

RESILIENCE – AN ASSET OF EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

THE INTRODUCTION OF RESILIENCE TO THE EU'S FOREIGN POLICY DISCOURSE

Resilience is a very versatile concept, which was utilised in different contexts with different meanings over time. Its connection with strategic autonomy was made recently, when European strategic documents started to use the two concepts next to each other. However, the concept of resilience appeared in the European Union's (EU) strategic thinking as early as 2012, it was used with a narrow focus on food security (TOCCI 2020: 177). Only the European Union's Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016 elevated it to one of the main interwoven motifs in the text. Resilience thus became one of the main ideas around which the EU's external action revolves (WAGNER-ANHOLT 2016: 414–415). Besides its external aspects, the concept was set to be applied internally as well in protecting democracies and critical infrastructure within the Union, for instance (European External Action Service 2016: 15–22). The concept became part of the everyday vocabulary of the EU, but mainly because of its versatility it is difficult to grasp what resilience means in practice. As it is a highly adaptable concept, it raises questions regarding its implementation. The “how”-s in this field can affect how European strategic autonomy can be put into practice.

The EU had been very vague on resilience to preserve its appeal in all of the domains it wishes to utilise it to reach its aims. Meanwhile, this ambiguousness raised concerns among academics on multiple aspects of the concept: how it is going to be applied to define crises, what are its implications on the concept of crises (WAGNER-ANHOLT 2016: 419–422; ULGEN 2016: 46) and how can the EU ensure that it is not building resilient authoritarian regimes (BISOP 2016: 2). This latter criticism was challenged as repressive regimes cannot be resilient, just immensely stable, which pitfall becomes visible during the occurrence of an external shock (TOCCI 2020: 181).

Despite the reception in academia, the EU's formulation of resilience as one of its main concepts towards the future has its merits as well. Resilience is claimed

to be an interdisciplinary tool, which resonates with multiple domains of policy communities (TOCCI 2017: 70). The aim to build resilient states is a more attractive expression than fragile and failed states, thus the European Neighbourhood Policy states are more willing to accept it. The concept is also more consistent with the EU's comprehensive and integrated approach (JOSEPH–JUNCOS 2019: 1002–1003). It is in line with the concept of principled pragmatism as well, also introduced by the EUGS, providing a “middle ground” between over-ambitious democracy and peace building and under-ambitious stability building in the neighbourhood (WAGNER–ANHOLT 2016: 415). This latter aspect, however, was also criticised as the EU must have a point of decision if it is going to pursue a principled or a pragmatic approach, as both is impossible to follow (JUNCOS 2017: 2). The third idea behind the utilisation of the concept lies in its dynamic nature. Resilience is not merely the act of surviving a shock and bouncing back to the original state, but it includes adaptation (TOCCI 2020: 181). In an ever more contested global order, and amidst heightened great power rivalry, the ability to adapt means survival. The borrowed term, however, raises concerns exactly about its flexibility, which is claimed to provide a mere constructive ambiguity for the EU (BARGUÉS 2021: 6).

This controversy in academia gives a difficult setting to assess how resilience contributes to European strategic autonomy. It is clear, however, that the expression is well received in the very areas it was intended to be utilised in the first place. It resonated well with European Neighbourhood Policy countries (JOSEPH–JUNCOS 2019: 1002–1003), it brought together European Union Member States' decision-makers (TOCCI 2020: 176) and finally gave a point of connection to the security and development policy communities (TOCCI 2017: 70). According to this, resilience can be a useful asset of European strategic autonomy in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), if utilised with care.

TERMINOLOGY

The interpretation of resilience within the EU and academia had faced controversy because of the broad and multidisciplinary application of the concept. The inconsistency between the different terminologies is not just a technical issue but points to fundamental disagreements about the concept. Therefore a guide of the terminology is offered here to disentangle the multifaceted idea of resilience.

