

Recommendations “Dealing with Neighbors: Fighting a Ring of Fire Rather than Building a Ring of Friends”

The 2016 Trilogue Salzburg convened leading thinkers, decision-makers and renowned personalities from business, politics and arts. They discussed how states should rethink and reform their politics toward neighborhood countries.

Changing political and economic realities as well as instability and armed conflicts have prompted countries worldwide to reassess their approach toward their neighbor states. Especially for Europe, the situation was changed dramatically during the last ten years. What was supposed to become a Ring of Friends surrounding Europe has turned into a Ring of Fire – with dire consequences for the European Union in terms of economic impacts, migration and terrorism, consequences that are carrying “sparks” of instability to the heart of the Union.

Therefore, the Trilogue Salzburg participants call on the institutions of the European Union and the EU Member States

- to define and give strategic priorities and reconcile them if possible with the neighbor states’ priorities to create programs and policies that are beneficial for both;
- to further pursue the efforts of the EU to move away from a “one-size-fits-all” concept regarding neighborhood and to develop a more individual approach, taking into consideration the aspirations of the countries concerned without neglecting the regional context (with a particular focus on “neighbors of neighbors”);
- to foster a debate on efficient approaches like cultural exchange, cooperation in education including exchange of experts/students, joint missions to overcome historical disputes. etc. to deal with neighbors beside bilateral trade agreements and security measures;
- to further enhance cooperation with NGOs, civil society, media, and business in order to support freedom of expression and trade;
- to establish an efficient border regime, strengthen FRONTEX, and establish centers of registration in the region as well as allotting an additional 10% of the EU budget for migration purposes;
- to question the existing tools to stabilize relationships like financial aid, economic cooperation and foreign direct investment if they are not strategically focused and serve both sides;
- to foster youth qualification and employment programs such as “Erasmus plus” in order to encourage exchange and cooperation in the area of apprenticeship as well as extending best practice examples such as the “entrepreneurship license” to all EU countries and beyond that benefit entrepreneurship as a whole and offer a perspective to young people in Europe and neighboring countries;
- to invest in programs aiming at including women and young generations in public space in neighboring regions/states;

- to establish an “inventory of good neighborhood practices” where best practices of overcoming conflicts or fostering bilateral relationship are documented and to integrate different cultural, religious and social backgrounds and make this platform accessible to the general public;
- to continue efforts in the field of visa liberalization, as appropriate, based on strict conditionality;
- to concentrate aid according to the strategic priorities rather than spreading support over a multitude of programs and projects;
- to consider the dimension of internal neighbors within the EU and how to deal with it;
- to strengthen multilateral institutions (UN, OECD) in the effort of neighborhood building;
- to increase common efforts in the fight against terrorism by establishing an obligatory information system along the lines of the Schengen Information System (SIS) to tweak the flow of information among member states.

During recent years, many observers were taken by surprise by certain developments, such as the “Arabellion”, the massive influx of migrants and refugees into Europe, and the terrorist attacks in European capitals. Therefore the 2016 Trilogue Salzburg participants call on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the national governments to get more deeply involved in the developments taking place in neighboring countries in order to spot signs of fundamental change early on.

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(Signed by)

The 2016 Trilogue Salzburg Participants