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Moshes, Arkady

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DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
STRANDGADE 56 • 1401 COPENHAGEN K • DENMARK
TEL +45 32 69 87 87 • diis@diis.dk • www.diis.dk

**THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR NORDIC ACTORS**

Arkady Moshes

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Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS

Strandgade 56, DK-1401 Copenhagen, Denmark

Ph: +45 32 69 87 87

Fax: +45 32 69 87 00

E-mails: diis@diis.dk

Web: www.diis.dk

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Arkady Moshes, Senior Researcher, Head of the 'Russia and EU Programme', The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki.

In the summer of 2002 Arkady Moshes was a visiting scholar at DUPI. The current publication is based on a public lecture delivered at DIIS on August 18, 2005.

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Abstract

The paper argues, firstly, that it is in the interest of the Nordic countries to focus increasingly at the EU new Eastern Neighbourhood and make their policies in the region more active. The region is gaining importance for Europe for various reasons, one of which is that the success or failure of the transformation here will seriously affect the future of Russia. Secondly, the European Neighbourhood will have a better chance to succeed if promoted by a group of member states that are capable simultaneously to make it an EU priority and to work with the recipients of the policy. The paper argues that the Nordic countries are the best to fulfil this task.

INTRODUCTION

Since its enlargement in 2004 and the expected entry of Romania in 2007, the European Union has become the neighbour of a huge region, full of multiple and diverse challenges. Even in Ukraine, despite the wave of optimism regarding the fate of democratic reforms in the country after the Orange revolution, the changes are still fragile, and the risk of a return to an inefficient and corrupt system of governance cannot be excluded. Belarus is ruled by an autocratic regime that is attempting to isolate the country and its population from the rest of Europe, as it sees openness to the outside world as a threat to its very existence. Moldova is a country torn in two, its breakaway part being suspected of carrying out all sorts of illegal activities, and both parts are suffering equally from extreme poverty, with all that this entails. In the Caucasus, basic socio-economic stability has yet to be achieved, and solutions for several frozen ethnic conflicts need to be found.

No doubt on a general level the European Union is interested in having stable, prosperous and democratic neighbours on all its borders, including those in the east. This commonsense conclusion is further supported by the fact that some of its new neighbours are explicitly expressing their aspirations to join the EU in the future. Regardless of whether these plans materialize or not, and even before they do, at least Ukraine may well enter an alliance of some sort with most EU members through membership of NATO.

At the same time, the ability of the Union to ensure the systemic transformation of the region is far from certain. Like many national capitals, Brussels is reluctant to recognize even a hypothetical perspective of membership for potential regional aspirants, without which the room for a policy of conditionality will be limited. The leverage available for those states that are unwilling to cooperate is close to nil, as the example of Belarus shows. There exists a residual tendency to view the area as predominantly post-Soviet, one to which it is assumed that the integration paradigm should not and cannot apply. Some member states are not free from pursuing a 'Russia-first' policy. Finally, resources are insufficient, and even those that are available are not necessarily used in the most effective way, thanks to inflexible internal procedures of the EU.

A major source of scepticism lies in the fact that the Union as a whole, all the rhetoric notwithstanding, does not seem to have reached a consensus on the extent to which it should engage in the region, on what scale and what sort of involvement, nor on the importance of its eastern neighbours compared with Europe's other foreign policy imperatives. Even to narrow the focus and mention only perceptions in the Nordic countries, one can hear an

argument in favour of concentrating resources on completing the as yet unfinished business in the Baltic States, where success is within reach, or on further stabilization of the Balkans, whose states have been promised EU membership, or on dealing with Russia, due to its reviving economic potential. The level of priority is not yet clear, and without an agreement on this issue, discussion concerning the way forward is doomed to be less useful than it might otherwise be.

To this author, the consistency and overall success of EU policy towards its eastern neighbours will depend on the emergence of a coalition of the willing, which, viewing the region as a priority, would lead the joint effort when possible, and substitute, or at least compensate, for the lack of it when necessary. This paper will argue that the Nordic actors should be interested in becoming an inalienable part, if not an initiative group, within such a coalition.

THE STRATEGIC CASE

The EU's eastern neighbours were firmly incorporated into its foreign policy agenda on the eve of the enlargement, mostly thanks to the efforts of the prospective new members. Central European countries primarily, but to a lesser degree the Baltic States too, which are linked to Ukraine and Belarus by regional, economic and cultural ties, saw their interests to lie in preventing the emergence of new dividing lines along their eastern borders and advocated an active policy in the region. Poland was particularly proactive and put forward various ideas regarding the launch of the EU Eastern Dimension, modelled on the Northern Dimension, an originally Finnish initiative which later became the policy of the whole Union.