Double interpretation. Resilience, derived from the Latin word “resilire” meaning jumping or springing back, refers to the capacity of states, societies, communities and individuals to effectively handle, endure, adjust to and bounce back from unexpected

events and difficult situations. Resilience was a familiar term for the EU academics and community of interest in 2016; however, at that time, resilience was mostly associated with the humanitarian field, namely food security. In 2016, the EU Global Strategy identified resilience as one of the top five priorities for the EU's global involvement. Primarily, it provided a more extensive understanding of resilience, which extended beyond just humanitarian intervention and encompassed various policy domains. The introduction of the concept of resilience was intended to bring together policy sectors that had hitherto been strictly separated. Unfortunately, from the very beginning, there has been an inherent ambiguity, the security community always meant "state resistance" by resilience, while development, humanitarian and human rights policy-makers have tended to think of resilience as "social flexibility" (TOCCI 2020: 2–3).

Local or state-level resiliency. While the EU considered resilience in 2012 a primary objective, a "goal in itself", in 2017 it was already considered a tool, "a means not an end" to achieve greater governance and stability in external affairs. The purpose of this security shift in EU resilience thinking was to enhance the predictability and manageability of Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The disadvantage of the turn was that EU agencies ceased to engage with local communities (e.g. municipalities, civil society groups, refugees, youth, women and media as target groups), and they lifted their focus to state governance. As a consequence, the local ownership of the resilience-related projects was denied. In summary, the concept of resilience as a narrative of the EU has been completely "governmentalised", focusing on security, by integrating engineered resilience into national policy frameworks. Resilience governance involves the establishment or acknowledgment of "negotiated moral communities" that have the ability to organise themselves in response to the common reality. How can EU effectively support these "negotiated moral communities" in an underdeveloped region, considering the constant challenges they face such as everyday hardships, ruthless dictators, widespread corruption and diminishing prospects for a better life? How can we develop resilience so as to avoid the entrapments of compliance and dependency? The EU must prioritise the examination of self-organisation within the broader framework of governance networks. This form of governance can be characterised as "guided self-organisation", which operates through a networked system of shared interests and rules. It involves initiating change at the local level, while receiving support from the global level, and then adapting and reflecting on itself through an ongoing process. This approach eliminates the need for foreign interference, allowing local abilities, customs and knowledge to serve as both the methods and objectives of intervention. This is an enduring process and adaptation, and the EU appears to be only at the early stages to find the answers (KOROSTELEVA 2020: 247–257).

EU understanding, the broad interpretation. The central idea of the EU's resilience concept is the "ability to resist and regenerate" and to be "crisis-proof" in disasters and other challenging situations. The EU is a political and economic union with a broader mandate that includes economic stability, social policies and political cooperation, thus the EU's resilience terminology includes non-military aspects such as economic resilience, foreign policy, public health and environmental sustainability. The broad initial understanding of resilience was "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks"; this definition was distilled in the EUGS as the "ability to remain functional and capable in the face of an external threat or danger, or to resume functioning rapidly following any disruption" (IATE s. a.). This definition implies long-term development and ability to change drastically after a strategic shock.

NATO understanding, the narrow interpretation. NATO, which cooperates closely with the EU on many issues, has a similar idea, albeit in more general terms: "The ability of a functional unit to continue to perform a required function in the presence of faults or errors." NATO prioritises collective defence, deterrence and military readiness; therefore, resilience efforts are closely tied to maintaining and enhancing military capabilities and defence-related infrastructure. Broadly speaking, NATO resilience is always associated with an emergency, and refers to the preparation and planning of the government institutions and systems related to the delivery of essential services to withstand acute shocks and protracted crises; however, it does not indicate the required capacity to reform and modify itself in the long run.

Internal and external resilience. There are two distinct interpretations of the phrase, which can be categorised as internal and external resilience. Both aspects are equally crucial for comprehending the new CFSP. In the external interpretation of the term, resilience exclusively refers to security-relevant challenges and the ability to withstand attacks, shocks and challenges from the outside. Where resilience is interpreted as internal, it refers mostly to legal challenges or legislative acts in nature. In this context, all counter-actions against the EU's legislation and practice to be adopted by Member States are threats to Europe. They include all breaches of European law by member states or other legal entities as well as explicit attacks (BENDIEK 2017: 14–15).

