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GAME OF ZONES
THE QUEST FOR INFLUENCE IN EUROPE'S
NEIGHBOURHOOD

Sven Biscop



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INTRODUCTION

Russia's annexation of the Crimea and subsequent meddling in Ukraine does not constitute a game-changer. It is just a reminder that at least since the war with Georgia in 2008 Russia has been and still is playing the same game: a "game of zones", aimed at (re)establishing an exclusive sphere of influence. Many of us Europeans had forgotten that, or had pushed it to the back of our minds, preferring to believe that we were not engaged in a zero-sum game in our eastern neighbourhood.

While we were dealing with Ukraine, we tended also to forget the crises still going on in our southern neighbourhood, in Libya, Mali, Syria and now Iraq. Spilling over from Syria, extremist militias may establish their own "zone" in the Middle East, which would de-stabilize the entire region. In order to prevent that game-changer from materializing, another game-changer may be necessary: a rapprochement with Iran.

Europe must assume responsibility for security in its entire neighbourhood, both east and south. The challenge is great – but so are Europe's means.

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TROUBLE IN THE EAST

The European Union's (EU) hope was that the countries of *Zwischeneuropa*, wedged in between itself and Russia, would be able to make their own choices, instead of Brussels or Moscow choosing for them. If they would choose to develop close ties with us, we would gladly oblige, on the condition that they would undertake economic reforms and commit to improve democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. But the EU never asked that they would sever relations with Russia. Russia however does not see the world through this lens. And because a win-win situation requires that both sides perceive a benefit, we *were* engaged in a zero-sum game, whether we wanted to or not.

Those who deride Europe for failing to understand this, especially in the US, are not entirely wrong. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was simply not political enough. Warnings were issued by EU Member States' embassies and from within the EU apparatus itself (notably the European External Action Service or EEAS) that appearances were deceptive and the signing of the agreement with Ukraine would not proceed that smoothly. Implementing its far-reaching stipulations was in fact incompatible with the nature of the regime. Pushing on regardless, we set in motion a chain of events that led to an (itself unpredictable) Russian overreaction. Thus we learned about the geopolitical implications of technical cooperation, export of norms and trade relations the hard way.

Just a few years ago however, in 2006-2008, the Europeans prevented the US from making the same mistake by resisting NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. Surely that move would not have remained without a Russian reaction either. Neither Washington nor Brussels seems to have learned very much from that episode. In fact, at the time Ukraine itself eventually declined to join NATO. That ought to have taught us that when a country itself is too divided over its own future, pushing it to make an untimely choice is unwise, for it is bound to increase domestic tensions.

And those tensions are easily exploited by the country's other neighbour, Russia, seeking to advance its pawns in the game of zones. Russia is acting more out of weakness than out of strength, however. Rather than executing a master plan, Putin seems to be making it up as he goes along. He supported Ukrainian President Yanukovich to the very end, probably because he did not see an alternative way of safeguarding Russian influence. Then Yanukovich fled the country, either without prior warning, which means Russia lost control of events, or with Russian connivance, in which case Moscow gravely miscalculated. For immediately the opposition came to power, which naturally turned to its western neighbour for support. At a stroke, Putin lost most of his influence in Ukraine.

The subsequent annexation of the Crimea can be seen as an overreaction. The peninsula’s only strategic asset is the naval base, the continued Russian use of which the new Ukrainian government guaranteed right away. But it is typical of a bully to grab by force even what he could get by asking politely, because that’s what the bully’s reputation depends on. The legitimacy of the regime is based to a great extent on the pretence that Russia remains a great power on a par with the US and China. The easiest way of maintaining that mirage is by acting as a spoiler in the west, simply because we are such polite company. It is difficult to imagine Putin taking similar risks vis-à-vis China, which would likely react with somewhat less circumspection than Europe and the US. But to take on a bigger part than that of spoiler, be it a very irritating one, Russia no longer has the means.

The real game-changer for us in Europe is that the US has made the same assessment and has reoriented its strategy accordingly. Seen from Washington there is only one strategic competitor: China, hence the “pivot” or rebalancing of the focus of US strategy towards Asia. Of course “events, dear boy, events” will continue to pull the US in other directions. But a great power will also aim to shape events in priority areas – China and Asia are that priority for the US today. The not so implicit message to Europe is perfectly logical: we must assume a lot more responsibility for security in our own neighbourhood. The “European Reassurance Initiative” that President Obama announced in early June 2014, asking Congress for \$1 billion to temporarily deploy additional American forces to Eastern Europe, organize exercises and train allies and partners, is meant to underscore this message. Rather than a reversal of the pivot, it says to Europeans, in the run-up to the NATO summit in early September: shame on you, for you ought to be doing this yourself. The more capable Europe is, the more safely the US can focus on Asia; in that sense, the pivot hinges on Europe. NATO’s Article 5 is there to guarantee, through conventional and nuclear deterrence, that our own territory is not under threat. As indeed it is not, for impressive though Russian operations in the Crimea may have been from a military point of view, taking on a NATO or EU Member State is another thing entirely.

