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# **Resilience as an emergent European project? The EU's place in the resilience turn**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper looks at the development of the resilience approach in EU foreign policy. Building state and societal resilience in the EU's neighbourhood has been identified as one of the key priorities in the EU Global Strategy (2016). Here we critically analyse these developments and seek to provide an account of the complex dynamics within which the EU's approach to resilience is located. We argue that EU resilience-thinking is influenced by three broad dynamics – the neoliberal and Anglo-Saxon approaches to resilience in the sphere of global governance; the particular normative discourse of the EU as a certain type of global actor (the EU as a normative/liberal power); and the multilevel character of the EU with its complex institutional structure and path dependencies which results in decoupling. As a consequence, the 'translation' of resilience constitutes an emergent project at the EU level, but also brings with it new challenges. The argument will be illustrated through a study of the EU Global Strategy and the Joint Communication on resilience in the neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** EU Global Strategy, European foreign policy, decoupling, governmentality, path dependency, resilience

## **Introduction**

The resilience approach has become a major feature of recent European foreign policy as well as other areas of EU policy-making such as civil protection, environmental planning and infrastructure protection. Building state and societal resilience in the EU's neighbourhood has been identified as one of the key priorities in the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) (HR/VP, 2016).

Resilience is promoted as the answer to a number of concerns regarding long-term development and short-term emergency intervention, disaster risk reduction, political and regional instabilities in the neighbourhood and enlargement.

This article looks at why the EU has chosen resilience as its strategy and how this fits with existing EU discourses and practices. In doing so we highlight the contradictions and limits of resilience as it is ‘translated’ through the EU’s different institutions, actors and narratives. We argue that rather than clearly constituting a new paradigm in EU foreign policy, we can detect significant differences in understandings of resilience which are related to the multilevel and complex structure of the EU and institutional legacies. These together help explain mismatch and overlaps between the general notion of resilience and its application to EU foreign policy.

Despite the relatively recent arrival of the resilience vocabulary to EU policy-making, there has already been a lot of debate as to whether this constitutes a new ‘turn’ in EU foreign policy. Resilience in EU foreign policy can be seen as a new paradigm, which might radically transform this policy area and contribute to a more pragmatic approach (Juncos, 2017), the pursuit of global justice (Tonra, 2018) or the foundation for true self-governance in the neighbourhood (Korosteleva, forthcoming). Others have described resilience as ‘a perfect middle-ground between over-ambitious liberal peacebuilding and the under-ambitious objective of stability... [that] resonates with the principled pragmatism that the Global Strategy embraces’ (Wagner and Anholt, 2016: 415).

The article proceeds by setting out what resilience is and why it has risen to prominence. We identify three broad dynamics that shape the emergence of resilience in EU discourse giving it a somewhat different character to what the above accounts might envision. The first is the broadly neoliberal character of current approaches to resilience in the sphere of global governance. The second relates to the power of the EU’s discourse and its self-

conception as a normative actor. We suggest that the second dynamic is often at odds with the first. The third dynamic is the multilevel character of EU governance and the complexity of its institutions which mediates or ‘translates’ both of the above.

In the following discussion, we note the broader turn in global governance and its neoliberal character. However, we also contrast this with the normative aspect of EU discourse, particularly in relation to its role as a global actor. The EU remains strongly wedded to liberal norms and values whose universalist character is essential to the EU’s narrative of being a normative power, which contrasts with the more pragmatic characteristics of resilience discourse. As such, the EU’s resilience turn has an emergent character that cannot simply be explained as global governmentality even if this is a strong determining factor. The multilevel character of the EU and the need for institutional coherence is the third factor. This leads to resilience being seen as way of promoting a joint and comprehensive approach. We argue, however, that this can also lead to decoupling where supposed adherence to norms at the international level fails to translate into changes in local practices. Finally, we also need to take into account different institutional features and path dependencies as the diffusion of new ideas like resilience ends up being translated through existing organizational rules and practices.

For these reasons we are sceptical of those views of resilience that see it as transformative since, first, the EU’s resilience approach can be partly seen as a continuation of neoliberal forms of governance; and, secondly, the implementation of resilience at the EU level is shaped by different discursive and institutional legacies and path dependencies that might prevent the institutionalization of a new paradigm. We suggest it also comes at the price of generating confusion and tensions between a neoliberal resilience discourse that emphasises transformation, adaptability and pragmatism and the more universal liberal norms and values that help define the EU’s identity. We suggest that the EU’s resilience turn is

actually more about *projecting* a certain image of the EU as having a joint and comprehensive approach, but that in doing so, the resilience turn may actually create greater incoherence.

