NEW MODELS IN THEORY-PRACTICE EXCHANGE

The case of EU support for resilience in the neighbourhood

Riccardo Alcaro and Daniela Huber

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EU-LISTCO investigates the challenges posed to European foreign policy by identifying risks connected to areas of limited statehood and contested orders. Through the analysis of the EU Global Strategy and Europe's foreign policy instruments, the project assesses how the preparedness of the EU and its member states can be strengthened to better anticipate, prevent and respond to threats of governance breakdown and to foster resilience in Europe's neighbourhoods.

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ABSTRACT

In a world of increasingly complex challenges, greater engagement between scholars and practitioners presents both sides with a significant opportunity for acquiring new knowledge. Traditional patterns of theory-practice exchange have mostly revolved around processes of knowledge transfer from scholars to officials. Academics do indeed have much to offer to policymakers; they bring a historical perspective and have extensive knowledge of the underlying causes of political and social trends, which they can also trace to policies carried out—or not carried out—by diplomats. They can thus provide policymakers with broader narratives that policymakers can use to give greater context to their action. But academics can also learn much more from policymakers. The latter do not elaborate on policies from the comfort zone of independent research. They are part of large bureaucratic processes in which multiple factors—political expediency, intra- and inter-agency coordination, number, education, and turnover rate of personnel, organizational structures, and financial resources—contribute to shaping policies. Furthermore, policymakers work within much shorter time horizons. This article takes the case of European policies in support of resilience in the EU's neighbourhood to explore the potential of a more flexible model of theory-practice engagement based on knowledge exchange rather than transfer.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1993, Alexander George wrote *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* with the aim of assessing how policy-relevant knowledge could assist in two essential functions of policymaking: "the diagnostic task and the prescriptive one" (George 1993: xix). George wrote his book at a critical historical juncture—the end of the Cold War and the onset of the United States' unipolar moment (Mastanduno 1997)—of which we are now witnessing the decline (Walt 2011) and transitioning into a multiplex world (Acharya 2017). As Bertucci et al. (2014: 64) have pointed out, in moments of rapid and uncertain changes, when policy-makers need to rethink everything as "old ideas have stopped working", scholars might be influential. In a world of such growing complexity as the one we are living in, challenges in such areas as great power competition, regional fragmentation, climate change, and public health make a growing knowledge exchange between scholars and practitioners a significant opportunity for both sides (Wilson 2007).

The assumption of complexity as the main feature characterizing today's international politics was at the core of a research project funded by the European Union (EU), called EU-LISTCO, from which this article originated. The project

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investigated the challenges posed to European foreign policy by identifying risks connected to areas of limited statehood (ALS) and contested orders (CO) in Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Within the conceptual framework of this project, we also implemented a theory-practice exchange between researchers from fourteen universities and think tanks located in the EU, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, as well as officials from four foreign policy administrations (FPAs): the foreign ministries of Italy, France, and Germany, and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Our goal was to find new ways by which the gap between the research world and the policymaking community—two diverse types of knowledge communities—can be bridged on the topic of building resilience in the context of ALS and CO.

In this article, we reflect on what we have learned from this endeavour and provide reflections on best practices for scholars wanting to engage in similar exchanges. Before doing so, we shall briefly detail the conceptual framework of the EU-LISTCO project which formed the particular focus of the theory-practice exchange. The framework focused on identifying how policymakers can build resilience in areas beset by limited state authority and/or political and social contestation. We identified two risk factors in Europe's internal and external environments that represent challenges for the external action of the EU and its member states. The first risk factor is *areas of limited statehood*, namely areas where:

> central government authorities and institutions are too weak to set and enforce rules and/or do not control the monopoly over the means of violence. … However, [ALS] are neither ungoverned nor ungovernable. Some ALS are reasonably well governed by a whole variety of actors – state and non-state, domestic/local and international – while others are not. The challenge for EU foreign policy is to foster good governance in [such] areas (Börzel and Risse 2018: 4).

Contested orders are the second risk factor, namely situations where:

> state and non-state actors challenge the norms, principles, and rules according to which societies and political systems are or should be organised. … The challenge for EU foreign policy is to foster conditions in which order contestations remain peaceful and do not contribute to governance breakdowns in [ALS] (ibid.).

Policy-wise, the relevance of these two concepts concerns the shift of focus away from outdated notions of state- or nation-building and towards the concept of *resilience*. We initially accepted the definition of resilience provided in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, which constructs it as:

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the capacity of societies, communities and individuals to manage opportunities and risks in a peaceful and stable manner, and to build, maintain or restore livelihoods in the face of major pressures (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 3).

We assumed this definition to be descriptive in nature, however, and so hardly likely to be operationalized in policy. We adopted a more analytical definition of resilience as the interposing factor preventing ALS and CO from descending into governance breakdown and violent conflict. Resilience involves societal groups trusting each other and accepting governance actors and their policies as legitimate. This definition of resilience also stipulates that institutions (formal or informal) retain the capacity to deliver public goods in a non-discriminatory way. Social trust, legitimacy, and fit-for-purpose institutions (e.g., sound institutional design or effective governance) are thus conceptualized as the sources of societal resilience (Börzel and Risse 2018: 19 and ff.; Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse forthcoming).

These concepts represented the analytical framework for the research upon which the theory-practice exchange we discuss in this work was pursued. This article is divided into four parts. Firstly, it discusses the existing academic literature on the exchange between two essentially diverse knowledge communities, i.e., the academic and the diplomatic communities. It then introduces a paradigm change from knowledge transfer to knowledge exchange and operationalizes this paradigm change through three practices: scholars-in-residence, platforms for exchange (such as joint workshops, study trips, and webinars), and shared production of policy knowledge and advice. There then follow three sections conceptualizing each of these three components and the lessons learnt from them. We conclude with a discussion of best practices and lessons on how the theory-practice exchange can contribute to the EU's and member states' support for resilient societies in ALS and CO.