EVEN MORE TROUBLE IN THE SOUTH

The European burden of responsibility does not just include our eastern periphery, but our southern neighbourhood as well. Successive crises eclipsed each other in Libya, Mali and Syria until now all eyes are on Ukraine. But the violence in the former three countries has far from abated, and a grave crisis has now erupted in Iraq as well.

At first sight, the ENP seems to have suffered from the same weakness in the east and in the south, which led to the EU being overtaken by the Arab Spring and the crisis in Ukraine. A focus on the “low politics” of economic and technical cooperation, to the detriment of the “high politics” of diplomacy and defence; a wide range of ongoing activities, but without a strategy linking these to well-defined political ends. In the east “low politics” masked the actual absence of an EU strategy, a consequence of the EU’s conscious avoidance of any fundamental debate on how to deal with Russia, for fear of bringing out the divisions between Member States. Activities under the flag of the Eastern Partnership went on without it being clear which relationship the EU eventually aspired to with the six countries concerned. Unfortunately, activity is no substitute for strategy: if you don’t know what your objectives are, even the most diverse array of activities is unlikely to achieve them.

In the south however “low politics” masked a “high politics” approach by the EU – but one that was very much at odds with the rhetoric of the ENP. Here not so much the absence of strategy as the discrepancy between declared and actual strategy handicapped the EU. In practice, the ambitious ENP agenda of stimulating neighbouring governments to equally provide for all their citizens in terms of security, prosperity and freedom was abandoned in favour of a short-term focus on energy, illegal migration, and terrorism. Whichever regime was ready to cooperate with the EU in these areas could count on our support, quite regardless of the human rights situation. The former colonial powers’ special relationships with most countries of the region did not help. As a result pictures featuring embarrassing embraces with since ousted dictators can be found of quite a few European leaders. In the east, by contrast, in spite of the absence of strategy, the EU did adhere much more to its principles. Compare our attitude vis-à-vis obviously flawed elections in Belarus and pre-Arab Spring Tunisia: condemnations for the former, congratulations for the latter.

Had we remained as principled in the south, we would probably not have seen a speedier or less violent transition, but we would have enjoyed much greater legitimacy. In Ukraine demonstrators used their support for the EU’s model of society to signal their dissatisfaction with Yanukovich. In Tunisia people rose in revolt demanding exactly what Europe stands for, but they saw the EU as an obstacle rather

than an ally in their struggle. Because of historical reasons people in our eastern neighbours can of course connect more easily with Europe than in the south. Less than in Cold War Poland perhaps but much more than in present-day Egypt, people in Ukraine can think in terms of a return to Europe and a restoration of the freedom which they briefly enjoyed and was then taken away from them. In the south, history inevitably leads people to see Europe as foreign, paternalist or even imperialist. Having just made a revolution they are loath to accept any outside model. Fortunately that means that other outside powers seeking to increase their presence (the Gulf States, Russia, China) find it is not a walk-over either. But they are intent on playing the game of zones and their influence is on the rise.

At the same time even domestic actors who prioritise a religious agenda over the political, economic and social concerns of the people meet with strong resistance. One positive conclusion can be drawn therefore. Revolution and protest in both our eastern and southern neighbourhood have vindicated the core *idea* of EU foreign policy (as expressed e.g. in the 2003 European Security Strategy). An equal share in security, prosperity and freedom is a universal demand and not a European or western conception; without it, no durable peace and stability are possible. On this the EU can build to revitalize its strategy for the neighbourhood.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT?

The start of a new Commission, including a new High Representative, is the perfect opportunity to make a new start in the neighbourhood. Fortunately, nobody seems to doubt any longer, as was long the case, that the EU should set priorities in function of its vital interests. They are obviously at stake in the neighbourhood: preventing spill-over of security threats to our territory, ensuring trade routes and energy supply, managing migration and refugees, combating trafficking of humans, arms and drugs, maintaining international law, safeguarding the autonomy of our decision-making.

