

Widening without Enlarging The European Neighbourhood Policy and the South Caucasus

Common definitions of “Europe” locate the South Caucasus just outside. Although it has only recently been included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the South Caucasus is of particular interest because of its geographic location and its energy resources. Since the ENP can be understood as a geopolitical policy intended to create a semi-periphery between the EU and its periphery, the policy seems designed to widen the scope of the EU yet at the same time excluding further enlargement. The South Caucasus fits well into this concept, however – especially with concrete Georgian membership aspirations – the approach needs to be clarified and incentives enhanced in order not to lead to frustration.

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The ideas of “Europe” have been constantly evolving just as collective identities develop.¹ Whereas a unique European identity is far from attained, the geographical concept of “Europe” underlying the European Union (EU) seems to be increasingly consolidating. The borders of the Union in the North, West and South are drawn by the Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, respectively, leaving little doubt about the outer extensions. In the East, however, where the European peninsula meets Asia, an exact assessment is far less evident. In contrast to the sea borders that are generally accepted as marking the boundaries of the EU,² there are ongoing debates on the continental limits of Europe, bearing significant implications for EU enlargement. In geographical terms, the line separating Europe from Asia is considered to run from the Aegean through the Dardanelles, the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus, to cross the Black Sea, to mount the Caucasus and to drop back to the Caspian Sea to finally follow the Ural up to the North. The course of particular sections of that line is quite disputed, implying specific challenges to the European aspirations of Turkey on the one hand and – admittedly to very different extents – to those of the South Caucasian countries.

Even though Turkey has been granted a membership perspective as early as 1963 and accession negotiations were launched in October 2005, it is still far from clear if the country will eventually join the EU. Current discussions focus particularly on the question of Turkey’s “Europeanness” with regard to politics, history, culture, religious traditions as well as geography: Thrace, the European part of Turkey, merely constitutes three percent of Turkey’s overall land, whereas Anatolia, the Asian part, accounts for 97 percent. Nonetheless, Turkey has been admitted to the circle of countries regarded eligible for EU-membership.

In contrast, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, to a large extent geographically South of the Caucasian watershed, have not been granted concrete EU-membership perspectives. In addition, it seems more and more unlikely that such perspectives will be offered.

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¹ Compare accordingly Wilfried Loth, *Europäische Identität in historischer Perspektive* [European Identity in a Historical Perspective] (Bonn: ZEI, Discussion Paper C 113, 2002), p. 6.

² The case of Morocco underlines this assessment: being considered non-European, Morocco’s application to join the European Community was rejected in 1987.

Nevertheless, the EU tries to establish closer ties with these three countries by means of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

When the ENP was developed in 2002, it was designed to govern relations with the “new neighbors” Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova as well as with the Southern Mediterranean. The South Caucasus only became included in 2004 owed to the fact that the EU realized that it had particular interests in the region,³ necessitating special attention and a concise policy approach.

EU Interests and Regional Challenges

A major factor generating international attention to the South Caucasus is natural resources, namely gas and oil, exploited first and foremost by Azerbaijan in the Caspian Sea. As the EU is largely dependant on energy supplies from a very limited number of countries – with the perspective of European energy needs to significantly increase in the future – the energy resources of the South Caucasus are of particular interest to the EU.⁴ Closely associated with the energy needs is the function of the South Caucasus as passageway, especially for the transport of gas and oil from the Caspian, as the region constitutes a natural connection between Europe and Asia. Moreover, the South Caucasus is also of utmost strategic importance for “connecting NATO territory and military operations in Afghanistan and staging areas in Central Asia”.⁵

However, the particular assets of the South Caucasus are closely linked with the region’s problems and challenges. The South Caucasus’ environment is charged with tensions and conflicts. To the North lies Russia with Chechnya where normalization is far from reached, to the East the demarcation of the Caspian Sea border is not yet determined, in the South the region borders Iran, and to the West Armenia-Turkey relations are far from cordial. In addition, even within the South Caucasus, there are several unsolved or – as it is often put – “frozen conflicts”: Georgia is occupied with territorial disputes in Abkhazia on the one hand and South Ossetia on the other, while the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved. Despite the commonly used terminology, none of these conflicts can be considered “frozen” since they facilitate corruption and crime, maintaining a structural instability throughout the South Caucasus.⁶

The economic and strategic importance of the region, combined with its various challenges, attracts major international attention. However, with various outside engagements, the “South Caucasus [...] is already crowded by the presence of the UN, the OSCE, and other major powers. This leaves little room to claim, and complicates thinking about a reinforced EU role.”⁷ Closely correlated with the general security environment and situation of the South

³ Bruno Coppievers, “An EU Special Representative to a new periphery”, in: Dov Lynch (ed.), *The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper 65, 2003), pp. 160-63 rightly points out that the South Caucasus – due to overlapping interdependencies – can hardly be considered a “region” itself. However, as the EU refers to the South Caucasus as a “region”, this terminology will also be applied here.