Resilience is a feature of complex and democratic social systems. Resilience is the act of an entity in response to internal or external strategic shocks, it means deliberate and structured changes, slight modification, or complete transformation of the entity to preserve itself. Resilience-as-quality means that the entity is aware of its external environment, can self-(re)organise its components, and enhance their performance by using its inherent strength. For adaptive governance based on resilience as

self-organisation, there is a need to shift from viewing resilience solely as a quality of a system to recognising it as an analytical framework for governance that encompasses complexity in its entirety (KOROSTELEVA 2020: 252). Resilience-as-thinking allows a more adaptable approach to governance by emphasising self-governance at the local and individual levels. It vests local authorities and civil initiatives with capabilities to adjust and gain knowledge internally to sustain their essential activities in the face of strategic challenges. Resilience as-quality and as-thinking is an attribute of a complex social system, in which large networks cooperate with no central control and with a simple *modus operandi*. This results in complex collective behaviour, advanced information processing, and adaptation through learning or evolution. A resilient state and society can change, reform and transform because resilience is a dynamic concept. From this perspective, a resilient society is democratic, based on institutional confidence and sustainable development (TOCCI 2019: 6; BENDIEK 2017: 14). According to the EU's stance, the resilience of the EaP nations can only be enhanced by a certain level of adoption of the EU's standards. At the same time, it is a contradiction again, since the resilience complexity theory fundamentally challenged the theory of liberal peacebuilding policy, as it emphasised localism, bottom-up spontaneous self-organisation and the empowerment of local actors, instead of prescribing top-down universal solutions (NATORSKI 2023: 1088–1090). This means that directing policies towards building resilience remained an idealistic aspiration, rather than a tangible reality because resilience, just like democracy, may be supported, but not artificially created (KOROSTELEVA 2020: 245).

Increased security, or/and extended activity? The current focus is on realism in spreading European values called *principled pragmatism* (referred to as such in the EU Global Strategy) (BENDIEK 2017: 13). *Principled pragmatism*, considered by some academics as almost an oxymoron, shows that the understanding of resilience is somewhat still ambiguous: some argue that resilience increases stability and security, while others refer to resilience as providing increased bottom-up agency through a humanitarian perspective. The EU has adopted both interpretations of resilience as a means to promote stability and order (interest) and at the same time, it aims to uphold the humanitarian and norms-based agenda (values) that forms the basis of its normative power paradigm (NATORSKI 2023: 1076). The duplex approach resulted in a lack of substantial measurable effects for resilience. Thus, EU resilience is sometimes described as *defensive* and is considered only as an effective tool for security governance, which helps create *buffer zones* that prevent dangers from reaching Europe by ensuring that neighbouring countries are robust to those threats. According to other opinions, EU resilience is an extension of neoliberal governance to redefining its influence through externally developed practices

(KOROSTELEVA 2020: 243). Either way, the EU disregarded the preferences of partner countries, whenever these preferences differed from its perspective. This aggressive, top-down, norm-based approach in resilience-building neglected any substantial political discourses and subsequent consensus-building, ultimately excluding the local ownership. The role of *the local* was simply to agree and implement the externally developed policy templates (PETROVA–DELCOUR 2020: 354).

RESILIENCE AND EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

The EU utilised the concept of resilience years before the introduction of the EU's Global Strategy of 2016. The then narrowly interpreted concept grew in its scope and meaning over time, but it remained still enigmatic and flexible to provide a universal tool for EU foreign policy. It was therefore not evident how the concept of resilience can be an asset to promote strategic autonomy.