2. A PARADIGM CHANGE: FROM KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER TO KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Diplomats and academics both constitute knowledge communities, but each is interested in a rather different type of knowledge and pursues a distinct mode of knowledge production.

As for the *type of knowledge* each produces, "social scientists (including IR theorists) seek to identify and explain recurring social behaviour, but policy makers tend to be concerned with the particular problems they are facing today" (Walt 2005: 37). Academics usually seek to produce "general explanations that abstract from the

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workings of policy processes" (Bertucci et al. 2014: 55) while drawing on and contributing to various larger theoretical traditions, such as realism, liberalism, constructivism, feminism, and poststructuralism. To policymakers, the debates between these schools of thought might look "esoteric" (Newsom 1995: 66) or like "a bewildering array of competing arguments" (Walt 2005: 26). Nevertheless, although policymakers are interested in factual knowledge, this does not mean that they do not implicitly rely on some sort of theory. As Hedley Bull has pointed out, the diplomatic community holds knowledge of "the current situation and how it is likely to develop rather than of the pattern of past regularities", while academics are more interested in knowledge of "the forces and conditions which shape a country's policy over the long term" (Bull 2002: 181). Both communities are, however, important for each other. For example, scholars do not regularly have access to classified or even confidential material and often lack a clear grasp of the political, cultural, institutional, and budgetary constraints that shape policymaking processes. Their work can, therefore, be enriched by an exchange with practitioners (Nye 2008: 651). Academics, for their part, can help place contingent circumstance into a wider and thicker context, given that they generally possess deep knowledge of certain countries, regions, or systemic problems that practitioners can find a useful, if not essential, resource to tap in order to make better decisions.

The *modes of knowledge production* in both fields also differ starkly. Academics need to publish single works that contribute novel ideas to the literature in order to advance their careers. It is, therefore, individual creativity that matters most (Nye 2008: 654). Foreign ministries, on the contrary, are institutions that work through consensus building. As Iver B. Neuman has argued, diplomats are engaged in a "much more bureaucratic mode of knowledge production", whereby the "writing up of a diplomatic text is not primarily a question of communicating a certain point of view to the outside world, or producing a tight analysis", but is rather "an exercise in consensus building", with diplomats tending "to reproduce extant knowledge rather than produc[ing] something new" (Neumann 2012: 7).

How then can an exchange between two such different knowledge communities work? Three models of theory-practice exchange can be found in the relevant literature. Firstly, as Bertucci et al. (2014: 65) have argued, there is the "trickle-down model" where innovative academic ideas seep into policy-making without a specific effort being made by the academics to this effect. Stephen Krasner (2009) has shown the conditions under which academic knowledge might inform the policy process with his three-streams model of policy recognition (i.e., recognition of a condition as a problem), policy alternatives (set up by experts), and politics (e.g., national mood or administrative or legislative turnover). If the three streams flow together, a policy window for knowledge transmission opens up.

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Secondly, in an alternative model, the "scholars-cum-practitioners" model (Bertucci et al. 2014), academics enter government in an official position, as is so often the case in the US. Examples of this include Henry Kissinger, Condoleezza Rice, Stephen Krasner, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Samantha Power—all foreign policy academics who have held high-level positions within the US federal government and brought academic ideas with them.

Thirdly, there is the "transmission belt" model (Bertucci et al. 2014), whereby think tankers act as transmission belts between academia and politics (Stone 2007). An example is the EU Global Strategy, whose penholder, Nathalie Tocci, heads the Istituto Affari Internazionali think tank in Rome. All three models assume that knowledge is transferred one way only; from academia into practice.

Our approach has been based on a different paradigm, moving from the knowledge *transfer* in the aforementioned models to knowledge *exchange* between two equal knowledge communities who can learn from each other, including by critically pointing out gaps in the ways the other community produces knowledge. To pursue this, we engaged in three practices of theory-practice exchange:

- scholars in residence, i.e., scholars who are seconded to foreign ministries for a certain period of time;

- platforms for exchange, such as joint workshops, study trips, and webinars; and

- shared production of policy knowledge and advice.

All three practices are rooted in *participatory action research* (PAR). As Cohen et al. (2011: 228) have pointed out, PAR expands scientific knowledge, is undertaken *in situ*, helps to cope with complexity, seeks to improve the quality of human action, is formative (i.e., shapes the subject positions of participant researchers during the process), contributes to breaking out of outdated paradigms, involves reflexivity and dialogue, and renders research usable. While PAR informed our knowledge exchange endeavour, each component of our approach was methodologically distinct from the others, as we discuss below. Furthermore, PAR was coupled with a comparative approach, since we involved four different foreign policy administrations: the foreign ministries of France, Italy, and Germany, and the EEAS. Finally, our work contributes to the literature on theory-practice exchanges by focusing on the European context, which has been considerably less studied (most such literature has been about theory-practice exchanges in the US).

3. SCHOLARS IN RESIDENCE

The first practice we engaged in was the scholars in residence exchange; that is, the secondment of two young scholars to FPAs for an extended period of time. In this section, we differentiate three scholars-in-residence models and describe our approach and methodology. We then make an evaluation of possible best practices in theory-practice exchanges based on the experiences of the scholars seconded for this project. It should be mentioned that the secondment of scholars was not new to many of these FPAs. Both the German and French FPA units involved in this study had experience with diverse models. This is also true of other foreign ministries outside of Europe, such as the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

Theory-practice exchanges based on secondment of scholars to FPAs may follow three different models, each with its own purpose, advantages, and potential problems (Figure 1 below).

The standard scholar in residence typically comes from a think tank and stays in an FPA for a period between eight weeks and six months. During that time, they typically work on a specific, pre-defined research agenda and use their time to establish new contacts, get new ideas, and use the special opportunities of the practice environment for their research. This research is usually of a more applied nature, and the results of this research and/or the scholar in residence's specific expertise are of use to the FPA. In a variation of this model, the scholar is integrated into the practice institution for the purposes of a specific, pre-defined project of the particular institution; for example, the setting-up of an early warning database project. Because the FPA is supposed to profit from the specific expertise of the scholar, the latter is usually of mid- to senior level.