However, the strategic rationale behind the promotion of the systemic democratic transformation of the region goes far beyond the interests of the EU's eastern members. Success here, without any exaggeration, would be in the interests of the whole EU and every single member state. Also, taking into account the evolution of the situation in the areas mentioned below, achieving the change becomes not only self-evident, but also urgent

To start with, transformation would have a direct and positive effect on Russia. Political developments in Russia are causing more and more concern in the western policy-making community. As the US expert Ronald Asmus put it, 'as opposed to viewing Russia as a

country moving in the right direction with some setbacks, there is a growing consensus... that the country is moving in the wrong direction, albeit with some ongoing successes'.¹ Whereas, in the middle of President Putin's first term in office, 'European choice' was the catch word best suited to describing Russian policy towards Europe, three to four years later the country's relationship with Europe looks much more problematic. It does not promise much in terms of foreign policy partnership, and the policies of both in the common neighbourhood are now even characterized as a zero-sum game.

It can be argued that success for reforms and the Europeanization of the region would influence the course of events in Russia. Ukraine is a key country in this respect. It is a large country with a Russian minority many-million strong, and the Russian language is spoken everywhere. If it is successful, Ukraine will demonstrate to Russia the advantages of adhering to modern European norms and values. Unlike the Baltic States, whose return to the west at the beginning of the 1990s looked like a geopolitical flight from Russia and was accompanied by the cutting of most ties with Russia, Ukrainian elites would like to preserve as many of such ties as possible. Ukraine's policy goal is integration within Europe *and* cooperation with Russia *at the same time*, not the former at the expense of the latter. This is why Ukraine's cultural, humanitarian and economic channels of influence on Russia will most likely be maintained, as for domestic reasons it will also be difficult for Moscow to take the initiative and limit interaction.²

No less important in view of the challenges that Europe and the West in general are facing in the 21st century, many of the EU's eastern neighbours are next to the area known as the Greater Middle East. It is in the interests of the European Union to consolidate the zone of stability around the Black Sea and to pool its resources with the countries in the region in order to combat these new risks.³ Ukraine again deserves a special mention in this context. On the one hand, it could be an extremely valuable contributor to the international war on terror.

¹ Asmus 2004: 36.

² It is most probably no accident in this regard that Moscow, which in October 2005 agreed to sign a readmission agreement with the European Union, took this decision only after it became clear to everyone that Yushchenko's Ukraine would go as far as it had to to facilitate its own negotiations on the liberalization of the visa regime with the EU. The functioning of the readmission regime between EU and Ukraine, compared with its absence between Russia and the EU, would make the introduction of a much more restrictive border policy between Russia and Ukraine inevitable. Moscow will hardly seek such an outcome.

³ See further in Asmus et al.: 21-3.

On the other hand, it has a significant Muslim minority in the Crimea, which under certain circumstances may not be totally immune from radical and militant Islamism.

Finally, the eastern neighbours are a latent source of soft security challenges themselves, whose negative potential in this sense must not be forgotten. Social problems on the one hand and weak and corrupt law-enforcement systems on the other long ago made the region both a point of origin and a transit route for human- and drug-trafficking, semi-legal labour migration and diseases. If they are left to their own devices, with no technical assistance being built into a strategy of transformation, the states of the region will not be able to cope with these situations, which are likely to deteriorate.⁴

These considerations became the conceptual background for important policy decisions. At the EU level, the so-called European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was shaped to serve as a framework for relations with the Union's southern and eastern neighbours.⁵ Individual Action Plans were signed with Ukraine and Moldova in February 2005. At the national level, a number of countries demonstrated their interest in backing that policy through twinning programmes, and the effort was further supported by some regional bodies. For the purposes of this study, the most noteworthy programmes are the Danish Neighbourhood Programme 2004-2007 (adopted in 2004 and allocating 30 million Danish crowns for projects in Belarus and another 50 million for initiatives in Ukraine, Moldova and Caucasus⁶), Sweden's strategy for development cooperation with Ukraine for the period 2005-2008 (150 million Swedish crowns earmarked), and the decision of the Nordic Council of Ministers, taken in October

⁴ An interesting example can be found in Belarus. For many years this authoritarian state had a relatively low level of corruption. In 2003, according to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, Belarus occupied 53rd position, and its index (4.2) was above that of Latvia. In 2004, however, Belarus plunged to 74th position (index 3.3) and in 2005 was already 107th (index 2.6). By comparison, Ukraine after the Orange revolution demonstrated progress, however limited, and the country moved from 122nd position in 2004 to 107th; the index grew from 2.2 to 2.6.