At first, resilience was considered the main theme of the EU's foreign policy before strategic autonomy (WAGNER–ANHOLT 2016; MOLNÁR 2024). Some even write about a resilience turn, claiming it to be the EU's key idea to deal with both internal and external challenges (NITOIU–SIMIONOV 2023: 1074–1076). This approach was contested by academia over time, claiming that with the new High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) taking office in 2019, the EU's foreign policy goals changed, and a realist turn occurred gradually in the previously more liberal approach as HR/VP Borrell continued to focus on strengthening resilience, but the return of geopolitical tensions called for a pragmatic and realist approach (BARGUÉS 2021: 6–8). This idea was supported by HR/VP Borrell's rhetoric, in which he argued for the primacy of strategic autonomy (BORRELL 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). The shift is striking, since resilience was the product of the EU's liberal, value-based approach (WAGNER–ANHOLT 2016: 415), while strategic autonomy is the result of the forced implementation of interest-based geopolitical approach (VARMA 2024: 69). The EU's pragmatic approach is clear from both perspectives, it just needs a clarification what is the state of play in 2024. As Biscop argued, the EUGS is the revival of “*Realpolitik* with European characteristics” (BISCOP 2019: 30), which means that the EU will not pursue idealistic non-achievable goals, or follow power politics (BISCOP 2019: 30–33; TOCCI 2020: 179). The middle ground between these is *principled pragmatism*, an idea also introduced by the EUGS, which translates to lowering aims, but defending values. The EU realised that it cannot build democracy in some states with which it must cooperate on various issues in defence of the community's values, like countering terrorism (BISCOP 2016: 2–3).

The return of an EU-style *Realpolitik* in the EUGS is also important in the sense that it reintroduced a geopolitical approach to European strategic thinking (BISCOP 2019: 32–33), which is in line with the community's characteristics as a security community (MOLNÁR–TÁNCZOS 2024: 93–99), and regional security complex theory (BUZAN 2003: 141; KELLY 2007: 200–209). The reintroduction was necessary, as geopolitical tensions were gradually growing, and if the EU wanted to live up to its self-made image as a security provider, it needed to give adequate answers to the changing security situation in its immediate neighbourhood. The idea looks similar to that in the European Security Strategy of 2003, and in the EUGS, too, the community aims to address its immediate neighbours, *the ring of friends*, the destabilisation of which circle would have an impact on the European Community's vital interests (BISCOP 2019: 33). This time, the EU aimed to utilise *principled pragmatism*, an approach between idealism and power politics (BISCOP 2019: 32), to build resilience in its surrounding regions to prevent their potential further destabilisation.

In this light it is not a surprise that the EUGS mentions the terms *resilient* and *resilience* 41 times in different contexts throughout the text (European External Action Service 2016). It is also clear from the document that the emphasis is on the external nexus, as expected, since resilience was intended as a foreign policy tool (TOCCI 2017: 70–71; NOVÁK-VARRÓ 2021: 36–37). Aside from the goal of creating resilient countries in the EU's neighbourhood, the community aims for a wider geographical scope by including migration origin and transit countries, too, under the same umbrella. The EU's peace policy, particularly long-term peacebuilding also includes resilience as an important element to build (European External Action Service 2016: 50–51). The concept in this sense offers a “middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peacebuilding and the under-ambitious objective of stability” (WAGNER–ANHOLT 2016: 415). Resilience was not chosen to replace the EU's liberal peace goals, and its stance as a normative power, but to achieve these aims in reality (TOCCI 2020: 180). Thus, resilience was set to be applied to desertification, food scarcity, the fight against terrorism, the protection of human rights, migration, infrastructure, education and many more (BISCOP 2019: 33). This created the concern that the new concept introduced in the EUGS will justify all EU actions, regardless of their nature (ULGEN 2016: 46). The ambiguity remained when the EU introduced its Strategic Compass (Compass) in 2022, for neither the EUGS nor the Compass described how the concept of resilience should be operationalised. It remained a prominent element of the European strategic documents, since the Compass mentions the term 51 times. This document is more inward looking than the EUGS: it includes more aspects of the internal nexus of resilience, listing

the EU's resilience against cyber and hybrid threats and the resilience of the European defence industry and technology as important factors (European External Action Service 2022).

Despite its intensive use in EU documents, the enthusiasm for the rather ambiguous term, resilience, started to fade when the geopolitical approach of the EUGS was reinforced by the outbreak of the Russo–Ukrainian war in 2022. The turn occurred even before that, when the new HR/VP, Josep Borrell, who replaced Federica Mogherini in 2019, took office. HR/VP Borrell emphasised the geopolitical approach even more, stating that the EU has to learn to speak *the language of power* in its foreign policy (BORRELL 2020a), and claiming that the EU's strategic theatre is more and more contested (BORRELL 2021). The vision of a more assertive EU amidst the changing world order caused a change in the priorities of the EUGS. HR/VP Borrell emphasised more strategic autonomy over the vague concept of resilience, which provided the EU's foreign policy with constructive ambiguity (BARGUÉS 2021: 6). Notwithstanding the constructiveness of the concept of resilience, the EU needs to achieve its strategic autonomy to obtain the freedom of action and safeguard its values and interests (BISCOPE 2020: 1015–1020).