The argument of the paper is supported by a range of empirical observations derived from documentary analysis of public and semi-confidential EU documents, participatory and non-participatory observation and nine interviews with EU policy-makers involved in the drafting of the EU's Joint Communication on Resilience (hereafter Joint Communication). Triangulation of these different data sources provides a fuller account of the dynamics behind the adoption of a resilience approach at the EU level and the challenges connected to it. The empirical data find their origins in our examination of six events organised with EU policymakers in Brussels in 2017 on the topic of resilience, including several roundtables, seminars and a training event with EU officials on the same topic. These observations were then complemented with nine semi-structured qualitative interviews with diplomats and officials from the European Commission (DG ECHO and DEVCO), European External Action Service and EU Delegations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and over the phone between September 2017 and January 2018. They are coded to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

### **Explaining the emergence of resilience: neoliberal governmentality, path dependency and decoupling**

Resilience is an idea that seems to have emerged from nowhere. Not many years ago it was barely visible in policy papers except perhaps more specialist analysis of ecological crisis. Drawing on the arguments of writers like C.S. Holling, attention started to shift to how human behaviour might change in response to systemic instabilities and uncertainties. Holling suggests that when faced with unexpected external shocks, the constancy of a system is less important than the ability of its essential relationships to withstand these shocks and persist

(1973: 1). With this understanding, focus has shifted away from the idea that we can or indeed should protect ourselves through adopting the correct set of policies and instead sees crises and shocks as enabling critical self-reflection, learning and adaptation (Berkes et al., 2003: 14-20). At the societal level, resilience implies the ability of communities to withstand external shocks through innovation, social learning and developing the capacity to cope with change (Adger 2000: 361). The resilience discourse is also underpinned by the belief that complex life is no longer bound by fixed laws or structures. Therefore, we cannot rely on the certainties of rational behaviour or prediction. The discourse of resilience seeks governance through complexity and uncertainty placing emphasis on the contingent, unstable and unknowable character of reality.

To understand resilience as a form of governance is to examine developments in policy-making aimed at promoting strategies of learning and adaptation, making communities and individuals more reflexive and self-aware and fostering individual and community self-governance, self-reliance and responsibility. We might talk of this as ‘governing through complexity’ (Chandler, 2014). Critical scholars of resilience have noted how resilience promotes strategies of learning and adaptation in order to shift emphasis, or responsibility, from states onto populations so that they are better able to govern themselves (Evans and Reid, 2014, Mavelli, 2016). Its usefulness to policy-makers derives from its ability to play a certain role in managing or governing populations from a distance, through ‘the conduct of conduct’ (Foucault, 2008).

This Foucauldian argument has dominated the more critical understandings of resilience which see it as an attempt to try and embed a set of neoliberal norms of behaviour and self-governance (Walker and Cooper, 2011). We can summarise the neoliberal understanding of resilience as based on certain key features. It promotes governance from a distance, using techniques of facilitation and monitoring (Joseph, 2014). It seeks to devolve responsibility for being resilient and managing crises and places strong emphasis on the role

of civil society and the private sector. This understanding of resilience also embraces neoliberal ideas of the market and enterprising behaviour. It encourages initiative and enterprise in the face of challenges, and sees crises and disasters as transformative opportunities. The resilient subject is to be considered according to its resourcefulness and ability to cope in the face of adversity and even its willingness to take advantage of opportunities that crises might present (Evans and Reid, 2014). The UK is a prime example of how this approach to resilience can be applied to the governance of domestic populations with resilience playing a prominent role in civil contingencies strategy, but also in the UK's international development strategy (DFID, 2011).

In what follows, we take account of this close relation between resilience and neoliberal approaches to governance, but also argue that account needs to be taken of the way that resilience is developed within the complex ensemble of EU institutions. Rejecting the view that resilience is an entirely new discourse and set of practices, we argue the need to see resilience in relation to already existing – but evolving – discourses, as well as more material social structures, practices and institutional frameworks. This means looking at the general dynamics behind the global resilience turn to take into account the specific issues connected to the EU as an institutional ensemble (Jessop 2004), comprised of competing ideas and interests across multiple scales. Such an approach can shed light on the implementation of this putative new 'turn' in EU foreign policy.