⁴ See Yelda Demirağ, “EU Policy towards South Caucasus and Turkey”, *Perceptions*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Winter 2004), p. 101.

⁵ Svante Cornell, “NATO’s role in South Caucasus regional security”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 126.

⁶ Compare the assessment of Ron Asmus, “Occidentaliser la région de la mer Noire” [Westernizing the Black Sea Region], *Le Figaro*, 7 Sept. 2004, p. 12.

⁷ Dov Lynch, “The Security Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy”, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan.-March 2005), p. 41.

Caucasus is the diversity of the three countries' orientations in political, cultural and religious terms. The national choices in security policy illustrate the differing approaches very clearly:

Armenia, perceiving threats from Turkey and Azerbaijan, has sought security through ties with Russia; Azerbaijan, perceiving threats from Iran, Armenia and to a decreasing extent from Russia, has sought western and Turkish support; while Georgia, mainly perceiving threats from Russia and internal challenges with links to Russia, mainly seeks American protection.⁸

Accordingly, the importance attributed to ties with the EU diverges considerably in each country, resulting in different intensities of official EU membership aspirations. Whereas Georgian aspirations are explicit, *inter alia* manifest in a draft integration strategy,⁹ they are much less present in Azerbaijan and currently not on the political agenda in Armenia. Ethno-linguistically, however, Armenia is closest to today's EU as Armenian is Indo-European, whereas Georgian is Caucasian and Azeri Altaic. Looking at religious affiliations in the three countries, most Georgians belong to the Georgian Orthodox Church and a vast majority of Armenians to the Armenian Apostolic Church, whereas the Azerbaijani population is mainly Shiite Muslim. All this combined gives an ambiguous picture of different layers of identities and orientations in which the three countries seem to be thoroughly intertwined. Eventually, a concerned observer will find the region to sum up to a virtual "Caucasian knot,"¹⁰ a knot the EU evidently tries to dissolve by the means of the ENP – and not by offering EU-membership.

The ENP as policy framework to govern relations with neighbors

The first official initiatives for the formulation of the ENP date back to 2001.¹¹ It was finally realized as policy to cover the relations with Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova as well as with the Southern Mediterranean.¹² With the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in June 2004, the ENP now encompasses most of the EU's neighboring countries either sharing a land border or a sea border with the EU.¹³ As an exception, relations between Russia and the EU continue to be managed bilaterally.

The structural principles of the ENP are laid down in the European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper (ENPSP), issued by the Commission just a few days after enlarging the EU to 25 member states in May 2004. It emphasizes that relations with neighboring countries are based on bilateral contractual agreements. As the ENP builds on older schemes of partnership, these agreements are either Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Eastern partners or Association Agreements with Mediterranean partners. On their basis, the European Commission drafts individual Country Reports in order to assess the state of relations as well

⁸ Cornell (2004), p. 126.

⁹ Cf. Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, *Georgia's EU Integration Strategy* [Draft, 28 Jan. 2006] (Tbilisi, 2006), available at <http://www.eu-integration.gov.ge/eng/natinalstrategy.php>.

¹⁰ Johannes Leithäuser, "Zupfen am kaukasischen Knoten" [Plucking at the Caucasian Knot], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 April 2004.

¹¹ The call for a policy towards "all our neighbours" was first formulated in: Commission of the European Communities, *The Commission's Work Programme for 2002*, COM(2001)620 final.

¹² See in more detail Michele Comelli, "The Challenges of the European Neighbourhood Policy", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (July-Sept. 2004), pp. 98-101.