⁵ Relevant communications of the European Commission and the decisions of the Council can be found at http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/document_en.htm .

⁶ Text available at

<http://www.um.dk/CMS.Web/Templates/Content%20Pages/ContentPage.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRORIGINALURL=/en/menu/DevelopmentPolicy/DanishDevelopmentPolicyCountries/TheNeighbourhoodProgramme/StrategicFrameworkForTheNeighbourhoodProgramme.htm&NRNODEGUID={DF03DDEF-02A4-411B-9976-B36F0649AF40}&NRCACHEHINT=NoModifyGuest&printmode=True>

2005, to include Belarus in its programme for strengthened cooperation with northwest Russia.

LOOKING FOR A 'PROJECT MANAGER' – AND MORE

Making the ENP effective, however, is a much more difficult task than just agreeing general policy guidelines. This chapter does not intend to address all the already known or potential deficiencies of the ENP. Briefly, however, it can be argued that this policy does not possess the required degree of rapid reaction and flexibility; does not create strong incentives for reform, but merely counts on a presumed shared understanding of the advantages of transformation and cooperation; and does not look like an effective coordinator, as actors who would like to do more things more quickly will not necessarily wish to adapt their timetables to those drawn up in Brussels. In two crucial cases when the performance of the ENP was examined, it was found that it failed to make any difference. One was the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, when EU impartiality – Brussels made it known that it would sign the country's Action Plan, whoever was the winner – apparently resulting from a lack of agreement between the member states, did not allow Viktor Yushchenko to run on a platform of 'European choice', which would have won him extra votes. The other is Belarus, regarding which the ENP has time and again failed to produce the combination of carrots and sticks that could at least prevent the Alexander Lukashenko regime from evolving towards an ever more restrictive dictatorship, let alone force it to comply with standards of electoral democracy.

Nonetheless the Orange revolution should have taught the EU one important lesson. As the involvement of the Polish and Lithuanian leaders, Alexander Kwasniewski and Valdas Adamkus, in the mediation process demonstrated, if certain countries are ready to act, the Union cannot totally abstain, even though other, possibly more influential member states might be more than reluctant to do so, as Germany apparently was in December 2004.

Cautious though one should be in generalizing, on the basis of this example it is possible to assume that many ENP deficiencies (except for that which concerns conditionality) could be eased if, within the Union, the policy could be promoted by a group of national actors who were both able and willing to prioritize the EU's eastern neighbours on the EU agenda. Any such group should observe three criteria. First, it should genuinely view the transformation of the region as critically important for its own interests and treat it as a high priority. Secondly, its claim to play this role should be recognized within the Union, where such an active stand

should be perceived as serving the common cause, not as being driven by special, less transparent considerations. In any case, there should be enough knowledge around of the technical side of agenda-lobbying through the corridors of Brussels and Strasbourg. Thirdly, direct and indirect addressees of the policy should also accept the activism of a particular group on behalf of the Union.

At the moment a constituency that might comply with these criteria is absent. In a number of cases, the positions taken by individual countries are only natural, or at least readily understandable. For the Mediterranean countries it is the southern periphery that constitutes the major challenge, which they long ago made the rest of the Union understand; it would indeed be strange if they decided to re-prioritize their agenda now. For several old member states, Germany above all, but not only Germany, securing unproblematic and cooperative relations with Russia is a primary goal in the east. Some other countries either do not feel exposed enough to the potential risks coming from the region, and/or are reluctant to commit resources and take on too many obligations regarding the area, which in relative terms has limited economic attractiveness, but serious problems.

As mentioned above, enlargement changed the situation in terms of the attention being paid to the EU's eastern neighbours. There is no doubt whatever that Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania and, though to a lesser extent, certain other states have a strong desire to bring about change beyond their own eastern borders, and even to continue with the enlargement process, when and if conditions become suitable.