While many accounts of resilience in international relations see it as neoliberal governmentality (see above), drawing on organisational theory allows us to illuminate the ways in which new ideas (such as resilience) diffuse and are institutionalised in different organisational settings. In other words, the neoliberal approach to resilience is not just adopted at the EU level, instead it is adapted, 'edited' or 'translated' (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008). Two insights are of particular relevance here. The first one is that of path dependency which

acknowledges that institutions are never created in a vacuum, i.e. there is no *tabula rasa*, but that the diffusion and institutionalisation of new ideas build upon previous institutional configurations. Analyses that take political interactions as a ‘one-shot interaction’ miss this point, as well as the fact that historical development can trap actors in concrete dynamics. This means that not only does history matter, but what also matters is the particular sequence of events. External forces will not have the same result in every period; previous political outcomes will determine the impact of current external forces and then a specific historical development or ‘path’ (Hay and Wincott, 1998; Pierson, 2000: 251). The existence of these institutional legacies will favour some decisions and exclude others, eventually, shaping the political outcome. Path dependency also implies that particular courses of action, once introduced, can be difficult to reverse. Institutions are ‘sticky’ or resistant to change. What is more, path dependency is self-reinforcing in the sense that steps in one direction induce more steps in the same direction (Pierson, 2000: 252).

Linked to this is the second key concept, that of decoupling which we understand here in relation to how supposed adherence to approaches and norms at the international level fails to translate into transformative changes in local practices, resulting in particular problems of compliance and configuration (Gizelis and Joseph 2016: 5). As a consequence of institutional legacies and path dependencies, the diffusion of new ideas such as resilience never takes place as expected; instead their implementation is mediated by existing organisational rules and practices which lead to decoupling (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Decoupling also results from the fact that, although organisations seek to adopt institutional myths as part of their organisational agendas and policies as a way to maintain legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), they rarely possess the resources or willingness to fully align their institutional practice with new organisational discourses.



As a result of these competing logics, what we observe is that resilience discourses have been generally adopted in EU foreign policy from development to security policies, but the institutionalisation of these discourses continues to be very limited (or shallow) since full institutionalisation would require an overhaul of the EU's institutional architecture and a rethinking of its main rationale for intervention. It would also require full agreement among member states, EU institutions and other relevant actors, many of whom have strong, often conflicting, interests in this area. This is compounded by the fact that there is no clear agreement as to what the concept of resilience means in practice both among academics and practitioners, making the process of 'editing' or translation into institutional programmes and policies even more difficult (Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008; Garshagen, 2013: 41). The following sections apply these theoretical insights to explain the overall adoption of resilience approaches at the EU level, but also the precise ways in which they have been adopted/translated in practice.

### **The neoliberal aspects of EU resilience**

In this section we look at those aspects of the EU's approach that might be considered similar to neoliberal governmentality, particularly the focus on building resilience at the individual and community level. According to one of the interviewees, 'resilience is not a new objective, but a way of operating – resilience as an approach, more specifically, a transversal approach, one that focuses on risk identification, endogenous capacities, dealing with communities and individuals, but also a political and strategic approach' (Interview 2). Another interviewee explained that 'the general concept is about building the ability of the individual, the community, the country to cope and recover from stresses and shocks. This concept has been at the core of work of ECHO and DEVCO for the last few years.' The 'resilience marker' is particularly well established in EU development and humanitarian policies (Interviews 2, 3, 6). Others identify the need to adopt a 'systems approach'

(Interviews 2, 9); a ‘bottom up’ approach (Interview 3); focusing on local ‘capacities’ and not just vulnerabilities (Interviews 2, 3, 7).

The EU’s approach to resilience represents a turn away from full intervention in favour of more distant approaches that shift responsibility away from the international community onto local actors (Joseph, 2014; Pospisil and Besancenot, 2014). This operates under the positive guise of local ownership and capacity building and invokes a progressive discourse of empowerment (Interviews 2, 3; Juncos, 2017). Resilience appeals to individual interests, to civil society, and to national leadership. However, this is done according to a global template that is decided not at the grass roots level, but among international organisations, NGOs, donor organisations and other international actors. The EU’s approach to resilience claims to help ‘partner countries’ by embedding the right policies into their national development strategies and promoting people-centred approaches (European Commission, 2013: 3; HR/VP, 2016). This is specifically framed as capacity to adapt. The EU recognises the leading role of partner countries while effectively telling them what their practices should be. This includes such contested notions as promoting public-private partnerships and better engagement with global markets (European Commission, 2012: 9; HR/VP, 2016: 26; Commission and HR, 2017: 6).