The second model is what we may call the *embedded scholar*. The main difference with the above model is the full integration of the scholar in residence into the work stream of the FPA without a pre-defined independent research agenda. In other words, the embedded scholar becomes a de facto (not de jure) regular member of the FPA's staff. However, while working in the regular work stream, the embedded scholar permanently screens the work process in the FPA for meaningful points of connection to their personal research and/or the research done at their home institution. Because of the scholar's deep integration into the practice institution, they are in a perfect position not only to identify such connections but also to identify the timing and format in which academic input is meaningful or in demand and digestible in the context of the information flow in the FPA. Depending on the circumstances, the embedded scholar acts as a bridge to the academic world at large, using their various contacts (or the contacts of their home institution) to bring in the

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right people at an appropriate time and in a viable format. This model works best if the embedding is long-term, i.e., at least one year. Then, the advantage of building deep trust relationships can fully come into play. For this model to work best, measures must also be taken (and be agreed upon with the FPA) to ensure the continued academic independence of the embedded scholar, ideally by an ensured academic feedback circle.

Figure 1: Models of scholars in residence

Model	Advantages	Potential Challenges
SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE **Focus on networking** Background: think tank Engagement: short term (4 weeks to 2 months) Expertise: mid to senior level	- Excellent to cultivate trust and establish personal relations - Scholar in residence expands the host institution capabilities with a profound expertise on a research area - Tends to be very active in making contacts and building networks - Conducts applied research in the field - Valuable for expanding the expertise of the host institution - From previous experiences, can bring new practices that enhance institutional performance	- Sometimes a rigid approach (research is pre-defined) - The individual research agenda can collide with the institutional workflow - Arduous integration process in the FPA's dynamics and internal processes
EMBEDDED SCHOLAR **Focus on research** Background: academia Engagement: mid-long term (1 year or more) Expertise: junior to mid level	- Full integration into the work stream of the FPA's staff - Always looking for "connection points" with the research done at home institution - Connects the FPA to a wider community of researchers and potential partner institutions	- Academic independence can be compromised because of the deep implication in the FPA dynamics or requirements - The model works better with long term engagements
MIXED MODEL **Focus on building partnerships** Background: think tank, academia and practitioners Engagement: short term (8 weeks to 6 months) Expertise: junior to senior level	- Hybrid model: captures the best practices from the two previous models - Pursues the integration of the visiting fellow into the actual workflow of the FPA - Pre-defined research agenda is preserved and remains intact	- Accommodation of interests: individual and institutional workflows should be aligned or synchronized - The terms of the collaboration need to be clear and mutually agreed in advance

The last, *mixed model* combines aspects of the two aforementioned typologies of secondments. It takes the integration of the scholar into the actual workflow of the FPA from the embedded scholar model, but it maintains the pre-defined research agenda that characterizes the standard model. Under the mixed model, the scholar has to fulfil a double task: integrate themselves as much as possible into the actual workflow of the FPA and, at the same time, carry out a separate research endeavour; according to terms agreed upon with the FPA in advance, of course. This model is only achievable if there is a close link between the workflow and the research agenda. Ideally, the agenda is linked to a permanent aspect of the workflow or has a meta-relationship to the workflow (e.g., involves observing the workflow itself). The mixed model usually involves a shorter time frame. This may limit the depth of embeddedness and the level of trust that can be built, yet it allows for a much better calibration of the actual academic content that is being exchanged.

We worked with a rotating variant of the mixed model as we needed the scholars to perform the dual function this model involves: working with the FPAs in order to cultivate trust and establish personal relations as well as carry out our research agenda. Rotating refers to two different dimensions here. First, two researchers, one from the Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) and another from the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome, rotated between their home institutions (FUB and IAI, respectively) and a foreign policy administration, splitting their work week between practice and research institutions and liaising between them. Secondly, they also rotated between different FPAs, each spending at least six months with two different FPAs. The FUB scholar rotated between the DG for Stabilization (Abteilung S) in the German Auswärtiges Amt (AA) and the Policy Planning Unit (Centre d'analyse, de prévision et de stratégie, CAPS) in the French Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE). The IAI scholar rotated between the Policy Planning Unit (Unità di Analisi, Programmazione e Documentazione, UAP) in the Italian *Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale* (MAECI) and the Directorate Integrated Approach for Security and Peace (ISP)[1] at the European External Action Service (EEAS).

As stated above, the scholars in residence had dual roles. On one side, they were integrated into the FPAs' staffs, taking up specific work responsibilities for the units they were seconded to. For example, they were asked to work on the setting-up of a periodic Mediterranean observatory (in the Italian MFA) or produce conceptual input

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[1] Originally, the scholar was seconded to the PRISM (Prevention of Conflict, Rule of Law/Security Sector Reform, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation) unit. However, this was merged with the new ISP Directorate during her stay.

on the issue of fragility. At the same time, they also carried out a comparative meta-analysis of how policy-framing and policy-making processes unfold in the diplomatic services of the four FPAs.

In particular, the scholars worked on the question of how the FPAs conceptually frame risks and threats to European security emanating from ALS and CO in the EU's neighbourhood. They also looked at how the FPAs organized their own structural set-up to address such risks and threats.

The use of the concept of policy frames was key in this endeavour. Policy frames are ways of "selecting, organizing, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading and acting" (Rein and Schön 1993: 146). We were not only interested in the policy frames as "objects people possess in their heads and develop for explicitly strategic purposes," but even more so for their "policy framing", which includes the "interactive, intersubjective processes through which frames are constructed" in the structures of the foreign policy administrations (Hulst and Yanow 2016: 93). We made use of such policy framing because the way in which the framing process unfolds affects the ability of the FPAs to identify and explain risk factors and, based on that, anticipate threats as well as devise preventive actions and policy responses to such threats.

