European Union's pursuit of resilience in the Eastern Neighbourhood

Loredana SIMIONOV[*]

Abstract

Over the past decades, the EU has faced a variety of challenges and shocks that have shaken the Union up to its very core, with crisis emerging both internally and externally (i.e. the sovereign debt crisis, terrorist attacks, refugees' crisis, Ukraine crisis, Brexit, pandemic crisis). Within this context, it is not surprising that EU's resilience has become the ultimate goal across various fields and sectors. Accordingly, resilience has found its way into EU's foreign affairs and agenda particularly after the Ukraine crisis, which has emphasised the Union's inability to predict and manage crisis emerging in its near abroad. In this context, the aim of the paper is to analyse EU's understanding of resilience beyond its borders, as a pragmatic turn, away from its transformative incentives. In practice, the paper will focus on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region, where the EU has put considerable efforts to shape a coherent approach to resilience. The argument is that, despite the EU's efforts and intensions, the pursuit of resilience abroad entails a series of contradictions and frictions between the EU's own resilience and that of the EaP countries, revolving around the dichotomy between interests and values.

Keywords: resilience, interests, values, European Union, Eastern Neighbourhood

Introduction

The series of crisis that have challenged the EU over the last decade (Ukraine crisis, refugees, Covid-19 pandemics, etc.) have gradually incited serious discussions about EU's strategic autonomy; these have helped the Union to realise that it was not enough to solely focus on its own resilience since most of the severe crisis that hit the EU have emerged outside its borders. Particularly, the Ukraine crisis has brought back into EU's agenda the geopolitical language, determining the EU to adopt a more pragmatic stance, and to export its resilience approach to its immediate neighbourhood, although focusing on its own interests.

> *"The era of a conciliatory, if not naïve, Europe has come of age. Virtuous "soft power" is no longer enough in today's world. We need to complement it with a "hard power" dimension, and not just in terms of military power and the badly needed strengthened European defence. Time*

---

[*]Loredana SIMIONOV is a researcher, PhD at the Centre for European Studies / Faculty of Law within Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, Romania, e-mail: loredana.simionov@uaic.ro.

has come for Europe to be able to use its influence to uphold its vision of the world and defend its own interests." (EC, 2020)

In this regard, EU's first clear step towards a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy has actually materialised in early 2019 when the EU took a more coherent and assertive stance towards China; hence, in its strategic outlook on China, the EU has simultaneously described it as "a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives (in different policy areas), a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance" (EC, 2019b). Such approach implies a more flexible and pragmatic EU keen on enabling a principled defence of interests and values.

Within this context, the paper aims at assessing the implications of EU's pragmatic turn in its eastern neighbourhood, by carefully examining the contradictions between protecting interests and exporting values. The first section of the paper outlines the main theoretical framework necessary to build upon the paper's argumentation. Whereas the second section offers a general overview of EU's resilient approach in its eastern neighbourhood, the third section of the paper goes forward by critically discussing the dichotomy between interests and values; the last section captures the paper's final remarks and conclusions.

1. Theoretical Account

Initially, resilience emerged as a keyword in various strategic documents concerning EU's development policy and agenda in early 2000s, thus becoming a prominent analytical tool for understanding and addressing development disparities within its member states (Béné *et al*. 2014), especially where shocks, vulnerabilities and risks are critical for the systems (Martin, 2018; Brinkmann *et al*., 2017; Hallegatte *et al*., 2016). The events in Ukraine (Euromaidan protests, annexation of Crimea, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, etc.) have shifted the attention towards crisis originating abroad so that the concept has been adopted from EU's internal policies and infused in its external actions. However, if the relevance of the concept in EU's development policy and agenda has brought about clear actions and results, when it comes to EU's actorness and external actions, the results are still questionable and discussed at length (Pascariu *et al*., 2020; Korosteleva, 2018).