¹³ Having already established closer ties to the EU than the ENP could possibly offer, the ENP does not include the current acceding or candidate countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, Turkey) nor the Western Balkan countries (considered potential candidate countries). It also does not govern relations with the Western European countries Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, nor with any of the European micro-states (Andorra, Holy See, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino).

as the political, social and economic developments and to identify specific issues to be addressed. Accordingly, the reports serve as points of reference for individual Action Plans, worked out in cooperation with the respective partners.¹⁴

Table 1: State of relations of the EU with the South Caucasus and the other ENP countries.¹⁵

Country	Contractual basis		Country Report	Action Plan	
	type	agreed		Agreed	in force
Armenia	PCA	04/1996	07/1999	03/2005	-
Azerbaijan	PCA	04/1996	07/1999	03/2005	-
Georgia	PCA	04/1996	07/1999	03/2005	-
Algeria	AA	12/2001	03/2005	-	-
Belarus	PCA	03/1995	-	-	-
Egypt	AA	06/2001	06/2004	03/2005	-
Israel	AA	11/1995	06/2000	05/2004	12/2004 03/2005
Jordan	AA	11/1997	05/2002	05/2004	12/2004 06/2005
Lebanon	AA	06/2002	03/2003*	03/2005	-
Libya	-	-	-	-	-
Moldova	PCA	11/1994	07/1998	05/2004	12/2004 02/2005
Morocco	AA	02/1996	03/2000	05/2004	12/2004 07/2005
Palestinian Authority	AA*	02/1997*	07/1997*	05/2004	12/2004 05/2005
Syria	AA	10/2004	-	-	-
Tunisia	AA	07/1995	03/1998	05/2004	12/2004 07/2005
Ukraine	PCA	06/1994	03/1998	05/2004	12/2004 02/2005

AA - Association Agreement; PCA - Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

* Interim Agreement.

One of the major innovations is the establishment of a unique financial instrument for the whole neighborhood. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) will replace the TACIS and MEDA programmes in 2007.¹⁶ This incorporation of former “neighborhood instruments” into the ENP-framework takes place in the overall context of harmonizing the EU’s foreign policy: The Union will eventually reduce the foreign policy instruments at its disposal from more than thirty to six.¹⁷

The harmonization of the Union’s foreign policy is one major but only very general motive underlying the ENP. Certainly, there also exists a variety of motives specifically attached to it. These motives cover two main intentions: With new threats surfacing, the EU intends to better protect itself and with the challenges of globalization increasing, the EU aims at maintaining – or even gaining – influence in its vicinity. This explains to a large extent the increased importance attributed to the Union’s neighbors, reflected in four different aspects of the ENP:

1. The legal foundation envisaged for the ENP is more exclusive than for its predecessors. Relations with Russia and countries formerly part of the Soviet Union as well as with Mediterranean partners are based on the general provisions for the Common Foreign and Security Policy as laid down in Title V of the Treaty on European Union. This title is also at the basis of the Union’s relations to other third countries. In the Constitution for Europe,

¹⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, COM(2004)373 final, pp. 2ff.

¹⁵ Data retrieved from <http://europa.eu>.

¹⁶ Even though not included in the ENP-framework, assistance to Russia will also take place by the means of the ENPI – just as via TACIS so far.

¹⁷ Commission of the European Communities, *On the Instruments of External Assistance under the Future Financial Perspective 2007-2013*, COM(2004)626 final, pp. 7-10.

however, the neighboring states have been granted special mention: Art I-57 explicitly addresses the “Union and its neighbours.”

2. Even though the conclusion of the constitutional process has been postponed, the special commitment to neighbors manifests itself in already introduced denominations. The official title of the Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, has already been changed to “Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy”.

3. The growing interest in the neighborhood is also evident in the significant rise in funds made available to assist partners. The TACIS and MEDA programs combined had a volume of approximately 8.5 billion euros in the period 2000-2006. For the ENPI, almost 15 billion euros are foreseen for 2007-2013.¹⁸

4. Development perspectives of the ENP go well beyond the prospects so far formulated in Partnership and Cooperation Agreements or Association Agreements. The Union now not only offers preferential trade or the participation in a customs union, but also “the prospect of a stake in its Internal Market and of further economic integration.”¹⁹ These perspectives and the increase in funds made available constitute the strongest incentives the EU offers to neighbors so far.²⁰

Even though it can surely be argued that the incentives are not sufficient, they signify quite far reaching measures on behalf of the EU. They are offered because of the fundamental changes in the international environment over the past 15 years, as assessed in the European Security Strategy (ESS). The awareness of an increased interdependence is clearly visible throughout the document. Albeit large-scale aggression against any EU-member state can be estimated less likely today, the ESS identifies new, increasingly asymmetric threats.²¹