At the same time, very little has changed thus far as far as the second and third criteria are concerned. As a framework to deal in a universal operational manner equally with the EU's southern and eastern neighbours, the European Neighbourhood Policy is, both in name and substance, different from the initial concept of the Eastern Dimension. This shows that at the time Poland and its supporters did not have (and probably still do not have) sufficient political weight to advocate such a proposal. The fact that any unprejudiced observer would find the decision intellectually unsustainable – given that the ENP treats European Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova and the non-European Maghreb countries in a similar basic manner – was apparently not taken into consideration. Besides, the position of the new eastern members inside the Union is weak for other reasons too. One is temporary, given that the necessary bureaucratic skills are most likely to be acquired soon. But another factor, the lack of their own financial resources with which to invest, is long-term and systemic. This will create a major impediment to entrusting eastern members with the mission to conduct the Union's policy in the east, as there will always be a suspicion that these countries mostly want to be

active in the east in order to strengthen their own positions in the competition over EU money.

As for perceptions in the region, there are certain negative features to be taken into account. Historical sensitivities, which are particularly noticeable in Ukrainian-Polish relations, cannot be easily disregarded, despite all the diplomatic rhetoric.⁷ The population of western Ukraine, one of the main pillars of Ukraine's pro-European stance, finds serious differences in accepting Poland in the role of 'Ukraine's advocate'. Finally, Poland and the Baltic States have problematic bilateral relationships with Russia, which remains a major political player in the region. Their appearance at the forefront of EU policy in the region will tend to strengthen zero-sum game perceptions in Russia and complicate the EU-Russian relationship, rather than contribute to mutual understanding and cooperation.

Given all this, the eastern members will most likely not be able to pursue this policy alone. They will certainly need both assistance and coordination, but maybe also guidance and even leadership, from other members.

WHY THE NORDICS I: ASSESSING THE CAPABILITY

The case for urging the Nordic members of the European Union to lead the EU effort in the east may look artificial and be not at all obvious. But if we examine the Nordic actors in the light of the proposed criteria, one can find much more basis for understanding.

In the Nordic countries, the degree of the motivation for acting in the ENP area is not equal. In the view of the present author, it is highest in Denmark, lowest in Finland, but not a top priority anywhere. The Nordic policy-making community has yet to be convinced of the merits of the case. Therefore, the analysis has to be made in the reverse order, contrary to the formula, 'Where there's a will, there's a way'. The will is insufficient, but it is more likely to be made concrete if the Nordic actors realize that they can actually make a difference.

Let us start with their reputation in the region. In short, it is extremely favourable for the suggested policy. Being outsiders, the Nordic countries are seen as honest brokers, whose involvement does not carry any hidden agenda (like gaining regional leadership in modern

⁷ Thinking ahead, one should also not forget the latent territorial dispute between Ukraine and Romania over several islands in the Danube delta and the Black Sea.

terms, or, as some would put it on the streets of Lviv and Kyiv when speaking about Poland, restoring old relations of domination and subordination). They also have a record of being receptive to the wishes and concerns of the region.⁸ This fact may not be widely known outside Ukraine, but within the country the decision of the Gothenburg summit of the European Council of June 2001, which mentioned Ukraine in the section 'The Future of Europe' instead of that on 'External Relations', was for years cited as a point of reference and encouragement by the supporters of that country's 'European choice'.⁹

Russia will remain a difficult case, however. As Copenhagen knows only too well, giving support to third countries when it is clearly against Russia's preferences does nothing to improve bilateral relations. But there are counter-arguments here too. First, assisting the Baltic States in the 1990s was even more difficult, as this assistance had no precedent, though the Russian reaction was predictably entirely negative. Secondly, the debate between the Nordic capitals and Moscow will in any case assume more moderate tones than would be the case between Moscow and Warsaw, for example, as there are other issues which allow it to be balanced with a positive agenda. Coincidentally, and thirdly, at least Finland, which is the holder of EU rotating presidency in the second half of 2006, should be in a position to tackle a possible controversy. In March, 2006, presidential elections will take place in Belarus, which the incumbent president Lukashenko is likely to win. His victory may be followed by repressions against the opposition. In that case, differences in the Russian and EU approaches to events of such kind may grow into an open diplomatic conflict between them.

The Nordic countries occupy a unique position inside the European Union. On the one hand, being old members they have a good chance to secure more positive attitudes, if not active support, from other old members. The role of Germany in developing and implementing the policy in the East is absolutely indispensable, and presumably bringing Germany on board should be easier for Nordic diplomacies than for those of the Central Europeans, given the mechanisms of bilateral and regional interaction that have already existed for so long. At the same time, any apprehensions among other EU members that a new regional bloc may emerge and undermine the cohesion of the Union are unlikely to become reality, thanks to the ten-year record of Finnish and Swedish membership: a good knowledge of EU institutions will serve as a factor increasing the likelihood of success. On a separate note, the initiative of the

⁸ An exception and, in retrospect, an unfortunate mistake of Denmark was the closure of its embassy in Kyiv in 2002, which was only reopened in 2005. This fact did not pass unnoticed, although its impact was minor.

