Strengthening resilience in the EU's neighbourhood

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EU-LISTCO

Europe's External Action and the Dual Challenges
of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders

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ABSTRACT

This policy paper contributes to the debate on the implementation of the new resilience paradigm central to the EU's Global Strategy. It argues that the EU should clearly distinguish between regime stability as the capacity to persist or 'bounce back', and resilience as societal capacities to undergo processes of adaptation and transformation. Moreover, the EU should focus on legitimate institutions, appropriate institutional design, and social trust when strengthening resilience in its neighbourhood. In order to help build resilience the EU needs to know its neighbours, find the right partners in its neighbourhood, and provide the policy space for new resilience partnerships to develop.

KEYWORDS: resilience, EU Global Strategy, legitimacy, social trust, institutional design

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union's (EU) external action has undergone significant changes over the past few years. The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) identifies crises as the 'new normal', calling for an anticipatory approach to future crises and a longer-term, preventive approach to vulnerabilities. The EUGS has received praise from some commentators for its moderate, pragmatic approach to external action. As Jan Techau notes on Strategic Europe:

"Importantly, it [EUGS] stops overestimating the transformative power of the EU, which observers believed to be very strong only to find out that nearly nowhere in its wider neighbourhood has the EU had any decisive influence on how things unfolded" (Techau 2016).

Moreover, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been revised in accordance with the EUGS, putting greater emphasis on security and stability in the EU's neighbourhood, as a precondition for economic development. A key benchmark of the EUGS and the revised ENP is the new focus on strengthening *state* and *societal resilience* in the European neighbourhood, which constitutes a major "conceptual leap" at the policy level (Ülgen 2016). The EUGS specifies that investing in the resilience of states and societies beyond the Union's borders is the way forward to enable societies to minimise the impact of crises and thus deter potential threats from the EU. However, what resilience is and how the EU can influence components of resilience in its immediate neighbourhood remains opaque in the EUGS (Bargués-Pedreny et al., forthcoming). What are the cornerstones of resilience the EU ought to support? How can external actions, policies and instruments contribute to strengthening resilience?

This policy paper contributes to the debate on the implementation of the new resilience-paradigm, building on recent research within the EU-LISTCO project. It argues that the EU should clearly distinguish between regime stability as the capacity to persist or 'bounce back' and resilience as societal capacities to undergo processes of adaptation and transformation. Moreover, it argues that the EU should focus on *legitimate institutions*, appropriate *institutional design*, and *social trust* when strengthening resilience in its neighbourhood. The paper concludes with an outlook on what policy makers and practitioners can expect from EU-LISTCO's research efforts in the coming years on how to strengthen resilience in the European Union's southern and eastern neighbourhood.

MAIN ARGUMENTS

EUROPE'S EXTERNAL RISKS AND THE NEED FOR EXTERNAL ACTION

Two main external risks exist in the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhood: First, risks arise from areas of limited statehood where central government authorities are too weak to set and enforce rules, and do not hold a monopoly over the use of violence. Second, they arise from areas in which the political and legal order is contested by domestic and/or external actors. If areas of limited statehood and contested orders deteriorate into governance breakdown and/or violent conflict, they transform from risks to immediate threats to the EU. For example, if citizens face severe shortages in terms of goods and service provision that state, non-state, or external actors

do not compensate for, governance breakdown becomes imminent. Scenarios where violent conflicts turn into threats for the EU are cases in which multiple violent actors compete with state authorities over the control of territory. Libya and Syria are just two virulent examples of governance breakdown and violent conflict in the EU's neighbourhood. These brief illustrations show that the EU is in need of external action in cases where risks of limited statehood and/or contested order could transform into direct threats for the EU.

BEYOND STATE-BUILDING AND MERE STABILITY

For a long time, the EU's responses to risks in its southern and eastern neighbourhood have been guided by ideas of state-building and the promotion of stability. However, a narrow focus by European policy makers on stability proves to be problematic. Interventions favouring stability have been particularly criticised in cases of (semi-)authoritarian countries, where the ENP was found to be unsuccessful with regard to fostering effective and democratic governance at the same time (Börzel & van Hüllen 2014a). Predatory, repressive, and corrupt state behaviour abounds in many areas surrounding the EU. Supporting the stability of these regimes does not improve the governance situations of their citizens. Moreover, approaches of liberal state-building conceptualize the existence of central state institutions as the blueprint solution to warding off security risks and threats. As such, they are also likely to strengthen predatory state institutions that fail at their key responsibilities towards their citizens. Additionally, state-building is not only cost and resource intensive, but also unlikely to reach its goal of establishing consolidated state institutions as recent failures of state-building in Afghanistan, Iraq or Somalia have underlined (Lake 2016; Risse & Stollenwerk 2018).