Critically, the scholars in residence inquired about how frames emerge in particular structures. A framing process may flow top-down from political leadership, meaning governments in particular but also parliaments. However, it may also be transmitted along a bottom-up trajectory, evolving from the elaboration of data collected and organized by embassies, information-sharing with intelligence services or other ministries (e.g., defence and development ministries), as well as through interaction with non-governmental actors. Furthermore, the framing process is affected by both the material capacity (financial and human resources) and the foreign policy tradition, or even prevailing culture, in a given FPA. The scholars relied on primary and secondary sources (see Figure 2 below), and, at the end of their first secondments in all four FPAs, they drafted four reports that served as a basis for a comparative analysis. It should be noted that the scholars in residence could not always rely on all sources, being dependent on both the respective ministries' openness in this respect, as well as on the respective case studies and their politicization (see the section below on lessons learnt).

Figure 2: Sources of the reports of the scholars in residence

	● Primary Sources	○·● Secondary Sources
Non-Interview	• Information from participant observation in the FPAs • (Policy) Documents of the respective FPAs (reports, guidelines, policy statements, press declarations, etc.)	• (Analytical) texts about respective FPs and FPAs (policy papers; academic articles; news reports, etc.)
Interview	• Interviews with members of the respective FPAs (Stabilization Unit; Crisis Units; Country Experts, etc.)	• Interviews with experts / academics about the respective FPs/ FPAs

FP = Foreign Policy; FPA = Foreign Policy Administration

3.1 Lessons Learnt: Scholars-in-residence

The scholars-in-residence reflected on their experience and provided input for best practices in terms of knowledge exchange. Practicalities, even the most prosaic ones, are important to make the exercise of knowledge exchange work. The secondment of scholars goes well beyond the organization of joint workshops and involves a number of administrative and procedural steps.

At the project application stage, we acquired letters of commitment from the FPAs. All FPAs explicitly agreed to host a scholar in residence, except in one case where the agreement was given orally and the letter made a less clear commitment. After the project was approved, the oral agreement was no longer valid, as the person who had given it had moved on to another position. As a result, we needed to re-engage the specific FPA, which was willing to honour the initial commitment although on new terms. In addition, specific internal rules of the FPAs, of which we had not been informed in advance, prevented the incorporation of persons employed by institutions from third countries. It is, therefore, crucial to formalize secondments as early as possible instead of relying on oral agreements and make sure that such agreements are in line with the FPAs' internal rules. It is advisable to avoid being too personality-bound and to always involve more than one unit or person within each institution. This strategy is important for the whole stay, so as to avoid additional challenges due to possible—indeed likely—changes of position of officials in the middle of the research process.

It is also vital to ensure that contact is maintained throughout the process, from initial application to the actual start of the secondment period and beyond.

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Established channels of consultation should also be factored in here. The fact that, in certain cases, a relationship of trust already existed through established linkages between the sending and the host institutions was extremely helpful for the work of the scholars in residence. Structural linkages are a crucial determinant of success and need to be constantly cultivated and developed.

In terms of responsibilities and tasks, it is also advisable that the scholar is presented to the FPA as an added value, both in terms of facilitating and actually speeding up contacts with a range of experts and in terms of carrying out specific tasks within the unit they are seconded to. How this can be done varies considerably, as it depends on the overall purpose and length of the secondment. As we adopted the mixed model (according to which the scholar worked *on* but also *for* the FPA), we had to carefully negotiate the amount of time the scholar would dedicate to research activities and to FPA-related tasks. Employment conditions of scholars in residence also need to be clarified early on. This relates to, among other things, the amount of time spent at the FPA, responsibilities there and within the seconding institution.

Furthermore, after consulting with the FPA, it is essential that the institutions seconding the scholars draft a concept paper and methodological guidelines for research and other activities that the scholar is supposed to carry out. This recommendation is especially important when research involves case studies, as ours did. Case study selection—in our case Libya, Tunisia, and the Sahel, as well as Ukraine and Georgia—should be agreed upon in coordination with the FPAs, as the latter have their own specific preferences and sensibilities. This was the case, for example, with Libya, where France and Italy found themselves on opposing sides of the conflict (Megerisi 2020). It is also critical that issues relating to access to information and confidentiality (e.g., publications and dissemination) are mutually settled before the secondment starts. For FPAs, confidentiality issues are extremely important, and how important also depends on the specific cultural milieu of the given FPA. Some FPAs are very open to gathering input from a scholar from the outside (and often young), while others tend to limit access to internal processes to people on the inside.

Last but not least, it is important that the sending institutions ensure an extensive support and feedback loop for every scholar in residence through at least one clearly identified senior researcher who can ensure sufficient time availability. Particularly when junior scholars are in residence, it might, at times, become necessary that senior researchers weigh in with the foreign policy administration to ensure that the scholar has access to information and FPA staff in keeping with the original arrangement. Furthermore, the situation of junior scholars might also change, and the sending institution needs to be available to discuss this.

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To conclude, there are pros and cons in the deployment of junior scholars versus more senior scholars to FPAs. In terms of the disadvantages, junior scholars—particularly when also writing their PhDs—might actually assume a triple, rather than a dual, role, working for their home institution, for the FPA they are seconded to, and on their doctoral theses. Thus, the workload for each of these tasks needs to be set very clearly in advance. Furthermore, more senior scholars might be better placed to provide policy advice on the spot and have academic experience that helps them use participant observation most effectively for their own research. In terms of the advantages, the secondment gives junior scholars the possibility to consider whether they would like to pursue their career in academia or an FPA, or somewhere in between. Both our scholars were, for example, offered a position at the FPAs to which they had been seconded that they accepted in coordination with their sending institutions, which then provided replacements. This experience shows that FPAs need to rely on academically trained junior experts, particularly in analysis units.

