

Playing the role of a strong global actor on the regional stage

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The European Union (EU) is not the only world player using soft power strategies to create stability in their neighbouring region. In fact, multiple time zones and many thousands of kilometres away, New Zealand is implementing a strategy not so dissimilar in its underlying values. Both recognise the strategic importance of encouraging respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law through their respective regional policies in order to achieve increased prosperity and stability in neighbouring countries. These three values are clearly evident in both the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and New Zealand's Aid Programme, and although each strategy plays out in different, regionally appropriate ways, they share similar expectations and challenges. This discussion piece will provide an insight into how the EU and New Zealand are making a case for the preservation and enhancement of these treasured values through regional policy, in an attempt to stabilise their respective regions and to increase prosperity politically, economically and in security-related terms.

One of the ten priorities laid out by the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker is to encourage the EU to transform into becoming a stronger global actor. Identified as a crucial step towards living up to this priority, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is by no means a new strategy. Revised in the November 2015 review to achieve its current form, the ENP is aligned with Article 8 of the Treaty on European Union¹

This article provides the legal basis for developing the EU's relations with its neighbouring

countries, and with regard to the ENP, its neighbours to the East and South. The revised ENP puts a strong emphasis on two key principles: providing a differentiated approach for each partner country and enabling increased ownership by partner countries and member states.² By recognising the diversity of all partner countries and member states, the ENP allows an increased flexibility to the range of policies designed, a greater involvement of each partner country's population in the implementation of the policies, and a shared responsibility to create regional stability. The EU accounts much of its own long-lasting stability and prosperity to its strong democratic foundations that respect human rights and the rule of law, each of which the EU believes should be shared with its neighbouring partners to encourage overall political and economic stabilisation.³ One way in which the EU encourages the development of strong democratic societies in its neighbourhood is through supporting independent media. An example of this is the significant funding allocated through the ENP to media initiatives in countries such as Moldova to encourage the development of a pluralistic media landscape.⁴

While New Zealand operates in a different regional zone, the Pacific, it too leverages its values, resources and knowledge within its own area of strategic and geographic importance. Under the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand's Aid Programme especially supports sustainable development in the Pacific region to create shared prosperity and stability. Much like the EU's ENP, New Zealand believes that by guiding

and encouraging solutions to regional challenges it will contribute to a “more secure, equitable, and prosperous world”⁵ One such solution can be seen in the Solomon Islands where educational support aims to encourage more girls to attend school. Having increased focus on a sector like education, which is important for the promotion of shared values, the Aid Programme supports the development of equitable human rights and economic empowerment.

New Zealand manages its Aid Programme through a number of methods within the framework of its regional development policies in order to achieve mutual benefits. The Aid Programme highlights the idea that clear communication, cooperation and coordination with and between partners is necessary, that there is a need for recipient countries to lead their own development, and that as an outcome, measurable results must be delivered.⁶ With a range of environmental, political, economic and development issues increasingly facing the Pacific, it is important that New Zealand continues to implement the Aid Programme and promote the benefits of democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights to heighten regional prosperity and stability.

However, despite the best efforts of officials in Brussels and Wellington to increase prosperity and stability in their neighbouring regions, often the root causes of problems in partner countries are not sufficiently addressed.⁷ Structural problems related to development, security, political transformation, low economic growth and inequality cannot be quickly fixed through the policy framework of a distant neighbour, but need to be dealt with by each partner country itself. However, any efforts made to address these structural problems face challenges in themselves through, for example, the growing regional influence of world powers such as Russia and China, as well as pressures arising from migration and climate change. As territory becomes increasingly contested and the competition increases to exert influence, continued EU and New Zealand engagement in supporting

prosperity and stability in their neighbourhood is vital.

Although neither the ENP nor the Aid Programme provide the only answers to developing long-lasting regional stability and prosperity in their respective neighbourhoods, they both play important roles. They provide frameworks for regional cooperation based on a shared value system that places great importance on the rule of law, democracy and a respect for human rights. There is still much work to be done to ensure that positive changes occur across the wider regions and progress will need to be monitored and evaluated along the way. However, the point can certainly be made that both the European Union and New Zealand are playing the role of global actor on their respective regional stages.

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Endnotes:

1. European Union. “Treaty on European Union”. Official Journal C 326. Last modified 26 October 2012. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12012M/TXT&from=EN>.
2. European Commission, “European Neighbourhood Policy,” December 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/overview_en (accessed 22 May 2018).
3. European Commission, “A Stronger Global Actor,” October 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/stronger-global-actor_en (accessed 22 May 2018).
4. European External Action Service, “Tackling challenges for independent media in Eastern Partnership countries”, September 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp/32404/tackling-challenges-independent-media-eastern-partnership-countries_en (accessed 22 May 2018).
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “New Zealand Aid Programme Strategic Plan 2015-2019,” February 2015, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid-Prog-docs/ASEAN/New-Zealand-Aid-Programme-Strategic-Plan-2015-19.pdf> (accessed on 23 May 2018).
6. *Ibid.*
7. Joachim Fritz-Vannahme and Gabriele Schöler, “The EU neighbourhood in shambles”, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user_upload/The_EU_neighbourhood_in_shambles.pdf (accessed 21 May 2018).

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