An institutional approach that works from a distance by seeking to implement various forms of benchmarking, standards, peer review and knowledge dissemination is consistent with recent internal EU governance strategies such as the Lisbon strategy and Open Method of Coordination and external ones such as the enlargement process. These work by attempting to tighten up mechanisms and procedures, while also appearing more *laissez faire* and distant in their manner of intervention. Many even claim that the EU was already doing resilience-building, but it did not call it that way (Interview 3). Hence, resilience constitutes another example of ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Interview 1; de Milliano and Jurriens, 2016: 86).

The arguments above can be found underpinning the strategies of key international organisations, most notably the UN (UN/ISDR: 2008), OECD (2008), and the World Bank (2013) and, as such, one can argue that resilience is now a core part of a modern international administration paradigm for overseas intervention (Garschagen, 2013). In this respect, the EU's resilience approach is consistent with a trend across a range of international organisations concerning how best to organise international intervention (Interviews 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9). In developing the new Joint Communication, the EU has 'borrowed' from these existing approaches, namely, that of the UN (Interviews 1, 2). As the new Joint Communication states, '[t]he EU has an interest in developing a shared understanding and practice around resilience' with other international partners, including the UN, the World Bank and the OECD (Commission and HR, 2017: 21-22; Interview 2). This new approach is generally packaged as a way to promote more cost-effective interventions, with downscaled goals based on 'best fit' solutions (European Commission, 2012: 3). Yet, the diffusion of these ideas and its adoption at the EU level needs to be seen not just from the perspective of (rational) cost-effective interventions, but as a way for the EU to maintain its legitimacy as an international actor in line with the EU's multilateralist approach and its desire to be 'perceived' as an effective and legitimate international actor (Interview 2). This leads to some divergence from the neoliberal approaches dominant among other international organisations. The following section explores two more dimensions of this process of decoupling.

### **Translating the resilience discourse: path dependence and decoupling**

While at the global level resilience is embedded in neoliberal discourses and governance from a distance, within the EU the process is conditioned by meso-level dynamics such as different institutional features and path dependencies, often resulting in a process of decoupling. There are two aspects to this process of decoupling. One is linked to the nature of the EU's own

liberal (structural) foreign policy. The second one has more to do with the EU's specific organisational properties which constrain the adoption and implementation of a resilience approach.

*The EU's liberal foreign policy: in search of an identity*

Firstly, the EU's liberal foreign policy shapes the way the EU has translated the resilience approach into EU discourses and policies. While resilience might suggest a post-liberal (Chandler, 2014), more pragmatic approach (Juncos, 2017) or a middle ground between liberal peacebuilding and stability (Wagner and Anholt, 2016), the EU's narrative is still closely wedded to liberal norms and values of a more universalist character. Although the EUGS recognizes that other non-liberal 'paths' might be possible (HR/VP, 2016: 25-26), the Joint Communication explicitly states that '[t]his work will be grounded in the EU's commitment to democracy and human and fundamental rights' (Commission and HR, 2017: 4). As one of the interviewees argued, 'the promotion of the EU's core values is intrinsic to resilience. If we do not respect these values, we won't be resilient (Interview 1). The promotion of liberal values constitutes the *raison d'être* of the EU's foreign policy and this shapes the way the EU understands resilience. As such, the EU's resilience turn continues to be liberal rather than post-liberal or pragmatic.

Whereas in the literature resilience is associated with characteristics such as adaptability, diversity, bottom up approaches, and the ability to work with uncertainty to mention but a few (Chandler, 2014), being democratic or respecting human rights are not among these features. By contrast, the EU's approach seeks to promote a set of universal values through resilience-building and portrays a world driven by universal laws, and hence susceptible to human intervention. The Joint Communication identifies the following (universal) liberal values: 'respect for democracy, rule of law, human and fundamental rights

and fosters inclusive long-term security and progress’ (Commission and HR, 2017: 3; see also HR/VP, 2016: 13). All this chimes well with the idea of Normative Power Europe (Manners, 2002) and that of Liberal Power Europe, which also applies to the economic sphere (Wagner, 2017). A resilient EU requires free markets and access to reliable energy-producing and transit countries (HR/VP, 2016: 22).