4. PLATFORMS FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

The second phase of our knowledge exchange exercise involved diverse joint platforms. Firstly, a *joint workshop* was convened to discuss the findings of the scholars in residence with the FPAs for a shared, systematic comparison of how the four practice institutions work on societal resilience in ALS and CO. Secondly, two *joint study trips* involving researchers and policymakers to critical countries in the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhood, notably Tunisia and Ukraine, were planned so as to expose the policymaking community and the research community to each other's knowledge and triangulate it with the knowledge of local experts and stakeholders. The exercise was meant to provide the basis for eventually fostering the production of joint policy knowledge and advice. Unfortunately, the study trips had to be cancelled due to the travel restrictions adopted by governments in both the EU and the destination countries of the study visits as a result of the COVID-19 contagion. The study trips were replaced with two *joint webinars*—one on each region. In this section, we present these platforms before identifying how the policymakers from the FPAs perceived the knowledge exchange endeavours taking place in them.

The comparative analysis of how policy-framing and -making unfold in the four practice institutions discussed in the joint workshop served three purposes. The first was to provide academics with information they usually lack concerning the structural conditions policymakers work in, thereby broadening and deepening the scientific perspective from which academics draw their assessments. The second was to provide officials with a systematic analysis of their respective work conditions, which is a relative novelty in the activities traditionally collected under the rubric of

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bridging the gap (between academia and policymakers). Third, and most important to a bridging-the-gap exercise, scholars traced challenges in existing policies back to the specific conceptual inconsistencies, organizational shortcomings, and coordination gaps in the FPAs' practices that had been highlighted in the comparative report. Linking problems in policy responses to problems in the policymaking process shed light on areas of potential improvement, in particular with regard to increasing conceptual convergence and policy consistency of EU member states and institutions. This outcome had, indeed, been one of the major motivations for the FPAs to participate in our exercise in the first place.

Figure 3: Forming communities of practice

The goal of the planned study trips had been to compare the knowledge of the international relations researchers and foreign policy analysts and the FPAs on building societal resilience in ALS and CO with that of the local stakeholders in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods, whose situation the EU policies are intended to address. For this purpose, we prepared extensive study trips with the researchers and policymakers from six European foreign policy administrations (the EEAS and the foreign ministries of France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Poland) to Tunisia and Ukraine to meet local policy-makers, civil society representatives, experts and academics, journalists to discuss issues related to the conceptual framework. The study trips were designed to facilitate a dialogue between the three knowledge communities, thereby forming communities of practice (Figure 3). There had been

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extensive interest in the FPAs about the study trips, and we had secured high level participation (heads of policy planning).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the study trips were replaced with two two-hour joint webinars; one on the case studies of Tunisia and Libya and the other on the case study of Ukraine. Both webinars were pursued through a software platform deemed safe by all foreign ministries involved in the exercise. The two webinars were designed as follows. In the webinar on Tunisia and Libya, researchers presented research findings on three main factors underlying the weakening of the central state's ability to deliver sound governance as well as the dynamics of order contestation within the given countries; migration, political economy, and radicalization. These were then discussed by local stakeholders whom we had carefully chosen in light of the topics discussed. Afterwards, the discussion was opened to the audience that included practitioners from all the involved FPAs as well as representatives of their embassies in Tunisia and Libya (both based in Tunis, given the pervading insecurity of Libya). Our experience in this webinar was that, whilst the exchange with the local stakeholders was fluid and productive, the practitioners were hesitant to get involved in the discussion. The joint webinar on Ukraine was arranged differently. Here, the webinar was divided into two parts: one on European foreign policy and ALS in Ukraine, the other on the challenges to Ukraine's internal governance and social cohesion. The two panels each included one researcher, one local stakeholder, and one practitioner. This approach worked better in two respects; firstly, it was more focused on particular issues, and secondly, practitioners were somewhat obligated to engage in the discussion, as we gave them speaking roles. Nonetheless, the FPAs appreciated both webinars and the unique exchange between the three communities of practice.

4.1.   Lessons Learnt: Practice-Theory Interaction

The FPAs had an interest in engaging in a research-based, comparative, and interactive exercise. This is important for a more cohesive EU foreign policy in the European context, but the practitioners were also keen to learn from each other. Some also welcomed the exercise because they thought that it could help them advocate for either what they deemed necessary reforms within their own institutions or for an issue or area to receive more attention for in their institution or from their leadership. Furthermore, the FPAs were interested in the research on resilience in ALS and CO, as they were, and still are, adapting to systemic changes in world politics, the neighbourhood, and within the EU itself in both conceptual and organizational terms. The exchange featured differing opinions, which were, however, presented constructively and aimed, if not at reaching consensus, then certainly at stimulating self-reflection in both communities.

During the joint workshop, one issue that FPA officials raised was the language through which the knowledge exchange takes place, which they felt to be far too distant from their own terminology. They showed quite a sceptical attitude towards academic jargon. This was evident in the diplomats' mixed reaction to the proposition that the notion of ALS could be a viable alternative to the concept of fragility with which they work on a regular basis. Officials did appreciate, to an extent, the observation that ALS might be rather well governed, including by non-state or sub-state actors. However, they showed reluctance to abandon the notion of fragility—which many FPAs, and notably the EEAS, frame as the contrary of resilience—as the conceptual premise of their understanding of the structural problems in countries and areas from which risks and threats to European security emanate. Critically, it emerged during the debate that one important reason behind the diplomats' reaction to changing their conceptual frame from state fragility to limited statehood has its roots in the institutional setting in which they work. FPA officials are expected to act within specific procedural limits defined by established diplomatic practices, which have an in-built, state-centric bias. The policy operationalization of the concept of ALS involves establishing new platforms of interaction with non-state actors presiding over governance in the areas where state control is weak or absent, which creates substantial diplomatic, legal, institutional, and procedural —rather than just conceptual—problems for policymakers. After all, FPA officials are first and foremost expected to interact with government officials of the host countries, and any shift away from policies aimed at state- and institution-building informed by the concept of ALS involves steps that diplomats can only take if certain conditions are present. These include, for example, support from the host government (such as in Tunisia), total absence of state authorities (as in Libya's southern regions), or a strong push by the political leadership at home (as in the case of Ukraine).