Europe cannot keep quiet therefore, but that does not mean that Europe too should start playing the game of zones. The best way of preserving our interests is not by attempting to bring our neighbours under our control. As Russia is learning in Ukraine, even if part of the population supports you, you will inevitably antagonise others, which is a recipe for perennial instability. Our interests are better served by empowering our neighbours to make their own choices, and to offer mutually beneficial partnership if they also, but not exclusively, choose to cooperate with us. We do not need our neighbours to look up to us, but we don't want them to look away from us either – that would be very harmful for our interests. Empowerment starts with domestic stability, which starts with integrating all citizens in the political arena, guaranteeing their security, and their share in the wealth of the country. We certainly do not need to abandon the core idea of the European Security Strategy therefore.

But we do require new regional strategies on how to bring this grand strategy into practice. Strategies, plural: the notion that a single Neighbourhood Policy can fit all of our neighbours has been proved wrong. The dynamics in the east (geographically and culturally in Europe, but also within the ambit of a power with irredentist designs, Russia) and the south (in Africa and Asia, where multiple powers compete for influence) are just too different. At the same time, the EU has come to realise that “the neighbours of the neighbours” are often as crucial to our interests. Five partially overlapping and strongly interrelated areas are of vital importance to European security: the eastern neighbourhood, the Mediterranean, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf.

In diplomacy, symbols matter. The EU would do well to gradually phase out the ENP brand, which rightly or wrongly has become associated with failure, in favour of an Eastern, Mediterranean, Sahel, Horn of Africa and Gulf Policy. These policies should be issue-based and thus geographically overlapping. The EU has a tendency, manifest also in the ENP, to see the world through the artificial geographic divides that are but its own creation and do not always reflect reality on the ground. Different issues

generate different regional dynamics, hence the EU should be flexible and approach the same country in the context of different regional policies according to the issue at hand. That of course requires prioritization and strong coordination between policies, in order to avoid that neighbouring countries would be confronted with contradictory expectations.

AN AMBITIOUS LONG-TERM SECURITY PROVIDER

Before any new long-term regional policies can be put in place, the EU must address the ongoing crises in its neighbourhood.

To start with we must make it clear that we do consider the security of this broad region to be our responsibility. Not because that is what the US expects from us, but in the first place because our comprehensive regional policies will not be credible if the impression persists, as in the past, that our engagement ends where hard security problems begin. Europe must be the first-line security provider in its own neighbourhood. Whenever a security problem arises, the EU must take the lead, initiate a response, and forge a coalition to deliver it. In many instances a diplomatic response will be called for, at which the High Representative and the EEAS have already proven to be proficient (on Kosovo and Iran e.g.), supplemented as required with sticks and carrots from the comprehensive EU toolkit (trade, development, SSR, sanctions etc.).

But the EU must also display the ability and the will to use force, first of all as a credible deterrent that will enhance the effectiveness of its diplomacy. Actual military intervention is the last resort when vital interests and the responsibility to protect cannot otherwise be upheld. Even if the EU would formally declare the broader neighbourhood a security priority, at the level of grand strategy, whether or not to intervene in a specific crisis will always depend on an ad hoc cost-benefit calculation. What positive effects could intervention achieve, but which negative fall-out might it generate and which risks would our forces run? Crucial to the military success of recent interventions (in Libya and Mali) is that a major part of the population welcomed them.

It will in any case be *our* decision. As a consequence of the pivot, the US will no longer take the initiative in our place but will look to Europeans to take charge. The EU evidently is the best forum through which they can assume this comprehensive security role. If in a specific crisis Europeans decide to take military action, they will of course call upon a Member State or NATO to provide the command and control for a European-led operation, through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) or NATO, depending on the circumstances. Assuming our responsibilities has capability implications. Europeans must drastically step up military cooperation and integration through the CSDP to enable them to fulfil the Headline Goal (deploying at corps level or up to 60,000 troops) in the broad neighbourhood *over and above* any ongoing operations – that would be a real deterrent and strategic reserve. Furthermore, they must aspire to be able to deploy in this region relying on their own enabling capabilities (air-to-air refuelling, intelligence etc.) rather than continue to be dependent on the US, thus freeing up American assets for deployment elsewhere.

AND A CRISIS MANAGER: IN THE EAST

These long-term security obligations provide the framework for the EU's short-term crisis management.