Comparing the ESS to unique ENP-documents, the EU’s assessment remains consistent, nonetheless there exists a difference in rhetoric. In general, the ESS is less partner-oriented and more focused on the EU’s own interests. At least partially, it even seems to regard neighboring states as problematic themselves, whereas the ENPSP prefers to emphasize the interests of partners. Some examples might be fit to illustrate this difference: Whereas the ESS stresses the potential “problems for Europe”²² if it comes to the neighborhood, the ENPSP rather highlights the “common interests”²³. What appears primarily as threats to the EU in the ESS like “violent conflict, [...] organized crime [...], dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth”²⁴, is also included but rephrased in the ENPSP as “increased challenges” that “partners are facing”²⁵; the threats are addressed just as if the ones named would not be among the major concerns of the EU as well. Regarding the neighbors as

¹⁸ In addition, TACIS beneficiaries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan then will be covered by the Development Co-operation and Economic Co-operation Instrument.

¹⁹ The phrase cited is included in all 12 Country Reports so far published, p. 3; cf. as well Commission of the European Communities, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003)104 final, p. 10 and Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, p. 5.

²⁰ Similarly argues Roberto Aliboni, “The Geopolitical Implications of the European Neighbourhood Policy”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 2005), p. 2.

²¹ *A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy*, available at <http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf>, pp. 5-9.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²³ Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, p. 8.

²⁴ *European Security Strategy*, p. 12.

²⁵ Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, p. 16 particularly refers to „migration pressure from third countries, trafficking in human beings and terrorism.”

political entities themselves, the ESS stresses the need of a “ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean”²⁶. The repeated emphasis on the need to be surrounded by “well-governed” countries implies a clear concept of how the EU expects partners to act and to organize themselves internally²⁷. In contrast to this quite demanding conception of the neighborhood in the ESS, most ENP-statements clearly prefer terms like “ring of friends”²⁸ to describe the aspired relationship with ENP-partners, implying that the EU and partners are on equal footing. However, as the ENP is funded by the EU and distribution of funds depends on EU-satisfaction with the process, the equality rather exists on a rhetorical basis. Accordingly, even the Wider Europe Communication clearly states that benefits and EU-engagement are “conditional on meeting agreed targets for reform.”²⁹ This appears to be in contrast to the ENPSP that emphasizes that the “EU does not seek to impose priorities or conditions on its partners”.³⁰ This seeming contradiction highlights that however co-operative and well-meant the ENP is designed, it certainly is far from altruistic. The EU’s growing commitment towards its neighbors rather seems to follow a concise geopolitical logic,³¹ fit to explain the inclusion of some countries and the exclusion of others, which otherwise appears to be arbitrary: As potential EU-candidates, the Western Balkan countries are not included, whereas Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine – with comparable aspirations – are treated as neighbors; in addition, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, to date taking part in TACIS, have not been transferred to the ENP scheme but shifted to development policy.

The Logic of the ENP and how the South Caucasus fits in

Taking a closer look at the geopolitical implications of the ENP, the EU constitutes a regional center³² that seems determined to create – or maintain – a functioning semi-periphery (i.e. the neighbors) in order to keep the periphery (i.e. the neighbors’ neighbors and beyond) at a certain distance.³³ The relations between center and periphery can be regarded as interdependent *and* asymmetric. They are interdependent because of reciprocal influences exercised³⁴ and asymmetric because of the different levels of development – politically as well as economically. The function of the semi-periphery is therefore to extenuate these differences. Under the conditions of interdependency and asymmetry the ENP might eventually create a win-win-situation for both sides, as the EU’s policy considerably strengthens the semi-periphery and enables it to gain additional options for action and

²⁶ European Security Strategy, p. 13.

²⁷ Karen E. Smith, “The outsiders: the European neighbourhood policy”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (July 2005), p. 763 rightly identifies a will “to create good neighbours”.

²⁸ See e.g. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Europe’s Neighbours – Towards Closer Integration*, Speech held in Brussels, 22 April 2005, available at http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/news/ferrero/2005/sp05_253.htm.

²⁹ Commission, *Wider Europe*, p. 16.

³⁰ Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, p. 8.