The joint workshop also shed light on the gap between experts and diplomats with regard to the concept of CO. Diplomats were wary of conceptualizing domestic order contestation separately from the category of internal fragility. They were more at ease with the concept when experts framed it in broader, international terms: that is, as geopolitical competition. However, they pointed out that ALS was an easier concept to work with than CO, as it is something recognized in international law, while CO is a quintessentially political concept, depending on issues diplomats can control only to a certain extent. Indeed, the FPA officials emphasized how order contestation—if framed as such—involves a different, and at times higher, order of policy-framing than the one usually occurring at the level of units dealing with crisis management. If a given situation is of high priority, it is usually the political leadership itself that directly engages with issues related to international order

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contestation. The FPA officials did acknowledge that the management of specific problems related to what they categorize under the broader heading of fragility would greatly benefit if the process of policy-framing, and consequently policymaking, were informed by regular interactions with the policy planning units and officials directly reporting to the political leaders.

Broadly speaking, then, the debate about concepts—limited statehood, fragility, order contestation, and international competition—revolved less around persuading one another of the depths and accuracy of each side's preferred concepts, as about stimulating a reciprocal process of questioning one's own assumptions. In these terms, the issue of language and conceptual discrepancy could be understood not just as evidence of an unsurmountable gap between the two knowledge communities, but, critically, also appreciated as a means to stimulate different ways of thinking about the same issues. Such wrangling over language could be called an "irritation game": both sides might get irritated, but this helps them to actually develop their own thought processes in new directions.

Besides the language and conceptual issues, the representatives from the FPAs highlighted another issue as critical to having a meaningful interaction with experts: the issue of different time horizons. The diplomats noted that academics "are more in the long-term business", whereas foreign ministry officials are "in the short-term business" because they are expected to react to "the conflict that is now, the crisis that is now" (FPA official in Rome workshop 2020). The discrepancy in time horizons was identified as a major factor behind the increasing relevance of the security-related approaches followed by the FPAs, whereas researchers' emphasis on the need for a resilience-building approach largely derives from a longer-term focus. The debate thus made it clear that exchange on matters related to risks and threats emanating from ALS or CO should include wider participation than just that of crisis management or policy planning units, as diplomats often pointed to other bodies— most notably development agencies—as meaningful interlocutors.

This notwithstanding, diplomats were willing to engage in a discussion about the relevance of resilience as a driver of crisis management policies. They admitted that, while FPAs are gradually adopting the concept into their language, they struggle to make it mainstream in their practices. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, while resilience is being adopted into the vocabulary of the FPAs, the concept remains somewhat fuzzy, except in the case of the EEAS where it is more clearly defined. Secondly, as the officials participating in the workshop pointed out, the various European development agencies—rather than those focusing on risk anticipation, crisis response, and conflict management—are the ones traditionally in charge of resilience building, as this relates to long-term processes in which social and

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economic sustainability are of central importance. The debate, nonetheless, highlighted how concepts with which FPAs already work substantively overlap with resilience and resilience promotion. Several FPAs could trace their assessment of state fragility to the relative strength or weakness of extant social contracts; a broad notion involving issues of legitimacy of state authorities and their ability to provide public services as well as reciprocal trust between different communities living in the same state. As these three elements of legitimacy, institutional design, and social trust are also understood by experts as the fundamental sources of resilient societies (Börzel and Risse 2018), the engagement once again proved that the use of different concepts is not by itself an impediment to mutual understanding and knowledge exchange but is actually key to narrowing the divide between different knowledge communities.

5. PRODUCING POLICY KNOWLEDGE

We highlighted above that academia and FPAs are interested in different types of knowledge and engage in different modes of knowledge production. This issue resurfaces here as we deal with the potential for a shared production of knowledge by the two knowledge communities, particularly policy knowledge in the form of policy recommendations. How well are scholars actually placed to give policy advice? How can they best provide policy advice in the paradigm of shared policy exchange? In a shared approach to theory-practice exchange rather than transfer, it is important to learn to listen, understand, and speak to and with each other, but to not give up the actual positionality of each side. As Nathalie Tocci has contended:

> [To] bridge the gap between academia and practice, many have called for policy relevant scholarship. But this misses the point: academics are and should continue to be academics, much like practitioners are and should continue to be practitioners. It is not up to the academic to come up with detailed policy proposals. They often lack the technical expertise, the bureaucratic experience or political instinct to know the specific what, when and how needed. Yet the academics' contribution to policy-making can be immense if they continue to be academics: using their unique skill set but with an eye for the concepts, the framing and the story-telling that are so essential to good policy-making. (Tocci 2018: 2)

The point is not so much about narrowing the gap between the two knowledge communities, but bridging it, so that both can interact and fluently communicate. This can be achieved by telling compelling stories each knowledge community can absorb to expand its own knowledge horizon and policy options structure, and by learning to understand the language of the other community, including through the irritation game mentioned above (Section 4.1).

