

History does not move in a straight line

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5 July 2012

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is now eight years old. It was initiated in the wake of the 2004 enlargement of the EU with ten new member states, preceded months earlier by the Georgian 'Rose Revolution' and then followed some months later by the Ukrainian 'Orange Revolution'. This seemed to be the EU's hour of triumph, with the huge enlargement going alongside the signing of the Constitutional Treaty also in 2004, following on from the successful launch of the euro in 2000.

These major developments motivated the launching of the ENP as a complementary move, signalling that the EU would not be ignoring its new neighbours to its east, and on the contrary wanting to encourage them to converge on modern European values and economic standards. 'Everything but the institutions' was one of the slogans, advanced by Romano Prodi who was presiding over the European Commission until November 2004. Initially the ENP was conceived to support the three new direct neighbours, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Given the EU's permanent balancing act between its northern and southern interests, it was decided to extend the ENP to the southern neighbours, which however meant a confusing overlap with the already existing Euro-Mediterranean Policy and its Association Agreements. One consequence of this widening to the south Mediterranean was that the initial exclusion of the three south Caucasus states became a politically untenable proposition for EU foreign ministers, and so they were added.

Expectations for the ENP saw contradictory narratives. Optimists were impressed by the colour revolutions, especially that of Ukraine whose hero Viktor Yushchenko had narrowly escaped assassination by poisoning, with the 'gas princess' Yulia Timoshenko co-starring as heroine. Less impressed were most academics, who commented that without EU membership perspective for the partner states there was unlikely to be the kind of transformative impact suggested by official texts and many speeches.

The Ukrainian Orange Revolution soon degenerated into chronic governance failure, leading to a virtual counter-revolution under President Yanukovich since February 2010, with Yulia Timoshenko imprisoned in order to remove this troublesome political competitor. She thus became Ukraine's counterpart to Russia's Mikhail Khodokorsky, imprisoned since 2005 as Putin sought to protect his regime against contagion from the colour revolutions. Georgia on the other hand saw a very impressive economic reform programme, although President Saakashvili became increasingly authoritarian. Georgian political scientist, Ghia Nodia, warned already in early 2005 of the 'banana republic' model, whereby a *coup d'état* removes a dictator in the name of democracy, only for the new leader to himself become a dictator, and so on to the next coup. However, in the Georgian case the next episode was instead war with

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Russia, after Saakashvili responded to relentless provocation by Russia's proxies in South Ossetia with his militarily catastrophic attack on Tskinali in August 2008. President Sarkozy mediated the peace to end Europe's first inter-state war of the post-Soviet period with impressive speed and resolution.

However that was Sarkozy's best moment, while one of the worst was his ill-conceived Mediterranean Union, initially proposed in 2007 to embrace only the northern and southern coastal states of the Mediterranean, and so exclude northern Europe and completely destroy the ENP. Chancellor Merkel put her foot down, insisting that there could be no such initiative that would be the prerogative of half the EU only, and by mid-2008 Sarkozy had given way. Still the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM, as it was renamed) amounted to a confusing overlap with the ENP. Its political aspects were spectacularly inappropriate in view of the underlying causes of the Arab Spring that was soon to follow: the UfM totally eschewed inconvenient political matters like the region's repressive authoritarianism, with Sarkozy inviting President Mubarak to be his co-president.

The failure of the colour revolutions, alongside the resilience of authoritarianism in the Arab world, Russia and China, led some commentators in the mid-2000s to write about 'smart authoritarianism' and the 'backlash' against the spread of democracy, as if this was the new global trend. But then in early 2011 the Arab Spring suddenly erupted. The EU's erstwhile collaboration with the Arab autocracies, and refusal to have relations with democratically-oriented Islamist parties, became instantly the subject of *mea culpa* declarations. For years officials of the EU institutions had wanted a more muscular human rights policy, coupled with opening of dialogue with moderate Islamist opposition parties. But foreign ministers for the EU's Mediterranean member states ruled this out. Now the discourse changed drastically. There would be support not for any democracy, but for 'deep democracy', with the offer of 'more for more' as the slogan for more serious conditionality. France's foreign minister, who had responded to the Tunisian uprising by kindly offering to President Ben Ali the help of the French police, was sacked.

Yet the path to deep democracy is anything but a straight line. The long-term trend may well be an ineluctable tendency for populations in advanced economies with high educational standards to demand political participation. But in the meantime the European neighbourhood sees a wide proliferation of regime types, and notably so in the aftermath of revolutionary regime collapse. We should not forget the 'great revolution' model, with its impressive empirical record (France 1789, China 1911, Russia 1917, Iran 1979), where well-intentioned democrats take power initially, but soon get swept aside by ideological radicalization and reigns of terror, with new authoritarian regimes to last for decades. The European neighbourhood sees no dominant dynamic political model as of now, but rather a complete spectrum of regime types, ranging from the very gradual constitutionalization of some monarchies at one extreme through to the descent into civil war and the nightmare of the failed or failing state at the other extreme, or counter-revolution, or just shaky attempts to work with new democratic constitutions.

The EU's neighbourhood policy may not have an impressive transformative impact in any directly observable manner, comparable to the example of the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. The conditionality mechanisms, so strong and comprehensive for accession candidates, are only a faint derivative, with incentives insufficient to drive the politics of the neighbouring states. Still it seems that a certain socialization process is at work. The civil societies of the eastern neighbours in particular, see European standards of human rights and democracy as the model. Moreover, the EU's neighbourhood policy compares distinctly favourably with other attempts at regionalism at the continental level, often bedevilled by the excess weight of the regional hegemon. China's ambitions in the South

China Sea are seen to be threatening to the other states of the region. India has been recurrently on the brink of war with Pakistan, and the South Asia regional association lacks substance. The presence of the United States in the Americas is so huge as to generate spasms of anti-Americanism, spurred on by some obviously aberrant examples like the Cuba policy imposed by Congress. Closest to home, Russia's attempts to re-integrate the former Soviet space have all too often been pursued with the aid of coercive measures, or implicit threats of coercion. The EU is at peace with its neighbours and has a reasonably high level of trust with almost all of them.

Moreover highly interesting opinion polls or surveys are now coming out of Russia and China, with special implications for their foreign policies in years to come. In Russia the young elite of persons interested in international affairs reject the current nationalist *realpolitik* of the Kremlin, wanting instead something far closer to European thinking, and for their generation to feel and be seen as a normal part of Europe. In China a recent poll shows a majority disapproving of the stance of their country in alliance with Russia in the UN Security Council over Syria. Both Russian and Chinese regimes may not collapse soon, but the groundswell of political dissent grows.

Yet, the EU's own current crisis is hitting its neighbours hard economically, and undermining its reputation as a model for regional integration. There used to be talk in Brussels of a bicycle theory of integration, according to which you have to keep moving to avoid falling off. This theory fell into disrepute as the single market, single money and constitutional treaty were deemed by some to have brought the EU to the level of a steady-state system, not requiring any further radical integration steps. The setbacks in ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, leading to the Lisbon Treaty compromise, underlined the depth of the resistance to deeper integration. Yet now the monetary union is seen as needing a banking union, a fiscal union and a political union in order for it and the EU itself to survive. Furthermore, most economists add that there is no extant economic and monetary union among advanced economies that does not also have a powerful redistributive function through the budget (otherwise known as a transfer union). The bicycle theory rides again. History indeed is not a straight line.