One of the key consequences of this self-understanding as a normative or liberal power is that resilience is understood as a process rather than as an end in itself (Bourbeau and Ryan, 2017). This is explicitly acknowledged in the Joint Communication as the first ‘guiding consideration for a strategic approach to resilience’ (Commission and HR, 2017: 23). By strengthening resilience, the EU seeks to secure progress towards its own liberal goals. Resilience-building is intentionally seeking change, but this change closely follows a liberal strategy. According to the EUGS, ‘[a] resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state’ (HR/VP, 2016: 24). Yet, the new resilience thinking also implies a humbler view about the ability of the EU, and generally the West, to shape the world especially compared to the 2003 European Security Strategy (European Council, 2003; Tocci, 2017: 62). Now, it is more about ‘shared responsibility’ between developed and developing countries (Interview 2).

There is also a realisation that the promotion of values alone will not be enough to ensure the EU’s prosperity and security; the EU needs to promote its interests too (Interview 1; 2). Hence, the EUGS advocates a new guiding paradigm for the EU’s foreign policy that of ‘principled pragmatism’ (HR/VP, 2016; Juncos, 2017). The emphasis on resilience thus denotes a change in the EU’s normative approach towards a more pragmatic approach (Interview 7, 9), but this does not mean that the EU should privilege stability over democracy or other liberal values. According to one official, ‘we have seen some people that say resilience is the new word for stability. But as long as we put people first, as long as we put

democracy and people's rights first, there is no tension' (Interview 9; also 8). Those values are still at the core of the EU's external action, they are just implemented in a more flexible manner:

we still care about broader values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, however this is more flexibly interpreted. For instance, when it comes to economic resilience. Five years ago, if we wanted to promote macroeconomic reforms we would have said 'there is the *acquis*', but not today. (Interview 2).

There exists another disconnect (or decoupling) between the liberal timescape of EU foreign policy and that required by resilience approaches. While the EU's liberal understanding of international relations is still based on a linear temporal timescape of transformation and modernisation (Holden, 2016: 416-18), this clashes with the assumptions of complexity and uncertainty of resilience-thinking. One visible outcome of this tension is the hesitations in the official documents between acknowledging uncertainty and the belief that we can still control/stop/prevent events from happening (HR/VP, 2016: 3, 7; Commission and HR, 2017: 3). In contrast to more neoliberal understandings, complexity and uncertainty are feared rather than embraced as an opportunity (EEAS, 2015). The Joint Communication does recognise that 'development, and progress towards democracy, peace and security, is not a linear process' (Commission and HR, 2017: 23; 17). Nonetheless, there remains a belief in the human ability to promote modernisation and progress towards liberal values: 'the challenge now is how to sustain progress in the transformational agenda the EU has set itself, against a backdrop of a more connected, contested and complex global environment.' (Commission and HR, 2017: 2). Resilience is not about maintaining the status quo, but about promoting changes, which sometimes might also be disruptive (e.g. administrative reforms linked to the fight against corruption) (Interview 1). This disconnect between the EU's timescape and resilience approaches is compounded by the EU's own institutional timescapes (see next section).

This leads to another point concerning the fit between resilience and the EU's international identity. While the argument above suggests that the EU's self-understanding as a liberal/normative power has shaped the way it understands (and implements) resilience, it is also important to note that this self-understanding also helps explain how/why the EU might find the concept of resilience an appropriate one in that resilience gives the impression the EU is exercising a form of power that is consistent with its own nature as an entity. It is noted by certain analysts that the EU places greater emphasis on things like regional integration, local ownership and capacity building, all things that fit with a resilience approach (Richmond et al., 2011; Juncos, 2017). The resilience turn thus gives new meaning to the 'sui generis' argument by supporting the idea of the EU acting as a normative/liberal power. Even if not true, resilience gives the appearance of being a form of soft power that differs from US approaches. External perceptions are vital for the EU's role as a normative power (Larsen, 2014) and that explains why the EU might favour the term resilience over other alternative terms such as stability/stabilisation, which other international actors such as Russia or the US might prefer. Moreover, as several officials explained, external partners are more prone to accept the term resilience, while they do not want to be labelled/associated with other terms such as fragile or failed states (Interview 1; 9; EU-CIVCAP, 2017a: 7)

Yet, the EU's resilience approach is as much about transforming the outside and external perceptions of the EU as it is about shaping the EU itself by developing a more political and strategic foreign policy (Commission and HR, 2017). Ultimately, it is an attempt by the EU to develop a more coherent and integrated foreign policy (Interview 6). It is to the question of EU coherence and its link to resilience that the next section turns.