With the strengthening great power rivalry, the strategic turn towards *Realpolitik*, and with that to a more geopolitical approach, the formulation of European strategic autonomy became a priority. To ensure that the EU can act alone, internal resilience became important. As Covid-19 showed the interconnectedness of the supply chains (BISCOPE 2020: 1017), resilience is needed to supply the EU with the ability to recuperate fast in strategic fields in case of an external shock.

RESILIENCE IN THE INTERNAL–EXTERNAL NEXUS

The role of resilience in connection with strategic autonomy changed over time. Both internal and external resilience are needed to achieve strategic autonomy. The EU's internal resilience ensures its ability to act, while external resilience building strengthens the community's sense of security, in parallel with achieving its interests, especially in its neighbourhood. Specifically, European strategic autonomy lies in a stronger European defence industry and a greater independence from external actors in defining the EU's external priorities (MIRÓ 2023: 317). Thus, resilience in both the internal and external nexus is important to comprehend how these areas contribute to achieving strategic autonomy.

A resilient European defence industry

The aim for a resilient European defence industry was not articulated explicitly in the EUGS. Instead, the strategy claimed that “a sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential for Europe’s strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP” (European External Action Service 2016: 46). The strategy therefore called for a strong European defence industry, but progress in this area has been slow. As a step to advance the EU’s objective, in 2017 Member States intensified their efforts in utilising the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and the European Defence Fund (EDF) was created to meet European demands on a more effective defence capacity (MIRÓ 2023: 328). Despite the willingness to strengthen the European defence industry, the area got its own Directorate-General only in 2019 (GOTKOWSKA 2019). The creation of the position of Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) was in line with the EU’s aims to build a “solid European defence industry” (European External Action Service 2016: 11).

The Strategic Compass showcases a continued EU interest in boosting the European defence industry, which theme was strongly motivated by the events preceding the release of the document. The war in Ukraine raised two concerns regarding European defence industry at the birth of the Compass. In 2022 competitiveness and funding were found to be the most vital elements in engaging with defence industry (European External Action Service 2022: 46–50). Two years later, the annual review of the Compass announced the creation of a European Defence Industrial Strategy, which called to strengthen the defence industry’s competitiveness and resilience. According to the review, securing the supply chains is one of the major contributors towards a more resilient European defence industry (European External Action Service 2024: 8–30).

Resilience in the European Defence Industrial Strategy is written in the language of the security community, which understands the concept through a solely security lens. This can be illustrated by the following examples: understanding resilience in the context of Member State defence spending (European Commission 2024: 10), or stating that resilience must be commensurate with the threat level (European Commission 2024: 14). This shows that the security community does not shy away from utilising the concept after the *realist turn* in EU policy, which subordinates resilience to strategic autonomy. The strategy itself calls for a speedy adaptation in the sector to the increasing global threats and to the return of conventional war into Europe (European Commission 2024: 2). This is the first call for resilience in the strategy, in the sense as Nathalie Tocci described the concept as one to call for not only a “baseline functioning”, but also for adaptation (TOCCI 2020: 181).

The document also claims the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) as the main driving force of a resilient Europe (European Commission 2024: 2), which statement correlates with the EDTIB's involvement in multiple policy areas: it is important from both the perspective of security and economy. The EU identified the cross-border supply chains of the EDTIB as a vulnerability in the strategic field (European Commission 2024: 5), and as such, its resilience is important to enable EU action in crisis scenarios.