Particularly, the *de-facto* adoption of the resilience concept in EU's external policies and agenda took place when the EU has launched its revised global strategy (EUGS) in 2016. Forged with the aim of enhancing EU's own resilience and that of its partners, the EUGS has introduced a new

approach to FASP, build upon "principled pragmatism". In this regard, EUGS represents a key moment in EU's FASP, as it announced a major shift in EU's modus operandi of state-building and transformation from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. In this regard, EU's newfound paradigm emerged as a blend between a more pragmatic, realist approach (stemming from a realistic assessment of the worsening geopolitical environment), coupled with EU's classical idealistic and normative vision of bettering the world.

Overall, the resilience concept is being portrayed in literature as the clear sign of the end of Europe's normative power in favour of a more pragmatic, realist one (Tocci, 2019; Juncos, 2016). However, this paradigm shift does not necessarily oppose EU's classical normative stance as it still keeps at its core the key concepts of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. This change of approach simply highlights that due to various crisis and challenges stemming from both exogenous and endogenous factors, the EU has finally accepted its limits in mitigating external shocks and crises, so that stability beyond its borders became "the new key goal to replace the liberal peace-building" (Wagner and Anholt, 2016, 11). Since the multiple shocks and crises (of both endogenous and exogenous factors) have seriously challenged the EU's international role in the emergent multi-order world (Flockhart, 2016), "a substantial overhaul of policy practices is still required to match the narrative turn" from the ambitious liberal approach to the more pragmatic resilience one (Petrova and Delcour, 2020).

The next section shall focus the discussion on the eastern dimension of EU's FASP, namely on EU's resilient approach in EU's eastern neighbourhood.

2. Resilience beyond EU's borders – the eastern dimension

Up to EUGS (2016), EU has been driven by its normative power when dealing with its neighbours, especially since it has been encouraged by the consecutive successful enlargements of 2004 and 2007; this has led the EU to further seek a diffusion of its norms and values and to outsource this integration logic beyond its borders (Manners 2002, Schimmelfening, 2008; Smith 2010).

Recently, the European Commission has issued its new policy guide toward the six eastern neighbours (The Eastern Partnership beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all) which highlights once more the transformation of FASP towards a consolidated resilience approach (EC, 2020). The document clearly outlines that the EU has slightly changed the peak of cooperation from democracy promotion to stability, thus the execution of functioning democracy. The fact that the democracy concept is missing in the discourse and architecture of this

latest policy guide highlights the realist turn in EU's FASP, as the Union has given up the status of "democracy inspector" in the region. This endeavour has a variety of implications for both the EU, the EaP, and by extension for the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, resilience has overall challenged the fundamentals of top-down global governance and refocuses on the role of "the local" to make it more responsive to people's needs (Korosteleva and Flokhart, 2020). Focusing at length on the resilience - local ownership nexus within the EU's major narrative turn, Petrova and Delcour (2020) highlight that resilience-building in the EU's neighbourhood is primarily justified by the EU's own security (Petrova and Delcour, p. 342). In this regard, "EU has left little scope (if any) to accommodate the preferences of those countries seeking closer ties with the EU, when these preferences diverged from its own vision" (Petrova and Delcour, p. 354). Subsequently, EU is actually aiming at an effective governance of the EaP countries, rather than genuine empowerment of the local (Petrova and Delcour; Korosteleva and Flokhart, 2020). In this regard resilience is not only a quality of a system, but also as a way of thinking, and a process inherent to "the local that cannot be externally engineered". In order for resilience-framed governance to become more effective, the EU needs not just engage with 'the local' by way of externally enabling their communal capacity, but to deeply understand that resilience is a self-governing project. (Korosteleva and Flokhart, 2020; Korosteleva, 208, 2019).

From a conceptual standpoint, resilience represents a systemic approach designed to attain the system's "development goals, to achieve security, to build inclusive societies or to recover from shocks" (European Commission, 2017), although not by just simply coping with crisis, but also by finding a long-term systemic solution 'to tackle the root causes' of these crises, as part of a new development agenda" (Korosteleva, 2018, p. 3). Reported to EU's specific goal of enhancing "its own resilience and that of its neighbours", it is challenging, to say the least, to define the referring system, going back to Chandler's questions about resilience of what and for whom (Chandler, 2015; Nitoiu and Pasatoiu, 2020; Korosteleva, 2020). Since the EU has left behind its missionary approach and renounced the transformative scopes in the neighbourhood, it indirectly acknowledged that its system and the one(s) of the EaP differ. Hence, enhancing resilience beyond its borders implies enhancing the resilience of at least two systems (the EU and the EaP); this translates into a a priori convergence/ harmonisation between the capabilities, goals and needs of the two systems. Since the EU has renounced transforming, thus integrating the EaP into its model (eventually making the EaP part of its system), it simply relies on the convergence between its own needs & interests and those of the EaP.