³¹ With regard to the Wider Europe Communication of March 2003, Ulrike Guérot/ Andrea Witt, “Europas neue Geostrategie” [Europe’s new Geo-Strategy], *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 54, No. 17 (19 April 2004), p. 11 even speak of the “first geo-strategic document” the Commission has issued.

³² Or “regional power”, Antonio Missiroli, “The EU and its changing neighbourhood: Stabilization, integration and partnership, in: Roland Dannreuther (ed.), *European Union Foreign and Security Policy: Towards a neighbourhood strategy* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 23.

³³ Raffaella A. Del Sarto/Tobias Schumacher, “From EMP to ENP: What’s at Stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 26f. also identify a “buffering logic” and a “centre-periphery approach” in the ENP.

³⁴ Even if this might primarily be in terms of security, see Thomas Jäger, *Isolation in der internationalen Politik* [Isolation in International Politics] (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1996), p. 27.

development.³⁵ This might even apply to the periphery in the long-run since more stable semi-peripheral zones will be likely to try to stabilize their neighborhood.

The addressee of the ENP is a clearly identifiable ring of countries around the EU, obviously inspired by the line characterized as dividing Europe and Asia. The ENP-countries form a continuous band³⁶ from the Maghreb to the Mashrek, via Turkey³⁷ and the South Caucasus over the Black Sea to the Western CIS-countries to finally touch back on today's EU in the East. Consequently, the ENP-countries indeed seem to form a European semi-periphery.

This assessment is supported by the fact that certain countries, although neighboring the EU are not included in the ENP.³⁸ Western European non-EU-members have already established special relations to the EU and – more importantly – do not fulfill functions of a semi-periphery, neither socio-economically, nor geographically. Economically, they are better off than most EU-members and geographically, they do not touch on the periphery. Consequently, they do not take part in the ENP. The same holds true for the countries that are currently candidates or at least potentially considered as such. Their acknowledged eligibility for membership makes them unfit to serve as semi-periphery in the meantime. Therefore, the semi-periphery is already designed around them. This certainly implies that the EU, by making clear distinctions between those regarded as future members and those considered neighbors, has somehow already pre-decided the ins and outs, i.e. the *finalité géographique* of the EU.

The picture is completed by the fact that none of the Central Asian CIS countries – sharing no border with the EU – are included in the ENP. EU-assistance to these countries will be transferred from TACIS – and thereby from the ENP – to Development Cooperation and Economic Cooperation.³⁹ By doing so, it is clearly expressed that they are now considered peripheral, in clear contrast to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Just a few years ago, there was still good reason to consider them peripheral as well,⁴⁰ albeit the appointment of Heikki Talvitie as EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus already hinted at the particular importance the EU attributes to the region. The final inclusion of the three countries into the ENP framework in 2004 has finally proven that they are indeed no longer regarded as periphery in geographical as well as political terms. In fact, they constitute an integral part of the semi-periphery as their inclusion facilitated the closure of the ring around the EU. However, just in the vicinity of the South Caucasus lie two significant exceptions to this scheme.

Exceptions to the Logic of the ENP

Russia does not take part in the ENP, obviously because it does not fit into the concept of semi-periphery. Some ENP-partners were formerly part of the Soviet Union and have explicitly oriented themselves towards the EU since. Including Russia as well as former Soviet states in one policy scheme such as the ENP could endanger the effectiveness of the policy. In addition, due to its political and economic weight, Russia needs to be considered as

³⁵ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *The European Neighbourhood Policy: helping ourselves through helping our neighbours*, Speech held in London, 31 October 2005, available at http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/news/ferrero/2005/sp05_31-10-05.htm.

³⁶ Aliboni (2005), speaks of a “geopolitical arc”, Michael Emerson, *The Wider Europe as the European Union’s Friendly Monroe Doctrine* (Brussels: CEPS, Policy Brief 27, 2002), p. 13 speaks of a continuous “chain”.

³⁷ On Turkey’s special position in this context see the following section.

³⁸ See Fn. 13.

³⁹ In addition, Mongolia, TACIS beneficiary from 1991 to 2003, is already covered by ALA.

⁴⁰ Coppieters (2003), p. 164-68.

a regional center itself, as it displays more features of a center than any other semi-peripheral country even though it also serves as a semi-periphery for the EU in ways. It therefore makes perfect sense that Russia is not included in the ENP.