In the East, the EU actually has responded pretty adequately to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis: adopting sanctions to signal its dissatisfaction with the annexation of the Crimea, keeping further sanctions in reserve to warn Putin against similar military incursion in mainland Ukraine, providing economic support to the Ukrainian government and helping to organize the presidential elections, and engaging in high-level diplomacy. Indeed, Obama aligned himself with this approach in his Brussels speech on 26 March 2014, putting paid to rather more belligerent utterings in some American quarters. Of course, EU decisions were preceded by difficult debates between Member States, but too often we allow these initial divisions to overshadow the outcome. They are inherent to decision-making in any actor, the only difference being that usually debates in the EU are out in the open as opposed to those between the State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Council.

This policy is helped by the fact that Putin too seems to have noticed that in eastern Ukraine there may be a lot of dissatisfaction with rule from Kiev, but it is neither as massive as (it apparently is) in the Crimea nor does it necessarily equate with a wish to join Russia. Unlike in the Crimea therefore, pushing things to extremes may lead to a bloody and protracted civil war (as civil wars usually are) in which Putin likely prefers not to be involved. Russia may in fact have more interest in keeping Ukraine together but weak, which creates opportunities to wield influence nationally, rather than in splitting off further parts, which would cut it off completely from the Western-oriented country that would remain.²

That also implies that the EU and the US should aid Ukraine to build up its armed forces, but with the objective of maintaining a presence of the central government throughout the country – not to try and resolve the issue by force. That would only fuel internecine violence, which could tempt Russia in turn to intervene militarily anyway, bound as it has itself by its statements about protection of Russians everywhere. The people who stand to lose from civil war are the Ukrainians. The EU should rather continue its diplomatic engagement to try and forge a consensus on a federal solution for Ukraine that can satisfy all Ukrainians, including in the East of the country, which can therefore also be a face-saving way out for Russia. That may require adopting more severe economic sanctions though, to ensure that Russian probing stays below a certain threshold. The EU's resolve may be tested sooner rather than later...

² Tony Wood, "Back from the Edge? On the Situation in Ukraine". In: *London Review of Books*, Vol. 36, 2014, No. 11, pp. 37-38.

In the end, the outcome might be very advantageous for the EU, except that we will likely be the one having to pay for it for a long time to come: the gradual stabilization of a more democratic Ukraine, free to build constructive relations with all of its neighbours. The economic and political challenge is huge though.

The question that we should ask ourselves is: are we willing to establish as close relations and spend as much treasure on the other countries of the Eastern Partnership? If they so desire, of course. In the case of Moldova a positive answer seems already guaranteed from both sides; as regards Belarus the question does not now pose itself. But what about the South Caucasus? What are their aspirations, how far are we willing to go to meet them, and how can we avoid another clash with Russia? Putin may have damaged his own long-term interests for even those who are inclined to look to Moscow rather than to Brussels did not count on cessation of territory being part of the bargain.

What EU policy will not achieve is to return the Crimea to Ukraine. The peninsula will join South Ossetia, Abkhazia and others in the category of territories whose proclaimed status we do not recognize but also do not actively attempt to alter. That is unsatisfactory, but it ought not to be a surprise. The history of international relations since World War Two shows that the Permanent Five do not wage war against one another, and that even proxy wars tend to be very costly for all sides. Just as, earlier in this century, Russia and China protested against but could do little in practice to end the evidently illegal US invasion and occupation of Iraq, so the balance of power impels us to live with a Russian Crimea, however much we disapprove.

We have to work with the great powers, simply because they are the great powers. Their non-obstruction, if not their active cooperation, is needed to advance in other key areas, such as the negotiations about Syria and Iran, and economic ties are way too close and important to permanently put at risk. Tempting though some may find it to revert to Cold War frames, it is imperative to maintain constructive relations. Issue-based cooperation with all of its “strategic partners”, whenever the EU finds that it can agree on the way to protect shared interests, is precisely the way of pulling them into effective and rule-based multilateralism as we see it. Partnership is not marriage: we do not have to declare our love, but we do have to be able to compartmentalize and proceed where we can.

With Russia specifically, energy supply is a crucial dimension of our relations. Putin will hopefully have provided enough of a scare to have convinced the EU Member States to finally fully integrate their energy markets and accelerate diversification. The latter should go beyond diversification in the supply of fossil fuels, for that will only increase our dependence on other equally undemocratic suppliers. Or it will make us rely on fracking by the US, which is extremely damaging for the environment. The US expects, by the way, that if Europe wants to benefit from American energy it needs to make an effort itself, i.e. start fracking too. Real diversification

thus either means more nuclear energy (which is also being suggested from the US side) or more renewables. Even when we achieve substantial diversification, the EU would do well to still buy Russian gas. It would then be in a much stronger position, able to demonstrate its goodwill by continued purchasing from and investment in the Russian energy sector, which is important for the stability of the country, but in the knowledge that it could much more easily turn its energy supply around. Our vulnerability vis-à-vis Russian energy blackmail would thus be much decreased.