3. The interests/values dichotomy within EU's resilience approach in the Eastern Neighbourhood

The reality check brought about by the Ukraine crisis has determined the EU to shift its focus from the fragilities that the partner countries and regions face towards its own interests, needs and vulnerabilities. Accordingly, within the Eastern Neighbourhood, the *EU's interests first* realist principle started to gain ground against its previous normative stance on diffusing European values. Subsequently, when dwelling upon the interests/values dichotomy, two major questions arise: *Is EU's gravitational attraction and values still powerful?* and *Whose interests should come first in the eastern neighbourhood?*

*

EU's gravitational attraction – the power of European values

Nevertheless, the idea that European Union and its member states, in spite of all the many imperfections and complexities of its system, does hold as pinnacle the protection and human rights and the wellbeing of all European citizens, is a very powerful one. As such, through its wellbeing and way of life (especially equality) the EU will continue to be a real power of gravitational attraction for third party states. However, the attractiveness of its model is being questioned every time the EU faces a crisis, so that the Union should be warry. By giving its own model a universal value, the EU has built its ENP around the idea that all neighbouring countries will automatically aspire and strive for the European model (Simionov and Pascariu, 2019), so that the Union could assume the role of a transformative power in the region, through the means of Europeanisation. Should we look at resilience as a "human ability to adapt to various regimes of governance (including of authoritarian nature), in a struggle to survive and achieve stability" (Korosteleva, 2018), being resilient might in fact mean being "an obstacle to positive change" (Korosteleva, 2020). Since at societal level, these countries have faced a series of crisis and significant hardships over the last decades, people have grown tired and somewhat afraid of changes, thus "naturally valuing autocratic stability and strong rule over the uncertainty of democratic governance" (Bourbeau, 2013, p. 8). Consequently, EU's actorness in EaP region essentially depends on the capacity and the interests of EaP countries to assume the European model as the desirable system, thus naturally assuming its resilience and survival as being pinnacle to their own (Chandler, 2015).

EU's soft power is a real asset that has no competitor in the entire Eurasia in terms of its attractiveness (not Russia nor China are comparable to the EU). The EU is the most appealing and its power of gravitational attraction of surrounding countries lies within its economic welfare (Incaltarau

et al., 2021) and its cultural attraction. However, the latest challenges and crisis that the EU has faced over the last decade has induced additional pressure on its ability to orient and focus its resources abroad. Subsequently, a gap has emerged between the force with which the EU continues to spread its narrative outside its borders and the internal problems that highlight an apparent weakness of the EU itself.

Moreover, EU's favourite instrument in its neighbourhood - conditionality is often being perceived as a return to the past, to those missionary European powers that meddle in lesser countries' internal affairs. Furthermore, there are powerful alternative narratives within Europe and beyond that openly challenge and deny the universality of the European values, by either proposing a different hierarchy of values or even a distinct set of universal values (like Russia or China). Moreover, critics highlight that real conditionality is only and mainly imposed on the weak. This critique is entirely justifiable. The richer/stronger the countries, the less susceptible to positive conditionality, as economic interests usually trump other considerations. Moreover, it is also justifiable and in our direct security interest, to ensure that in a case like Ukraine the European financial assistance is well-spent and reforms are properly implemented. In this regard, it becomes obvious that the perspective of enhancing resilience in the region is directly dependent on the willingness and capacity of EaP countries to assume and implement reforms "in moments of abrupt change and rupture of political and social stability" (EC, 2014). This means that it is necessary to find common solutions, outside and inside, and advance better understanding of the EU's partners and of the region as a whole, by integrating a deep analysis of the local community's needs, values and behaviours.

<div align="center">*</div>

Whose interests come first in enhancing resilience in the Eastern neighbourhood?