*The EU's institutional framework: in the search for a more coherent foreign policy*

Resilience is often presented as a way to promote a more joint and comprehensive approach to tackling global threats. Linked to adaptive systems theory, resilience thinking puts forward a view of the world whereby different sectors (humanitarian, development, foreign policy) and different real-world events are intrinsically connected. As an umbrella approach, ‘[r]esilience is employed to bring together perceptions, experiences, knowledge and interests from different fields for policy-making, planning and decision-making’ (de Milliano and Jurriens, 2016: 86). A silo mentality or box thinking is fundamentally at odds with resilience.

From this perspective, a significant reason for the EU’s interest in a resilience turn is the clear perception that the EU needs a far more coordinated strategy to managing conflicts and crises in its neighbourhood. Resilience-building therefore comes into the picture as a means of doing this, emphasising coordination between actors across different levels or scales and offering a bridge between crisis response and longer-term development (Interviews 2, 6). While in the past resilience was circumscribed to development and humanitarian aid, the EUGS and the Joint Communication extend the ‘resilience approach’ to the whole EU external relations system, broadening the ownership of the concept (Interview 2, 6, 7; EU-CIVCAP, 2017b). Resilience-building seeks to promote joint action between humanitarian, development, environmental and security policies as well as between internal and external security policies (Commission and HR/VP, 2; 15). According to Nathalie Tocci, the penholder of the EUGS, ‘resilience is a term that speaks to two policy communities which the EUGS sought to bring together: the security community and the development community’ (Tocci, 2017: 70; also Wagner and Anholt, 2016). Hence, there is a clear link between resilience and different initiatives on a comprehensive/integrated approach (Commission and HR, 2013; HR/VP, 2016). By engaging in resilience-building projects, a view of the EU can be projected that helps disguise or even resolve some of its own internal tensions and contradictions. Developing a more coherent foreign policy, even if only in certain areas of activity, builds



confidence in the idea of the EU as global actor. Given the significant differences between member states' interests and bureaucratic rivalries, a notion like resilience can perhaps play an important role in presenting a more coherent and united approach to external action.

However, despite this emphasis on comprehensiveness and coherence, a number of studies have shown that silos and lack of integration between different actors and organisations remain (di Milliano and Jurriens, 2016: 87). In the case of the EU, this problem is exacerbated by the EU's institutional configuration, which prevents this from happening in a meaningful way in practice. Consequently, while the uptake of resilience by the EU is intended to bridge the gaps in policy, unintended consequences might have the opposite effect (EU-CIVCAP, 2017b). Some of these problems are illustrated by EU development and humanitarian policies.

In contrast to development aid which is conditional, humanitarian aid is meant to be an automatic entitlement. ECHO, the EU's Directorate-General (DG) for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, claims to focus on providing apolitical emergency assistance. However, the introduction of resilience into the equation challenges this approach. For instance, one interviewee explained that 'the humanitarian community and the development community are still two different voices, the objectives are not always the same, this is why they have different portfolios, different objectives, different instruments (financial, etc.)' (Interview 6). The emergence of resilience thinking is meant to help bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and development by linking emergency aid to longer-term preparedness, but by doing this, it might also hinder the impartiality, neutrality and independence of EU humanitarian aid if humanitarian actors are perceived as following any political and security considerations (Interview 6). There is always a risk that a political approach to resilience building might endanger the 'humanitarian space', although so far this has not had an impact on EU humanitarian actors on the ground (Interviews 8, 9).

The EU's approach also remains divided between short-term intervention and longer-term programmes with different departments and mechanisms. While the Joint Communication points at the need to increase synergies and coordination between different policy areas (Commission and HR, 2017: 7), underneath this rhetoric are growing inconsistencies and divided interests over whether development and humanitarian assistance can or should be kept separate. For instance, an interviewee noted that while many member states have humanitarian and development affairs integrated within the same ministry, at the EU level 'we have a very separate system, with ECHO having a separate commissioner [and] DEVCO having its own commissioner [...] on top of that, we have a foreign and security unit, which is also a separate entity [the EEAS]' (Interview 7). These tensions are not only encouraged by the distinct mandates established by the Treaties which prevent further integration of development, humanitarian and foreign policies, but also due to the existence of different communities of practice with their own interests and ways of doing things (Interviews 3, 6, 7).