Furthermore, when giving policy recommendations, there are always ethics-related considerations involved. As Bertucci et al. (2014: 57) have pointed out, "Scholarly outputs can also help legitimate the workings of an institution and substantiate particular policy positions while undermining others," which then "legitim[izes] particular courses of action." Scholars' ideas are always contested in academia, but policymakers might "find excuses and justification for rejecting those studies that do not fit their own policy orientations and rely instead on those that do" (George 1994: 150). One tragic example is how the democratic peace theory was translated into a political conviction that drove US neo-conservative policies in the Middle East (Ish-Shalom 2006). Similarly problematic are prescriptive ideas emanating from scholars "for which there is no empirical evidence" (Bertucci et al. 2014: 63). In light of this, scholars should apply the do-no-harm principle and be explicit about the normative assumptions of their own theories and how these might influence findings. They must also constantly reflect on the range of possible negative consequences their ideas might have if translated into policies. It is particularly crucial to reflect on the building of communities of practice with local stakeholders—such as trade unions, rights groups, syndicates, activists, think tankers, and experts—when seeking to give them a voice in sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas, expectations, and needs when it comes to European policies that directly affect them. To this end, an effort needs to be made to gather the views of dissenting actors which are usually neglected in such exchanges.

5.1. Lessons Learnt: From Research to Policy Recommendations

What, then, has been the compelling story that this exercise in knowledge exchange tells? Our conceptual framework represents a turn away from the state fragility and failing or weak statehood literature, as its definitions are neither state-centric (i.e., they bring in non-state or hybrid actors and focus on societal resilience), nor Western-centric (i.e., they focus on the local, rather than Western templates), nor stability-centric (i.e., resilience is defined as the ability of societies to adapt and change, not to remain stable). Comparing this approach to the notions adopted in the FPAs, we have found in these examples of state bias, a stability bias, and an isomorphic, Western-centric bias.

Consider first the notion of ALS. Such areas might be well-governed in terms of service provision and legitimacy of governors even if the state might not be able to set and enforce rules or have the monopoly of power. However, in the observed FPAs, limited statehood is to varying degrees equated with state fragility or failure. This is problematic, as it implies that ALS are, as manifestations of instability, a security threat to the EU and its member states. An example of this is border control, which is directly framed as a security problem by some FPAs. There is a significant gap

between these conceptualizations and research findings, however, which point to the importance of looking beyond the state to assess the governance performance as well as the legitimacy of local or hybrid arrangements (Hazbun 2016; Haddad 2020). This does not mean that the framework of the state or territorial sovereignty and integrity should be abandoned. As highlighted above, diplomats were right to point out that they need to work within the confines of international law. Nevertheless, FPAs can take account of local realities and needs below the state level without transgressing international law.

Regarding CO, the implicit assumption we found in the FPAs is that Russia is the origin of order contestation and state integrity in the East, while in the South this seems to be attributed to extreme and radical groups weakening state institutions. The added value of the concept in this respect is that it provides concrete parameters alongside which states and societies in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods of the EU, as well as in Europe or any other world region, can be compared. Cadier et al. (2020), for instance, have highlighted that it is not only Russia that is contesting order in the East, while North Africa has been subject to external order contestation since the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Hinnebusch 2003).

Regarding resilience, in the FPAs it is generally seen as the contrary of (state) fragility and understood in terms of stable and relatively effective state institutions. Perhaps this is the reason why resilience remains under-conceptualized or even fuzzy, and, therefore, under-utilized as an organizing principle of policy-framing in FPAs (with the partial exception of the EEAS). As a result, the main tendency is to conflate resilience with stability and thus continue applying Western models of governance. To show this, we briefly turn to a more in-depth comparison of expert and practitioner understandings of the three key components of resilience—legitimacy, institutional design, and social trust—so direct policy implications can be highlighted.

Legitimacy is the "social acceptance of a governance actor's right to rule" by the governed community (Schmelzle and Stollenwerk 2018: 456); a definition with which the FPAs are comfortable. Indeed, they continuously stress the need for legitimate governance. What features most prominently in the definitions of the ministries, particularly the French and the Italian FPAs, is the notion of the social contract, which they see as the ultimate source of what they define as the resilience of a strong and stable state. In this conceptualization, resilience promotion is the strengthening of social contracts in order to prevent fragile situations from descending into governance breakdowns (i.e., crises) and possibly conflicts. However, as Capasso (2020) has highlighted, there is a local-global dimension to the social contract. As an external actor, the EU promotes a particular development model that impacts the

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local social contract, rather than working within locally-owned models (Huber and Paciello 2019).

Regarding institutional design, the FPAs typically emphasize characteristics of state institutions, such as rule of law, accountability, and transparency. Locally, however, this is often seen as a Western template associated with a normative foreign agenda, rather than a context-sensitive one, drawing on local concerns and accommodating a plurality of governance actors. For example, the EU might foster transparency, rule of law, and the accountability of Iraq's state institutions, but there are powerful actors such as the Popular Mobilization Units that are part of a hybrid security governance arrangement. How are they to be integrated into this scheme? The policy implication of these considerations is that while institutional reform and capacity-building programs may meaningfully promote resilience, the simple export of Western blueprints and scripts is bound to fail. Thus, such programs have to be undertaken in full consideration of the plurality of local governance actors, local governance practices, and the prevalent social norms in which governance institutions are embedded.

Finally, social trust, the glue which holds societies together, is understood as a "cooperative attitude" between individuals and groups of individuals (Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse forthcoming). This concept hardly features in the FPAs conceptualizations of resilience, and this is understandable. Social trust is particular to each society and difficult for an external actor to build, outside of practices like active conflict mediation, reconciliation processes, and inclusive dialogues. The latter in particular need to include some actors which the EU is not yet ready to work with (Hamas and Hezbollah, for example). Even more important for the EU and its member states as external actors is that they might not be trusted locally. Such mistrust might have historical roots, for example, vis-à-vis their being former colonial powers, but it also has current roots. Bicchi et al. (2020: 37) have shown, for instance, that current EU migration policies have seriously harmed trust in the EU. Therefore, trust in an external actor also needs to be considered as an important political resource.

To sum up, a key message of our theory-practice exchange exercise has been that the FPAs might consider qualifying their more state-centric, Western-centric, and stability-centric concepts in favour of more local models, actors, and norms. This shift in approach is of the essence in order to lend greater sustainability to EU and member states' support for resilience and thereby contribute to reducing the risks and threats emanating from ALS and CO.

