbours should accept a European project in which they occupy a position of asymmetrical dependence against the Union?

Answering with Joffé, neighbours: "perceive a utility in closer links with Europe, given their economic dependence upon it and their geographic contiguity with it, and realize that they have very little choice in the matter. The overwhelming size of the EU in almost every aspect, if compared with any other potential partner, obliges them to accept the European vision of a shared future, even if they may fear the consequences"²². Starting from the premise that main European concerns are fundamentally security issues, (security matters linked to migration, energy security problems, negative effects of regional conflicts), he speaks about a "peripheral regionalism", in

²² Joffé G., (2001), *European Union and the Mediterranean*, in Telò M.,(2001), *European Union and New Regionalism*, Burlington, Ashgate, 207-226

which the most important power bloc forces solution along its periphery “in which mutual benefit is an incidental consequence of unilateral security concerns”²³ (Joffé: 220-221).

Other possible interpretations of the WENP’s project is provided by the notion of open or soft regionalism, that is a form of regionalism in which a rule-based political space has not been still created, which is still far from “going beyond the mere functional model, and including confidence-building measures, common rules *and procedures, mutual expectations and political dialogue or cooperation*”²⁴ (Telò 2001:90).

I sustain that the existence of an asymmetrical relation between the Union and the other regional units is undeniable. In a certain sense, then, we can talk about an implicit coercion exercised by the Union over neighbours, in order to accept Europe’s project of a shared neighbourhood. We should not forget, anyway, that neighbouring countries, though in a subordinate position with respect to Europe, have a lot to gain from an enhanced cooperation with it (a chance in the Internal Market, technical and financial assistance, an enhanced international status).

WENP, then, is an instance of flexible and evolving region-building process: in the first period it aims at satisfying Europe’s security objectives allowing it to control what happens in neighbouring countries. In this context mutual benefits are just a consequence of unilateral European concerns.

In the long run the same benefits will result from the enhanced interactions among the regional constituent units. Thus should balance the initial European exclusive attention towards its own security matters, highlighting those mutual interests neighbours share with the Union, making them supporters of the WENP regional integration project. Neighbours’ support, however, will be dependent on the Union’s capacity to foster trust and a sense of “we-ness” across its neighbourhood.

Conclusions.

Wider Europe Neighbourhood Policy reveals the European Union’s urgency to cope with the consequences of the enlargement process over its near-abroad.

Excluding membership prospect, the Commission has elaborated a stabilisation approach towards its neighbours based on a region-building process. In this paper, in fact, I analysed WENP as an instance of regionalism trying to highlight characters and dynamics of the new region Union is going to create with its new neighbours.

²³ *Ibidem*

²⁴ Telò M., *Between Trade Regionalization and Deep Integration*, in Telò M., (2001), *European Union and New Regionalism*, Burlington, Ashgate

Built on the assumption to assure its own security through the stabilisation (social, political and economic) of its frontiers, EU's new policy should not forget the basic lessons learned from other neighbourhood policies – such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Despite the limited results achieved, Barcelona's main attainment is the awareness of the importance to eliminate the asymmetrical perception between the two shores of the Mediterranean, making partners feel as equals, fostering sub-regional cooperation and developing common identity.

Wider Europe region, on the contrary, is an area in which the dynamics of interactions among its parts are based on a hub-and-spoke scheme, in which there is no an institutional dimension (i.e. institutions that guarantee partners' interests and partners' effective participation in policy making and implementation), in which there is no real interest in supporting sub-regional cooperation and no ambition to create a common identity.

The EU should bet not only on economic and legislative integration with its neighbours – as a way to stabilise them-, but also on mutual trust and collective identity to make WENP a solid and durable initiative over time.

European neighbourhood project (i.e. the creation of a region of shared values and prosperity) is strictly linked to the Union's capacity in involving neighbours in the construction of a common region. EU should induce its neighbours to accept not only the material benefits deriving from an enhanced relation with it, but also to embrace a far-reaching project of an inevitable shared future.

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