Different officials (those working on development, humanitarian and security/foreign policy) have different interpretations of resilience which also shape the way they implement this concept in practice (de Milliano and Jurriens, 2016, 86). The interviewees referred to the existence of different 'understandings', 'roles', 'cultures' and even 'communities' and, more generally, 'an inbuilt difference in the way we do things which also impinges on the implementation of resilience'. (Interviews 1, 6, 7, 9). This is one of the reasons why the Joint Communication does not put forward a single definition; instead it refers to both Commission documents and the EUGS (Commission and HR, 2017: 3). The difference in perception between different EU institutions are not just semantic in nature, but deeper in nature. As acknowledged by Tocci, 'resilience often means different things to these two groups', with the development community emphasising more 'the developmental, including psychological,

dimensions of resilience’ (2017: 70). While those dealing with humanitarian and development policies are more familiar and more inclined to accept a resilience discourse (Interviews 3, 6), those dealing with foreign policy and security policies have often prioritised stability and are more sceptical of a resilience approach. Not surprisingly, the revised ENP strategy still asserts that ‘the new ENP will take stabilisation as its main political priority’ (Commission and HR, 2015, 2; Interview 1), although it also concedes that building resilience in the neighbourhood is an important, if only second-order, goal. Others have also pointed out at the tensions resulting from the EU’s intention to promote resilience at the individual, societal, *but also* at the state level (Tonra, 2018). Development and humanitarian organisations have also noted some of the dangers in conflating state and community resilience:

State resilience and community resilience are not the same. Prioritising the former puts an emphasis on security and stability that can limit legitimate grass-roots movements for development and change, opening the door to civil society repression. (VOICE, 2017: 4).

Linked to the problem of institutional coordination is that of bureaucratic politics – with different organisations using resilience as a way to increase their own competences and resources – which might also get in the way of the implementation of a resilience approach. The development of a resilience strategy thus reveals divisions between actors belonging to different departments within the EU such as ECHO, DEVCO and EEAS, as well as divisions within departments like ECHO over their role and function. These actors have their own strategic interests linked to institutional incentives, bureaucratic conditioning and role identities. Despite its claims to be a bridging approach, the EU’s resilience strategy has particular unintended institutional and strategic consequences, revealing divisions of actors and interests that are multi-scalar and institutionally complex.

Finally, there are more concrete institutional features of the EU's foreign policy system that work against the implementation of a resilience approach. The consensus-building nature of the EU foreign-policy decision-making tends to make the adoption of decisions slow. The fragmentation of EU financial instruments and burdensome procurement rules have also been criticised for negatively affecting the responsiveness of aid delivery and the implementation of its civilian and military operations (Interviews 3, 7, 9; European Commission, 2017). One official described the current approach as 'instrument driven', which is fundamentally at odds with the resilience approach (Interview 2). Another interviewee added: 'when it comes to the Commission, financial procedures and instruments are never quick or flexible enough. We require more flexible instruments that have mixed purposes (e.g. both with humanitarian and development aims)' (Interview 3). It is not surprising that some of the key lessons from previous EU resilience programmes include 'the need for longer term programming cycles (including planning of humanitarian aid) combined with short term flexibility, and the need for contingency financing arrangements to address potential disruptive pressures and shocks' (Commission and HR, 2017: 21). These problems are also linked to the different EU timescapes: EU budgetary programmes are multiannual and project-specific preventing the implementation of resilience approaches, which require adaptability, flexibility, etc. The new resilience approach thus requires an overhaul of the EU's foreign policy machinery, including programming and financing. However, this is particularly difficult given that the EU is currently half way through a programming cycle (Interviews 1, 2, 7). According to one official, EU officials will not be willing to adopt a new approach unless there are some incentives in return, but the resilience approach is a long-term process and it is difficult to incorporate such incentives in the short-term (Interview 2). The new approach requires learning new ways of doing things:

We are having to learn how do you do joint proposals, joint analyses [...] we are working out how we work with ourselves and also other partners, including whether national government, local government, the IFIs... working with a more holistic system based approach. (Interview 9).

Another interviewee added that ‘this will only mean more work and then it becomes a new burden. If this is imposed, it won’t work’ (Interview 1). The Joint Communication also suggests that ‘[a]ll this requires a rethink of the EU’s problem analysis and design of programmes, as well as of the methods of assessment of the sustainability of EU’s interventions.’ (Commission and HR, 2017: 18). Yet, as shown in the literature, organisations are usually reluctant to large-scale change or innovation; at most what we might see is some gradual incremental change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009).