A whole chapter of the strategy, entitled “Achieving readiness and resilience through partnerships” is dedicated to discuss the resilience of the European defence industry (European Commission 2024: 28). This motif appeared first in the EUGS, where the EU sought for a closer relationship across the Atlantic to strengthen its own resilience (European External Action Service 2016: 36). The European Defence Industrial Strategy lists three tiers of partners to consider in order to “achieve resilience”, Ukraine, NATO and other international partners (European Commission 2024: 30). Achieving resilience through partnership seemingly translates to the interdisciplinary meaning of the concept, including adaptation. However, the wording of the text strongly signals that primarily the EU's security is understood behind it. Since the text is closely related to European defence, it is logical that the concept is viewed exclusively through a security lens.

Conclusively, resilience in the context of the European defence industry mostly bears security connotations, while it also appears to be accommodating the idea of adaptation as well. In EU strategic documents regarding defence industry, resilience is understood as the security of the community, as suggested by the security community's understanding of the concept as state resistance (TOCCI 2020: 1–2). Following the footsteps of the EUGS and the Strategic Compass, the European Defence Industrial Strategy of 2024 also does not define what it understands by the term of resilience.

Resilience in the neighbourhood

Is it possible to externally design resilience, as believed in the policy world, and if not, how can resilience be built in practice? The EU's answer to this question was clearly to transfer the responsibility to the EaP nations, therefore significantly enhancing EaP ownership, thus the current rhetoric portrays the *neighbouring states as being responsible* for developing their own resilience and effectively addressing frozen conflicts or managing geopolitical constraints. EU support for the development of resilience means the facilitation of an all-inclusive political review

process that encourages open discussion, especially: a tailored cooperation agenda, recognition of differentiation to enhancing resilience; wide societal engagement at all stages of policy-making in addition to the state level; a wide and demand-driven scope of resilience, including resilience of state, society, institutions and policies (PETROVA–DELCOUR 2020: 353). The EU's CSDP resilience definition puts emphasis on the ability of functioning in case of a crisis (IATE s. a.).

European security depends on the cooperation between EU and NATO. Under a framework, the Berlin Plus Agreement, the EU is authorised to draw on NATO assets and capabilities for its military operations. The close cooperation of the two organisations is common interest. The effective defence of the EU's territory relies on close cooperation between the EU and NATO. The establishment of the EU defence union was a specific request from NATO, thus all actions in foreign, security and defence policy automatically *enhance NATO or at the very least complement its capabilities*.¹ The collaboration has seven fields of action: defence against hybrid threats, early warning and situational awareness, parallel operations in identical areas, cybersecurity and cyber defence, interoperable capabilities, defence industry and research as well as exercises *to reinforce the resilience of the EU and NATO partners* (BENDIEK 2017: 19).

The Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)² was the most immediate and targeted initiative in addressing the crisis in Ukraine by the European Commission, with the objective of mitigating its consequences. Nevertheless, only three decisions (regarding civilian protection, de-mining and socio-economic data in the Azov Sea region) explicitly mentioned resilience in their titles, and only two decisions (concerning community-led peacebuilding and the reintegration of veterans; and countering disinformation) incorporated resilience into their general objectives. The lack of consideration of resilience thinking is due to the planning process for these projects as it does not contain the complexity features that underlie resilience thinking. However, the EU utilised additional resources in Ukraine through the European Neighbourhood Instrument and its successor the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument – Global Europe, managed by the European Council, to assist in implementing policy reforms. The 2015 revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was seen as a setback however, since its priority shifted from democratisation to stabilisation (to build a resilient neighbourhood) (DEKANOZISHVILI 2020: 300). The targeted local level actors were too weak to sustain a bottom-up integration, and in the short term it failed the

¹ E.g. the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell's task is to pool information from security authorities in NATO and EU states, EU institutions and partner states.

² 19 European Commission Decisions were adopted within the framework of IcSP.

target countries in essence (LAVENEX 2017: 67). The purpose of these projects was to facilitate the fulfilment of obligations outlined in the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement, which signals the inherent misconceptualisation of the ENP as the direct continuation of the EU’s Enlargement Policy (KELLEY 2006: 30), rather than directly addressing the immediate needs of Ukraine and the consequences of the war. However, it was acknowledged that resilience necessitates a comprehensive strategy, highlighting the need of localism, bottom-up initiatives, spontaneous self-organisation, and the empowering of local actors, rather than imposing top-down universal answers. The failure of EU interventions can be attributed to the absence of this complexity in the dominant project management practices. The established EU institutional frameworks for project planning and implementation prescribe a sequential and hierarchical approach to post-conflict actions. Given this limited presence of resilience-as-thinking in the practices, there was a minimal opportunity in Ukraine to improve positive feedback loops and utilise authentic local knowledge and self-organisation. The only positive example remained the EU4ResilientRegions program, which focused on the Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine to enhance their overall resilience and promote local peacebuilding efforts (NATORSKI 2023: 1087–1099).