In general, out of all the values and norms that the EU has sought to promote beyond its borders, the most contested by far was democracy and to some extent human rights. It is obviously understandable why democratisation is the most antagonistic out of all, as it does imply regime change, namely the change of those governments that the EU is dealing with and indirectly suggests them not being fully legitimate.

> *The conviction that [our] principles are universal has introduced a challenging element into the international system because it implies that governments not practising them are less than fully legitimate (Kissinger, 2015, p. 235).*

However, the EU cannot totally abandon its normative agenda, since although we cannot change non-democratic regimes, neither must we strengthen them. In practice, EU's actions in democratising its eastern neighbourhood have been lees than satisfactory to the point that the EU has

finally acknowledged and understood that democracy cannot be engineered from outside a country, but it has to naturally grow from the inside (bottom-up approach). Nevertheless, the EU cannot just abandon its democracy and human rights agenda either. First of all, such endeavour would also mean abandoning the relatively new civil societies that took roots in some countries (i.e. Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) and who need all the support they could get from the international community in promoting democratic values and principles. In this regard, it seems that the EU needs to find an alternative solution when promoting its democracy and human rights agenda so that it does not abandon nor overemphasises them. This middle ground could consist of EU's broadening the narrative; in this regard, the latest revisions of EU's FASP and particularly its strategic documents towards the EaP countries highlight that the EU's narrative shift towards `Pragmatic idealism' is gaining ground.

Principled pragmatism translates into promoting values and norms, but not at the expense of its interests. On the contrary, highlighting the newly recognised importance of interests in dealing with the EaP, the EU declared its intent to 'pursue its interests which include the promotion of universal values'. However, since 'not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards', 'the new ENP will take stabilisation as its main political priority' whereas the EU will continue 'to promote democratic, accountable and good governance […] where there is a shared commitment' (EC, 2015).

Until recently, interests were not particularly emphasised in EU's foreign policy, as the focus was mainly on EU's normative agenda, thus on diffusing its norms and values. However, a glance through EU's FASP strategic documents (EUGS, 2016; EC, 2019b; EC, 2020) highlight an enhanced focus on interests against values. In Europe's Strategic agenda for 2019-2024, the fourth priority of the EU is to promote its interests and values on the global stage.

> *"EU needs to pursue a strategic course of action and increase its capacity to act autonomously to safeguard its interests, uphold its values and way of life, and help shape the global future […] but to better defend its interests and values and help shape the new global environment, the EU needs to be more assertive and effective. This requires us to be more united in the stances we take, and more determined and effective in exerting our influence. It also means making more resources available and better using those we already have at our disposal. And it means giving a clearer priority to European economic, political and security interests, leveraging all policies to that end." (European Council, 2019)*

Throughout the text, it can be noticed the manner in which the EU is switching the importance of its priorities from promoting its values to safeguarding its interests. In this regard, building and fostering resilience of its eastern neighbours is being a scope for as long as it supports and adds on to EU's own resilience.

Conclusions

The latest developments beyond EU's border highlight that the Union resides within an increasingly hostile world defined by enhanced competition between states and regional actors, thus a more multipolar and less multilateral world; In this regard, faced with the reality, the EUGS downgraded EU's transformation agenda of bettering the world into more realist objectives of protecting the EU's interests and ensuring its resilience to eventual external crisis. As such, the pursuit of resilience in the eastern neighbourhood brought to light EU's necessity to find the right balance between exporting democratic values and ensuring the stability of its near abroad.

As such, after examining the interests/ values dichotomy within its newfound resilience paradigm, it looks like the EU has finally prioritised and stability is more important. Should the situation arise in its near abroad when the EU must choose between safeguarding its interests or stick to its values, it is clear now which course of action shall EU choose. This normative turn equips the EU with more room of manoeuvre and brings about an additional focus on differentiation, ownership, visibility and flexibility for EU's immediate neighbours. Subsequently, the resilience turn provides the neighbours with a flexible choice to decide the depth of their relations with the EU, moving towards privileged sector-based cooperation, in which they have joint ownership.