Turkey is not included in the ENP either since it has already started accession negotiations with the EU. However, the semi-periphery logic as the organizing principle of the ENP becomes evident *ex negativo* in ongoing discussions on Turkey's potential accession: One of the frequently used arguments against Turkish membership is that with Turkey joining, the EU would have a common border with Iran and Iraq. One of the obstacles to Turkey's aspirations therefore is that its membership would thwart the concept of a continuous semi-periphery, designed to "protect" the EU from "problematic countries". Critics therefore try to prevent the "ring of friends" from being "interrupted" by the breaking up of the semi-peripheral cordon.⁴¹

Implications for EU-South Caucasus Relations

Just as the Central Asian CIS countries are degraded from neighbors to development countries, the logic of the ENP puts the South Caucasus in an arbitrary position as well, especially Georgia which has explicit aspirations for EU membership. The Wider Europe Communication⁴², as well as the ENPSP⁴³, do not grant ENP-partners an EU membership perspective and exclude them from the provisions of Art. 49 TEU governing accession – at least in the medium-term.⁴⁴ However, in the long-run, Georgia might have a chance to join, because, geographically speaking, its membership would not destroy the concept of a semi-periphery since Armenia and Azerbaijan are located to its South. However, a Georgian EU membership would still be quite delicate because of the described features of the South Caucasus region. Besides, a concrete membership perspective could possibly a) foster similar aspirations in Armenia and Azerbaijan and thereby run counter to the logic of the ENP, b) weaken the semi-periphery in the Caucasus as Armenia and Azerbaijan may not be regarded sufficient to effectively exercise the functions attributed to it and c) be considered too far reaching since Georgia is not geographically linked to the EU.⁴⁵

Evidence that the EU does not consider to offer such a perspective lies in the fact that up to now progress in EU-South Caucasus relations has always been accomplished simultaneously with all three countries (see Table 1). In addition, Mediterranean countries, generally not regarded eligible for EU membership,⁴⁶ are also included in the ENP. This is perceived as a problem by countries that regard their relationship with the EU through the ENP as a first step towards their EU membership. From their standpoint, the transfer of the "open-ended" TACIS into the ENP already created disillusionment.⁴⁷ It is unfortunate for the EU that this problem seems to have developed because of the EU's own conduct. Even though official documents do not mention an accession perspective for ENP partners, the rhetoric used in dealing with partners does not clearly close the door for membership either.⁴⁸ This has led to an important gap between European intentions and partners' demands.

⁴¹ Compare analogously Aliboni (2005), p. 6.

⁴² Commission, *Wider Europe*, p. 5.

⁴³ Commission; *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Commission, *Wider Europe*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Only Turkey – candidate itself – could eventually serve as a "bridge".

⁴⁶ Commission, *Wider Europe*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ This assessment is shared by Smith (2005), pp. 768f.

⁴⁸ Analogously argues Iris Kempe, "Nachbarschaftspolitik als neues Handlungsfeld der Europäischen Union" [Neighborhood Policy as new Field of Action for the European Union]in: Werner Weidenfeld (ed.), *Die*

Nonetheless, the EU recognizes the South Caucasus as an important part of its new foreign policy approach. The Union – explicitly intending “to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours”⁴⁹ – needs to offer *substantial* and *sustainable positive effects* to the semi-periphery. Accordingly, the EU must find a way to balance its efforts to maintain or increase security and prosperity by *exclusion* and to maintain or increase them by *inclusion*. The only way to accomplish this is to clearly articulate how far the EU is willing to go in order not to generate frustration among partners, especially Georgia at this point in time. At the same time, the EU needs to stress the positive aspects for the entire South Caucasus and maybe develop even stronger incentives in order to convince partners of the utility of participating in the ENP and of continuing to strengthen their ties to Europe.⁵⁰ After all, the further development and implementation of the ENP is in the vital interest of both sides: It increases the EU’s prospects to acquire security and gain influence and should enable the South Caucasus to stabilize and develop, profiting from its geographic proximity to the European Union.

Europäische Verfassung in der Analyse [Analysis of the European Constitution] (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 2005), p. 257.

⁴⁹ Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Concrete proposals are developed by Barbara Lippert, “Assozierung plus gesamteuropäische Aufgabenkonföderation: Plädoyer für eine selbstbewusste EU-Nachbarschaftspolitik [Association plus Europe-wide Confederation: Pleading for a Self-Confident EU Neighborhood Policy], *Integration*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (March 2006), pp. 149-57.