⁹ Presidency Conclusions, Gothenburg European Council, 15-16 June 2001.

EU's Nordic members is likely to be supported by Norway and, possibly, Iceland, the involvement of both countries being potentially very valuable.

On the other hand, it would be easier for especially the Baltic States, but also Central European countries, to accept and even welcome the coordinating role of the Nordic states. An informal consultative mechanism in the form of a 'group of six' (the three Nordic and the three Baltic EU members) could also be used to coordinate policy in the east and, when necessary, be extended to include Poland and other interested countries.

The rich experience acquired in the process of assisting the transformation in the Baltic States can be applied to other European Newly Independent States (NIS). Obviously, the conditions in Ukraine, let alone in Belarus and the Caucasus, are not identical to those in the Baltic States, but a range of separate policies may well best.

Last but not least, the Nordic countries possess resources to be added to those that would be provided by Brussels. While in no way challenging the argument that Finland, Sweden and Denmark are small states and, therefore, their contributions in financial terms, as well as in terms of diplomatic staff, will be limited by definition, it can be still argued that a redistribution of resources is possible, provided the priorities for assistance are revised. Furthermore, the Nordic countries possess a huge potential in terms of civic activism. Non-governmental organizations can be extremely helpful in intensifying people-to-people contacts, students and professional exchanges, trade-union cooperation, training the media and political activists etc., which together could promote the emergence and maturation of civil society and the fostering of new elites in the countries of the east.

WHY THE NORDICS II: ASSESSING INTERESTS

An analysis of the reasons why the revision of the foreign policies of the Nordic countries in favour of greater involvement in the east would be in their interests should start from an assessment of the general strategic considerations described at the beginning of the chapter from the angle of Nordic Europe.

The importance of Russia's transformation is self-evident in Nordic Europe and not at all controversial. Being neighbours of Russia, since the very disintegration of the Soviet Union countries in the region have been actively trying both to assist Russia to address socio-economic problems in its north-west, and to engage it in regional cooperation. At the

moment, however, the perspectives of a breakthrough of reforms in the area are not very bright, to say the least. The inflow of the oil money into Russia has unfortunately had a discouraging effect on the changes as it has provided the authorities with financial instruments to stabilize the situation and compensate for the lack of progress. Moscow's policy of recentralization is making the regions less dependent on foreign aid and therefore less interested in international cooperation. This will have a corresponding impact on the Nordic 'favourite' in the region, at least in rhetorical terms, namely the Kaliningrad issue, the opening of which to international efforts is less and less welcome to Russia, as long as it sees itself able to address it on its own. In turn, the issue was on the Nordic agenda for so long that a slackening of interest in it is inevitable. The Northern Dimension initiative is stagnating for reasons of its own, namely its inability to cope with the economic and technological modernization of the Russian north-west due to its lack of own resources; its 'umbrella' role, in which its own programmes play no part; and its focus on energy, which Moscow would like to discuss with its partners in the Union outside the Northern Dimension context. In this situation, pragmatic cooperation with Russia can and should continue, but the effort to achieve a systemic transformation is not promising. The energy being used up here can therefore be re-targeted to the EU's more immediate eastern neighbours, while not forgetting that, as stated above, it may have a demonstrable effect on Russia later.

With the troops of some Nordic countries being engaged in the area of the Greater Middle East and the terrorist threat becoming a much more universal concern and as therefore coming closer to northern Europe, the need to have more capable allies needs no proof. As for the soft security challenges coming from or through the EU's eastern neighbours, no country, however geographically distant it may be, can feel safe.¹⁰ Countries with modern law-enforcement systems, regardless of whether they are given the perspective of EU membership, will be better able to combat soft security risks in their own interests and those of their EU partners.