In response to the shortcomings of state-building and stabilisation efforts, the EUGS takes a cautious stance on working with repressive regimes. This new approach is also well-suited to meet the criticism that the former ENP was faced with: That of being naïve regarding the willingness of state partners to implement democratic reforms (Techau 2016). The strategy underlines that there are many ways to support "inclusive and accountable governance" (EUGS 2016: 25/26). In addition, the EUGS explicitly references *societal* resilience next to state resilience, opening up windows of opportunity for engaging more thoroughly with civil society partners and governance actors other than the state.

LEGITIMACY, APPROPRIATE INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND SOCIAL TRUST AS A COMPASS FOR STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

As a middle ground between liberal state-building on the one side and mere stabilisation efforts on the other side, strengthening resilience can hedge against the criticisms previous interventions have faced (Bargués-Pedreny 2015; Juncos 2017; Wagner & Anholt 2016).

Strengthening resilience is a more modest approach compared to large-scale state-building, as governance solutions do not necessarily have to be provided by central state institutions. Indeed, recent research has shown that effective governance does not necessarily require consolidated statehood (Börzel & Risse 2015; Lee et al. 2016; Risse & Stollenwerk 2018). Strengthening resilience means supporting existing local capacities that are able to provide *effective governance* solutions to citizens.

Furthermore, opposed to mere stabilisation efforts, the concept of resilience comprises *adaptive* and *transformative* abilities of societies to manage opportunities and contain risks in a peaceful and stable manner. Strengthening existing local governance arrangements is less ambitious and more flexible, following a bottom-up logic to peace. Moreover, it makes long-term consolidation of essential governance provisions more likely (Brozus et al. 2018).

However, supporting the resilience of existing local governance arrangements constitutes partly new and uncharted territory for the EU's external action in many regions. Therefore, EU-LISTCO argues that the EU and its member states require a *conceptual compass* for identifying local governance arrangements that either possess three components of resilience or have good prospects of developing these in the foreseeable future:

First, *legitimacy* is key for the resilience of a governance arrangement. Empirical legitimacy as the social acceptance governance actors and institutions enjoy among local populations matters from two perspectives. The first perspective is that the higher the legitimacy of state and non-state governance solutions in the eyes of the citizens, the better are the chances of the EU to successfully contribute to making these governance solutions more effective. The second perspective underlines that the EU's external actions themselves are in need of being legitimate from the perspective of local populations in order to be effective (Börzel & van Hüllen 2014b).

Second, *institutional design* matters for the resilience of a governance arrangement. The more a governance arrangement between the EU and local actors is characterised by sufficient financial and human resources, a thorough institutionalisation at different levels of governance, and a concise legal framework, the more likely it will be able to ensure effective governance (Risse & Krasner 2014). Nevertheless, the institutional design of governance arrangements between the EU and local actors also needs to be able to flexibly adapt to local circumstances or conditions that change over time.

Third, *social trust* is an important component of societal resilience, as trusting relationships between individuals or groups of individuals can enable effective governance (Draude et al. 2018). This means that actors and institutions that are working to increase social trust should be favoured in interventions by the EU. Institutions that foster social trust are likely to provide citizens with positive everyday experiences of fairness and equality. However, the EU needs to be aware that social trust within specific societal groups may also result in social exclusion and severe intergroup tensions, generating challenges for the EU and its local partners.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE EU: HOW TO STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE?

1. Know your neighbours

Acknowledging the plurality of governance actors and arrangements in the EU's neighbourhood is a first important step for the EU and its member states to strengthen resilience. Substantial efforts

should be undertaken by the EU to better understand existing social practices and the vested interests of the stakeholder groups in its neighbourhood (Lederer 2018: 3).

2. Find the right partners

When applying the conceptual lenses of legitimacy, institutional design, and social trust systematically to the EU's neighbourhood, central state institutions may still turn out to be the most adequate partners, but they are not so by default. Therefore, the EU should consider external and non-state actors as partners to foster resilience. Moreover, the EU's external actions can also aim at promoting cooperation between non-state governance solutions and local/central state institutions.

3. Provide the policy space for new resilience partnerships to develop and unfold

The EU and its member states need to question and re-think established mindsets of foreign and security policy in the course of the ongoing debate on the implementation of the EUGS. 'Resilience partnerships' should be considered with a variety of local state and non-state actors, provided that they meet the resilience criteria sketched out above. Shifting the focus from state-building and stabilisation to strengthening resilience requires the EU to re-evaluate and adjust their policies and instruments accordingly.

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ABOUT EU-LISTCO RESEARCH

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. Continuous knowledge exchange between researchers and foreign policy practitioners is at the cornerstone of EU-LISTCO. Since the project's inception, a consortium of fourteen leading universities and think tanks have been working together to develop policy recommendations for the EU's external action toolbox, in close coordination with European decision-makers. The EU-LISTCO Policy Papers are peer-reviewed research papers based on findings from the project.

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