AS IN THE SOUTH

In recent years, awareness has sharply increased across the EU that security in the broader southern neighbourhood concerns all of the 28. That does not yet translate, unfortunately, into a great willingness to act when forceful intervention is required. In Libya and Mali ad hoc coalitions outside the EU had to take the military lead, at the initiative of Britain and France, with the EU as such not coming onto the stage until the follow-up phase. But the EU does now have comprehensive regional strategies for the Sahel and the Horn, in the implementation of which it has deployed training and capacity-building missions as well as the naval operation Atalanta. It also has a border assistance mission in Libya, and it plays a vital role in the diplomatic process on Syria and on Iran. The challenge now is to consolidate the effects of these actions and ensure that durable peace and stability result, which may require additional and ambitious diplomatic initiatives.

What is required first of all though is staying power. The security situation in the Sahel appears manageable, but fighting in Mali remains ongoing and the EU will have to sustain its military deployment as well as its economic and financial support for years to come if the region is not to slide back into major instability. The vastness of the region is a challenge, but on the other hand even a limited number of major assets (air support e.g.) in support of local forces can make a difference as insurgents are mostly but lightly equipped. The EU might wish to consider an additional effort in this sense, alongside its training missions. In the Horn of Africa, the efforts of years are finally bearing fruit, but here too a sustained effort is necessary. It will be some time to come before Somalia is sufficiently stable and prosperous to eradicate the root causes of piracy. Until that time the EU has no choice but to keep patrolling the neighbouring waters.

Much more challenging at this moment is the situation in Libya, which is far too chaotic and dangerous for the border assistance mission to be more than a token deployment. Unfortunately, gravely deficient follow-up has almost completely negated the effects of the successful military intervention in 2011. The crisis in Mali in 2013 has already demonstrated the damage that spill-over from Libya can cause. Though success is by no means guaranteed, the EU has both the greatest responsibility and the most instruments to work with the Libyan authorities to try and create a semblance of stability. That implies a much more ambitious role than it is assuming today.

The gravest crisis is the civil war in Syria, in which any military intervention would cause more harm than good, and which so far has proved too intractable for the diplomatic process to achieve anything beyond the destruction of chemical weapons. At least spill-over of violence to where it was most feared (to Lebanon,

Jordan and Turkey) has so far been limited, but the risk remains; military action may yet be called for to prevent it from materializing. In June 2014 however the war spectacularly hit Iraq, when the extreme ISIS group (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) that was fighting Assad in Syria took everyone by surprise by capturing large parts of northern Iraq. Another proof (if more was needed) of the error of invading Iraq in 2003, everyone is now looking to the US to rescue the government in Baghdad, including militarily. But Europe can no longer consider this to be just an American problem, for the stability of the entire Middle East is at stake. Furthermore, ISIS is exactly the group that many fighters originating from Europe have joined, which poses great security risks if and when these eventually seek to return.

Meanwhile the EU, together with the UN, the US and Russia, has no option but to keep putting pressure on all parties in Syria to bring them to the negotiating table. In view of the stalemate in the civil war, any agreement may have to include a continued role for Assad, at least in a transitional phase, for it to be workable. However much we may dislike the idea on principle, the crisis in Iraq has probably tilted the balance in favour of realism.

The attempt to involve Iran in the Syrian negotiations was very wise and has to be kept up, for a settlement for Syria has to take into account the proxy war with Saudi Arabia that is going on. The EU’s role is not to take sides, but to strive for a regional arrangement in which all find their place. Hence the strategic importance of the broader negotiations with Iran itself. Care must be taken not to jeopardize the outcome of these by appearing so eager that Tehran would no longer see a reason to make many concessions – European energy companies especially are chafing at the bit. Yet a “normalization” of relations with Iran would be a breakthrough indeed. “Normalization” can only go so far, in view of the serious human rights issues in Iran (such as the hanging of homosexuals), though the situation in Saudi-Arabia, the West’s “ally” in the Gulf is hardly any better. But even a limited shift towards constructive relations on an issue-by-issue basis would be a game-changer for the Middle East and the Gulf – and there probably is a much bigger chance of transition in Iran, which is in many ways a much more open society, than in Saudi Arabia.