The second set of reasons is related to the opportunity that is provided to raise the visibility, profile and effectiveness of the Nordic countries in world politics. The sad reality of life is that

¹⁰ In March 2005, a tourist bus with 48 women from Georgia in it was stopped on the Finnish-Russian border. Passengers in the bus were suspected of trying to enter the Schengen territory as illegal immigrants and were therefore refused entry. The story was widely reported in the Finnish media between 16 March and the beginning of April. This example shows that the Nordic countries, lingering instinctive perceptions to the contrary, are directly exposed to risks coming from their eastern neighbours.

the projects that Copenhagen, Stockholm and Helsinki have prioritized in the last ten to fifteen years are clearly losing dynamism. The Northern Dimension suffers not only from insufficient Russian interest. The fact that the primary focus of the programme has been on Russia in previous years has caused frustration in the Baltic capitals, and enthusiasm can no longer be expected from them when the future of the Northern Dimension is being considered. With due respect to the economic, educational, research and other sorts of networking being pursued around the region, Sweden must realize that Baltic Sea cooperation is likely to be overshadowed as EU mechanisms take over the functions of integrating the Baltic newcomers and also, to a greater extent, of dealing with Russia. Denmark's portfolio has become much emptier since the Baltic States joined NATO and EU. And, on the separate track of the wider continental and global contexts, the diminishing influence of the OSCE and the UN is weakening the role of the non-allied states, as is the unilateral policy of the United States and its reliance on ad hoc coalitions of the willing as opposed to formally established alliances for NATO members.

Taking over the role of being the main driving force of the EU's new eastern policy will first of all strengthen the position of the Nordic countries inside the EU itself. If this is seen as fulfilling an important task that serves the interests of all the member states and the whole Union, the Nordic capitals will be given more say on other items of the CFSP. It is worth remembering that no sacrifice of any current initiatives is either expected or required. On the contrary, new linkages will be possible. For example, as argued by an international group of experts who studied the perspectives for cooperation in the east between Finland, Poland and Lithuania in particular, it will be easier for Finland to obtain the support of other member states for the Northern Dimension if it shows more interest in the whole area and not only in Russia.¹¹

Activism in the east will create a new framework for renewed interaction with the United States. The US sees the area as strategically important in both the Russian and southern contexts, and it is more likely to increase, not decrease, its presence in the region and to welcome support and assistance there. Among other things, American diplomacy, together with its Nordic and Baltic partners, is looking at the contents of the Enhanced Partnership in

¹¹ Gromadzki et al. 2005: 7.

Northern Europe initiative, or EPINE, and the possibility of it joining other initiatives in the area, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, is also being discussed.¹²

Cooperation on issues regarding the EU's eastern neighbours may provide a fresh start for Nordic cooperation itself. It is not a secret that in the past decade the Nordic countries have become somewhat jealous of each other's foreign policy initiatives and have not been as supportive of one other as they might have been. This should now be changed.

CONCLUSION

Before it does anything else, the European political community in general and the Nordic community in particular should convince themselves that systemic transformation in Ukraine and, in the long run, Belarus, Moldova and to some extent the Caucasus too, which are critically important for building a democratic Europe without divisions, is possible. With such convictions, the will to act will be that much stronger. Without them, the policy will be reduced to empty declarations.

What can be done to promote these transformations? In short, there is no need to re-invent the wheel. The experience of the 1990s can still be useful in many respects.

First, the opportunity side of the equation should be kept firmly in mind. It is the political and security aspects that have been dealt with in this chapter, the whole economic dimension being deliberately left aside, as at present the economic attractiveness of the region is low. If, however, we think of a reformed east as a potential future market and a field for investment, this impression may change.

Secondly, the EU's eastern neighbours should be treated as a priority in its policy on a constant basis, and not only surface in times of political crises or on ceremonial occasions. EU Action Plans for individual countries should become what their title suggests – guidelines for the policy of the European Union, not lists of expectations of homework results. Among other things, the EU should be ready to discuss its policy with other non-regional players to make it more transparent.

¹² Hamilton 2005: 36.

Thirdly, the available resources should be pooled and used in the most flexible way. In this regard, the shortcomings and weak points of earlier instruments (TACIS, ND) should also be analysed critically and prevented from being replicated in the future.

Finally, the major work will still have to be done in the region. Assistance with economic reforms, fostering the development of civil society in the region and promoting the evolution of individual states toward greater political democracy, including through transparent criticism of the most advanced regimes in any attempts to manipulate the people's choice – will require a visible physical presence, in which the participation of NGOs is vital.

All these recommendations are general and are not targeted at the Nordic countries specifically. At this stage, as already mentioned, they should still find their place within any coalition that desires to make a difference.

In the 1990s Denmark – and hopefully other countries, looking at Denmark's example – realized that foreign policy activism could indeed bear fruit. Whether the same pattern will be repeated in the case of the eastern neighbours of the European Union remains to be seen. But it is undoubtedly worth a serious try.

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