The confidence in EU values, namely that resilience can only be built up by applying Western standards resulted in limited local ownership in Ukraine. Therefore, the EU’s efforts could be seen as a type of neoliberal governance, to promote effective governance at the state level rather than empower local communities (PETROVA–DELCOUR 2020: 354). Instead of assisting in decentralising and empowering local communities to address their own needs, EU resilience projects sponsored establishing institutions that would be standard in “normal” democracies, such as professional police, judges, doctors, administrators and a dependable and regulated army. This also included promoting state-level economic development and enhancing capabilities for early warning and risk assessment. Whereas the Russo–Ukrainian war illustrated the power of local communities, and their ability to resist a violent military invasion through the local self-organisation. The natural resilience of the Ukrainian nation has allowed the continuation of essential social services and the establishment of territorial defence. The local authorities and bottom-up civil society entities (informal leaders, influencers) reinforced the general resilience of Ukraine’s overall ability to resist the Russian army and gave the central government more resources to maintain the functioning of the state. It is highly likely that the EU’s initiatives before the war significantly contributed to Ukraine’s societal preparation. For example, several EU projects supported the integration of internally displaced following the occupation of Crimea and the Donbass rebellion.

These efforts reinforced the local capacity to manage the displacement of more than 8 million Ukrainian citizens, thus avoiding a major humanitarian catastrophe. The lesson has to be learned, *local actors may be more knowledgeable* in relation to the activities to be pursued and have enhanced capacity to organise their activities. *Local communities are supposed to be involved* directly in the intervention activities (NATORSKI 2023: 1098). It was ascertained that the local communities must identify their own priorities and futures, and the resources they may need to achieve them. External assistance should be sought, of course, when necessary. Enabling local communities to take control of their own future is an appealing idea, as it provides an opportunity to expand the EU's influence and, more importantly, to establish a stronger connection with local entities to maintain sustainable government (KOROSTELEVA 2020: 243–248).

The EU's illusion of solving the internal problems of the EaP countries (e.g. lack of reserve capacity, dysfunctional institutions, stagnant markets) by engineering intervention from outside has led to the risk of losing the powerful ability of resilience as a form of self-governance. Instead, EaP countries' resilience is becoming trapped in a cycle of relying on EU intervention and focusing solely on maintaining security (KOROSTELEVA 2020: 243–244). The planning and implementation of Ukrainian IcSP projects followed a standardised process codified in the Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) Manual. This organisational handbook specifies predefined, stereotyped procedures and templates for planning projects, and the detailed methodology follows a technocratic, linear, bureaucratic and centralised management approach. There was a top-down approach and there was neither place for consultation with local authorities, nor request for feedback.³ The standardised approach does not include localisation and self-organisation empowerment as part of the organisational methodology. The project implementation practices adhered to the initial design, and they were never transferred to local control (local ownership). The example above demonstrates that resilience is portrayed as the protection of the stability of states during times of crisis, rather than a way to empower local communities impacted by destabilising violence and threats, thus remaining a rhetorical device rather than novel approach (NATORSKI 2023: 1091).