Europe could thus try to maintain an equidistant position between Riyadh and Tehran, further diversify energy supply, and stabilize the Middle East. As the US role vis-à-vis Iran remains constrained, for domestic political reasons, the EU is best placed to imagine an ambitious diplomatic scheme to take this forward. Even the US may step up its engagement, for the crisis in Iraq, where Sunni ISIS fighters are massacring Shia, is of great concern to Iran as well and has immediately produced consultation between Washington and Tehran.

A PARTNER IN PRAGMATIC IDEALISM

If the security situation can at least be kept under control, the EU can revitalize its long-term multilateral and bilateral relations with the countries in the five sub-regions of its broader neighbourhood.

A multilateral forum would add value to bilateral relations, at least as a confidence and security-building measure for the countries of each region, which often are embroiled in tensions and disputes, but also to foster cooperation between sets of countries on concrete issues. The more operational the multilateral forums can be the better, of course, which requires a focused agenda. That certainly holds true for the existing forums, the Eastern Partnership and the ill-fated Union for the Mediterranean; with the participants of these the furthest-reaching bilateral relations, such as association agreements, can be envisaged. Multilateral relations with the Gulf countries, via the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), need to become more political. For the Sahel and the Horn, European security initiatives in these regions can be the starting point for less institutionalized but focussed multilateral meetings. In addition, ad hoc meetings in various constellations can be envisaged, including Iran, in function of the issue to be addressed, e.g. the security crisis in Iraq.

At the bilateral level, a reconceptualization of relations is in order. Partnership is indeed the aim, but it cannot be the starting point. Partnership at first sight does not work. By declaring all neighbours to be partners from the start, the EU has weakened rather than strengthened the incentive for reform. Why change if you are on the list of the good guys already? Instead of changing its neighbours, the EU itself has become tainted by associating itself too closely with unsavoury regimes. Real *partnership* implies systematic consultation and regular joint action on an agreed range of issues. That requires a degree of agreement on both values and policy objectives which can be achieved with democracies and countries in transition but probably not with authoritarian regimes. The EU should of course have a *dialogue* with all neighbours, starting from the realisation that in the absence of a membership perspective and because the paternalistic conditionality approach no longer fits in with this multipolar and post-Spring era, having a *reforming* role from the outside is extremely difficult. Playing a *moderating* role, curbing excesses, is realistic and important however, and can go hand in hand with issue-based cooperation on an ad hoc basis, as a prelude to eventual partnership. This is what could be called pragmatic idealism. When transition and democratization does happen, the EU can and must of course offer full support. In such a scenario Europe has a comparative advantage, for few other external actors can fully support democracy, in view of their own lack of it.

The east is the exception here, because as stated above it sees itself as a part rather than as an object of Europe. This is a key reason why dynamics in the eastern neighbourhood are very different and conditionality can work, though how far to the east this applies may be doubted as well.

Within this context the EU should phase out the language of partnership, except where it really applies. A return to classic diplomacy is in order, speaking with all actors at all levels, privately but also publicly, in full view of public opinion in the country. For this is our strongest asset throughout our broad neighbourhood: people have become active citizens and will continue to exert pressure on their governments when they perceive their rights to be ignored. Once found, this “class consciousness” cannot be put back in the bottle. Supporting free media and our own public diplomacy are very important in this regard. Secondly, the EU has a lot of expertise to offer (e.g. on security sector reform) and should be generous when it is requested, especially in countries in transition. Thirdly, although other external actors at times have more resources to spend and the scale of the challenges is immense, the EU still can allocate significant budgets (e.g. €15 billion for the European Neighbourhood Instrument for 2014-2020). Or at least they would be significant if they were concentrated on more specific priorities rather than fragmented across a wide array of well-intentioned but not always very effective initiatives. The highest priority appears to be investment in economically viable projects that stimulate employment and long-term development (such as transport and energy infrastructure).

CONCLUSION

As violence and foreign intrusion threaten the stability of many of Europe's neighbours, with full-blooded war going on in several countries, our broader neighbourhood certainly is in the worst state since a long time. But that does not mean that Europe is impotent to deal with this. If we deploy them pragmatically, our diplomatic, military, civilian and economic instruments, and indeed our values themselves, can have a great impact. The key, as ever, is strategy: setting clear objectives and choosing instruments and allocating means in function of those priorities. In the simplest of terms: not just doing things with the neighbours, but doing things for a purpose.