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The European Commission wants a radical change in the financing of the neighbourhood policy

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In early May, the European Commission (EC) put forward a proposal of new rules for the financing of the external assistance and neighbourhood policy that would apply in the EU's new financial framework for 2021–2027. The proposal envisages the liquidation of the twelve instruments of financial assistance to external countries currently in place, including the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) established to support the transformation of the Eastern Partners (EP) and southern neighbours. These would be replaced with a single global fund for the implementation of the EU's external tasks, named the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. The new instrument would absorb all development funds and consist of three main pillars: the geographical (the neighbourhood is still given special attention here), the thematic pillar (e.g. migration) and the crisis pillar (funds that could be launched quickly in case of any crisis). The ministers of foreign affairs of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova addressed a letter to the EC expressing their concern about the liquidation of the ENI which, in their opinion may result in the marginalisation of Eastern Partnership.

Commentary

- The new financial proposal is intended at responding to the EU's international situation after the outbreak of the migration crisis in a situation where, given the large number of financial instruments, it was difficult to respond in a flexible manner to the needs of external countries (this mainly concerns the funds offered to Turkey to counteract unregulated migration to the EU). Furthermore, the new fund is also expected to comprehensively manage development aid for Africa – which is undergoing a demographic explosion – to prevent an uncontrolled upsurge in migration to Europe.
- A completely new way of thinking about the EU is inherent in the new instrument; the EU is viewed mainly as a global actor in providing developmental aid, owing to which it will react to humanitarian crises that could affect the EU's security. Thus the EU seems to be withdrawing from more ambitious goals aimed at supporting transformation of the countries around it according to the EU model. The ENI was created in 2014 to offer the neighbouring countries a special kind of aid supporting their European aspirations, the development of democracy, the rule of law and modern economies. There is a well-grounded concern that the way financial aid is thought of will change. To date it has been

seen as an instrument that is preparing the Eastern Partners, if not for membership, then at least for building a broad political and economic community with the EU (such as the proposal of building a customs, energy and digital union with the Eastern Partners presented last year by the European Parliament). This will now be weakened.

- Symbolically, the term Eastern Partnership or eastern neighbourhood has not been used in the proposal presented so far (it is expected to be developed in the coming months). For the time being, it is uncertain what sum will be allocated to the geographical pillar (out of the 123 billion euros allocated for the instrument as a whole) and whether the total funds allocated for the EaP will be lower. The political decisions concerning the priorities will most likely be shifted to the top political level of the EU, where an interest in Eastern Europe is smaller.