Since 2015, the European concern about migration has overshadowed many policy areas. While significant security threats such as climate change and the erosion of the nuclear arms control regime have been extensively discussed by experts, the issue of migration has consistently been a top priority for many EU governments,

³ The 29 EU interventions in Ukraine do not report any genuine process of consultations that would reflect a space for embracing local concerns and priorities.

as well as the Council of Ministers and European Council. The European approach to Libya has been significantly impacted by an *excessive focus on migration*. While the EU proudly emphasised that two significantly different “resilience-related” goals, namely, the control of migration and establishing an effective government in Libya are reconcilable, the contradictions between these two “resilience-related” goals became obvious. The EU assisted local authorities and militias to control migration, but this containment approach worked against the goal of building a resilient Libyan state, as it weakened the central government (TOCCI 2019: 9).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The concept of resilience in EU policy emerged as a result of external pressures and is primarily an acknowledgement of geopolitical constraints and realist thinking (TOCCI 2020: 178). The previous paradigm (influence through the transmission of EU values) seems to have been profoundly changed by the new concept, from a liberal value-based tool to the instrument to implement a realist idea: European strategic autonomy. It offers a realistic middle ground between over-ambitious and under-ambitious perspectives, providing the geometrical centre between peacebuilding and promoting stability. Resilience was chosen to be included in the EUGS for multiple reasons. The concept is utilised by different policy communities, which was resonating well with the aim that the strategy is global in scope and has all the EU’s policy areas, tools and instruments at its disposal (TOCCI 2020: 178). The versatility of the concept ensures its applicability in all policy domains throughout the internal and the external nexus of the EU’s foreign policy. The revival of geopolitics in the European strategic thinking also needed a new concept to rely on, to find the middle ground between unfulfillable aims, such as building democracies, and unprincipled power politics (BISOP 2019: 32). The ambiguity of the term is also intended, as it answers the complexity of the global environment (TOCCI 2020: 181). In spite of the wide utilisation of the term resilience in EU documents, it was never operationalised by either strategic document (EUGS, Strategic Compass).

Resilience is intertwined with principled pragmatism and the idea of strategic autonomy. First, resilience was included in the EU’s strategic thinking in support of its liberal self-image. Then the gradually growing geopolitical tensions turned it into a tool to find the EU’s own path towards a realist turn through principled pragmatism. In this sense, resilience provides the EU with a concept to remain true to its original, value-based liberal foreign policy approach, but also utilise elements

suiting the harsh reality of revived geopolitical rivalry. It can also be utilised both in the internal and the external nexus of the European policy landscape, exploiting the enigmatic nature of the concept. The concept appeared in European strategic thinking when the geopolitical approach was introduced in it, but it was never elaborated in either of the strategic document. It is suggested that a resilience turn occurred with the revival of *Realpolitik* in Europe. However, the concept was the main theme of the EUGS, and it slowly became an asset to achieve European strategic autonomy.

The geopolitical turn, and the EU's new-found realist approach in strategic thinking was induced by the heightened great power rivalry, and the return of war in Europe. The more contested European strategic theatre includes multiple policy areas, such as industry, digital, competition and Common Security and Defence Policy, where multiple external actors are challenging the EU. The incumbent HR/VP Josep Borrell realised quickly that resilience is not the leitmotif, but the instrument of EU strategy to achieve strategic autonomy in the growing global disorder.

Resilience became and remained an important aspect of the European strategic thinking. Its internal and external utilisation includes the European defence industry, which can be considered one of the principal elements to achieve strategic autonomy. In this policy field, based on the strategic documents, resilience is interpreted as state resistance, and viewed solely through a security lens, which is obvious from the wording of relevant documents. While, in the external nexus, the most discussed and researched policy area which considers resilience is the European Neighbourhood Policy, which includes the EU's immediate surroundings. Both areas underline that the EU accepted the reality that surrounds it and put the concept of resilience into work to achieve strategic autonomy.

Nevertheless, the terminology is far from clear in its interpretation for the various policy sectors and close allies. If resilience means state stability, it requires a top-down approach, but if it is a means strengthening local communities and building resilience, it requires a bottom-up approach at project management. If this is a concept that can only be used in military conflicts, as NATO thinks, then much more precise and measurable outcomes need to be attributed to it for building and evaluating resilience. If resilience is inward-looking, it is primarily about internal EU cohesion vis-à-vis rebellious Member States, if it is outward-looking, it is only about meeting security challenges and leaving the responsibility for implementation to neighbouring states (externalisation). If resilience is a category of thinking, an analytic framework of governance, then it implies a non-linear, complex way of thinking about the self-organising and survival capacity of local communities; if it is seen only as a quality of the state, it is seen as capability of awareness of the external environment, and ability for self-(re)organisation.

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