Are the FPAs structurally prepared for such a paradigm shift? Supporting the legitimacy claims of local governance actors, locally embedded institutional reforms,

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and inter-societal cooperative attitudes are not especially easy for FPAs to translate into policies when the relevant structures are missing. Some FPAs have created stabilization units in response to "fragility", but the availability of resources varies, while some FPAs have no such structures at all. Nevertheless, even when such structures exist, to make resilience building the central tenet of neighbourhood policies would require the FPAs to transform into structurally coherent agencies capable of punctual contextual analysis, sound prioritization of objectives, consistent mobilization of resources and long-term commitments, and a high degree of self-reflexivity. For institutions constantly pressed to find workable trade-offs between practical needs and political preferences amid contrasting national interests, and whose daily work is mostly absorbed by emergencies or crises, this is a tall order—perhaps even an impossible one. This is not to say that improvements at all the structural levels cannot be made. To do so, we propose best practices including: expanding the ability of the embassies to gain local knowledge and inform policies with greater context assessment; strengthening ties between early warning and in particular crisis management units and offices entrusted with longer-term commitment policies, such as development agencies; and structurally embedding exchanges with European and local academics, for example through periodic round-tables or funding of research, including on the impact of foreign policy on the resilience of societies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This article has engaged with the question of how EU foreign policy research and policymaking communities can find new ways to interact in a mutually beneficial pattern. Our initial assumption was that old models of knowledge transfer, whereby academics directly or indirectly inform policymaking, should be integrated with the more flexible approach of knowledge exchange.

Academics have much to offer to policymakers; they bring in a historical perspective and have extensive knowledge of the underlying causes of political and social trends, which they can also trace to policies carried out—or not carried out—by diplomats. They can thus provide policymakers with broader narratives that policymakers can use to give greater context to their action. What academics cannot do, unless they are specifically tasked with elaborating on detailed policy proposals, is tell policymakers how to do their jobs.

Most importantly, academics can also learn much more from policymakers, most notably by getting a deeper grasp of the specific conditions in which policymakers work. The latter do not elaborate on policies from the comfort zone of independent research. They are part of large bureaucratic processes in which multiple factors—

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political expediency; intra- and inter-agency coordination; size, education, and turnout rate of personnel; organizational structures; and financial resources—contribute to shaping policies. Furthermore, foreign and security policymakers work within much shorter time horizons than academics who have the luxury of taking the long-term view, and they are expected to react to crises in a matter of days or weeks. Learning about how policymakers frame problems of security and engage in a complex policymaking process is of the essence for academics keen to not just investigate policy impact but policymaking itself.

During this project, we evaluated different practices of knowledge exchange. One was the temporary secondment of scholars to four FPAs with the dual task of participating in the FPAs' daily work and observing the policy-framing and making processes that we could then compare. Another was the establishment of joint platforms for knowledge exchange, including joint workshops and the organization of joint study trips to critical countries of interest. While the study trips had to be cancelled due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions, the joint webinars that replaced them suggest that the concept remains very much valid. We were thus able to make an attempt at producing joint knowledge; that is, content infused by the motivations both communities.

A main conclusion from this endeavour is that knowledge exchange is always a process of mutual learning. Academia can learn as much from FPAs as it learns about them, and vice versa. Diplomats may be interested in diverse types of knowledge, yet they tend to produce the knowledge they work with internally, according to pre-ordained bureaucratic processes. This does not mean that the process is entirely insular, however. In fact, the knowledge of FPA officials is equally informed by the specific local conditions of other countries, particularly when it so heavily relies on the embassies to provide inputs to knowledge production within the ministry. Thus, scholars should be sensitive and open to different approaches and working conditions in the FPAs. Ideally, unless they are explicitly requested to provide advice, experts should primarily interact with diplomats in order to understand the conditions in which the knowledge that diplomats act on is produced. This includes factors such as bureaucratic processes that differ in terms of staff and financial resources, access to political leadership, and intra-ministerial and inter-agency coordination. This helps create a constructive engagement in which diplomats' assumptions may be questioned in a framework that they can relate to. For instance, inviting officials to conferences where they are lectured at by academics or experts on how they should do their job is hardly meaningful, but creating special sessions within expert events in which a bilateral exchange unfolds may greatly help experts understand what advice or aid they may realistically give. Diplomats and officials greatly benefit from experts or academics providing them with historical, social,

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political, and other relevant context, or even grand narratives that help them better grasp the motivations and conditions of the foreign actors with whom they interact (Tocci 2017). At times, however, FPA officials may also need specific recommendations from experts, usually of high seniority. Whatever the kind of interaction sought by the academic or expert, it ought to be flexible to adapt in situ to the practitioners. More specifically, there are organizational and administrative issues that academics need to bear in mind when they reflect on how policies are worked out by practitioners in order for a knowledge exchange between experts and practitioners to be meaningful.

In terms of content, our endeavour revolved around how EU member states frame risks and threats emanating from neighbouring areas. We contrasted the concepts of ALS, CO and societal resilience with the concepts informing policy-framing and policymaking in the four FPAs; in particular fragility, stability, and social contracts. We identified compatibilities—for instance, between order contestation and fragility—and even partial overlaps—such as between our assumption that legitimacy and trust are key sources of resilience and the focus of some FPAs on the viability of the social contract. We also identified significant gaps, in particular due to what we perceive as lingering isomorphic state, stability and Western biases within the FPAs, to which we opposed the notions of hybrid governance, societal resilience—understood as the ability to change peacefully—and the value of local norms and practices in sustaining the legitimacy of governance arrangements and social trust. While our main policy recommendations concern the need for FPAs to move closer to these notions, we also tailored our ideas to respond to the greater knowledge of the political, institutional, organizational, and financial constraints weighing on policymakers.

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