References

Béné, C., Newsham, A., Davies, M., Ulrichs, M. and Godfrey-Wood, R. (2014) Review Article: Resilience, Poverty and Development, *International Development*, 26(5): 598-623.

Bourbeau, (2013), Resiliencism: premises and promises in securitisation research, *Resilience International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, Volume 1 (retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21693293.2013.765738).

Brinkmann H., Harendt C., Heinemann F. and Nover J. (2017) "Economic Resilience. A new concept for policy making?" Bertelsmann Stiftung, Inclusive Growth for Germany. 11, Gütersloh.

Chandler, D. C. (2010), *International statebuilding: the rise of post-liberal governance*, Routledge: Abingdon, ISBN: 9780415421171.

EUGS (2016), "Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy", June 2016 (retrieved from: https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf).

EC (2014), European Commission: Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Economic Council, Social Committee And the Committee Of The Regions, Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013 (retrieved from http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/2014/joint_communication_en.pdf).

EC (2017), European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The resilience approach in EU's external action" (retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas /files/join_2017_21_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf).

EC (2019a), European Commission: Main principles of the working methods (retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/working-methods-principles _en.pdf).

EC (2019b), *European Commission: EU-China – A strategic outlook* (retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf).

EC (2020), The Eastern Partnership beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all (retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/1_ en_act_part1_v6.pdf).

European Council (2019), *A new strategic agenda 2019-2024* (retrieved from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/20/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/).

Hallegatte, S., Vogt-Schilb, A., Bangalore, M., and Rozenberg, J. (2016), *Unbreakable: Building the Resilience of the Poor in the Face of Natural Disasters*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Incaltarau, C., Sharipov, I., Pascariu, G.C. and Moga, T.L. (2021), Growth and convergence in Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries since the dissolution of the USSR — embarking on different development paths?, *Development Policy Review*, https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12547

Juncos, A. E. (2016) Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: a pragmatist turn?, *European Security*, ISSN 0966-2839, pp/1-18.

Korosteleva, E. and Flockhart, T. (2020), Resilience in EU and international institutions: Redefining local ownership in a new global governance agenda. *Contemporary Security Policy* [Online] 41, pp. 153-175. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1723973

Korosteleva, E. (2019) Reclaiming resilience back: A local turn in EU external governance. *Contemporary Security Policy*, [Online]:1-34 https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019. 1685316.

Korosteleva, E. (2018) Paradigmatic or Critical? Resilience as a New Turn in EU Governance for the Neighbourhood. *Journal of International Relations and Development* [Online]. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0155-z.

Kissinger, H. (2015), *World Order*, Penguin Books: London.

Manners, I. (2002), Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40: 235–58.

Martin, R. L. (2018), "Shocking aspects of regional development: Towards an economic geography of resilience" In Clark, G. Gertler, M. Feldman, M. P. and Wójcik, D. (eds.) *The New Oxford handbook of economic geography*, pp. 839–864. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nitoiu, C and Pasatoiu, F (2020) Resilience and the world order: the EU and the RIC states, *International Politics*, ISSN: 1384-5748, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2020.1838488, retrieved from https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-020-00259-z.

Pascariu C. G., Simionov L. M. Incaltarau C. (2020) Resilience — an emerging paradigm in EU's external action, in: Duarte A. P., Simões M., Bação P., Martins R. (eds.) *Estudos de Homenagem a João Sousa Andrade*, pp. 259-280, Almedina, ISBN: 9789724085289.

Petrova, I. and Delcour, L. (2020), From principle to practice? The resilience–local ownership nexus in the EU Eastern Partnership policy, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 41:2, pp. 336-360.

Simionov, L. M. and Pascariu, G. C. (2019), A critique to EU's (lack of) strategy towards Russia, *Politické vedy*, 22 (2), pp. 137-158.

Smith, M. E. (2010) Negotiating New Europe: The roles of the European Union, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7(5): 806-822.

Tocci, N. (2019) Resilience and the role of the European Union in the world, *Contemporary Security Policy*, ISSN 1352-3260, pp. 1-19.

Wagner, W. and Anholt, R., (2016), Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's new leitmotif: pragmatic, problematic or promising?, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Volume 37, Issue 3, retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2016.1228034

.