### **The EU’s resilience approach and member state level projects**

The last part of the analysis draws attention to contestation at the domestic level where understandings and interpretations of resilience might be affected by different interests, identities and political dynamics preventing the implementation of a new paradigm/turn in EU foreign policy. As argued above, generally it could be said that the EU’s approach to governance broadly reflects a neoliberal rationality that promotes market mechanisms and uses competitiveness as a benchmarking tool (Joseph, 2014). However, the situation inside the EU is somewhat different to Anglo Saxon countries like the US and UK insofar as neoliberal policies are not fully hegemonic inside the Union and are up against powerful counter-models and rival hegemonic projects. While the UK model has been very influential in the area of EU development policy and it has shaped the overall EU approach to resilience, Brexit means that UK influence in the making of EU foreign policy has diminished in recent years (certainly during the drafting of the Joint Communication) and will be more so the case

in the future. Therefore, EU policy-making reflects a fight going on inside the EU between different approaches to governance and consequently different interpretations of strategies like resilience.

While EU member states might be supportive of the resilience agenda as a whole (Interviews 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9), they are divided over neoliberal strategy and what are perceived as Anglo-Saxon methods of governance when applied to areas of EU policy. This is clear from disagreements over financial regulation and economic reform, tensions on employment reform to flexibilise labour practices and the significant failure by member states to comply with the Lisbon strategy. Although with overseas development policies, these divisions are less significant (Interviews 6, 9), the modalities of EU foreign and security policy in the neighbourhood remain a very controversial subject (for instance, regarding how to deal with Russia). The evidence thus suggests that while the bulk of the EU's resilience approach might be neoliberal in nature (see above), the emergent outcome is more complex than this because of Brexit and the existence of competing approaches at the national level.

Continental discourses of resilience (e.g. in France or Germany) place more emphasis on the relation between states and societies, where the state has a responsibility for protecting the population, with the legitimacy of state action rooted in society as a whole (Joseph, 2017). For instance, for some French officials, resilience was translated into 'résistance: a word with very obvious security connotations' (Tocci, 2017: 70) and quite different from the Anglo-Saxon focus on adaptability. These competing understandings of resilience – some more individualistic, some more state-societal, some more adaptable, some more robust – are reflected and filtered through EU documents. A quick glance at the EUGS and the Joint Communication shows that while the individual and communities are mentioned in a few places, the main focus is on states and societies as per continental (Franco-German) approaches. Also revealing is the fact that in contrast to developments in Anglo-Saxon

approaches which suggest that full protection is no longer possible and that a shift to a strategy of resilience is necessary to deal with increasingly ineffective forms of protection, deterrence and intervention, the EUGS still argues that protection (i.e. ‘the Security of our Union’) constitutes the main objective. Finally, while the need for adaptation and transformation is mentioned in both the EUGS and the Joint Communication, in the case of economic resilience and infrastructure resilience, the emphasis is on robustness and coping rather than adapting. Resilience, is also understood somewhat conservatively in the EUGS as ‘the ability of states and societies to reform, thus *withstanding and recovering from* internal and external crises’ (HR/VP, 2016: 23).

Other interviewees noted significant differences among the member states in the way they understood resilience regarding external vs internal security; soft vs hard power; and regional vs global approaches (Interviews 1, 2, 8, 9). For some this might mean promoting rule of law; for others the focus should be on protecting critical infrastructures or cybersecurity (Interview 1). The big donors (UK, Germany, France) and the Nordic countries were said to be more actively engaged in the discussions about promoting external resilience in development and humanitarian policies (Interview 7). The member states also have different views as to what capacity building means in the context of promoting resilience in the neighbourhood and EU security policies (Interviews 4, 5). As summarised by one interviewee:

Some of them put more emphasis on the internal dimension of resilience (infrastructures, hybrid threats), especially in the context of the crises in the East. Others focus more on the external dimension of resilience. Some again are more interested in promoting resilience in the neighbourhood; others have a broader approach. For instance, some member states have supported the resilience agenda because they see this as a counter-balance to the discussions on security and defence, as a way to develop the EU’s role as a soft power. (Interview 2).

More importantly, as noted by some interviewees (Interviews 1, 2), the ambiguities surrounding the EU's discourse on resilience allow for these different understandings to be accommodated into this emergent European project (also Wagner and Anholt, 2016), but at the cost of coherence.

## **Conclusion**

At first sight, the adoption of resilience at the EU level can be hailed as a new turn towards a more pragmatic, adaptive and locally-owned foreign policy. A closer look shows that, in fact, EU resilience-thinking is influenced by three broad dynamics – the neoliberal and Anglo-Saxon approaches to resilience in the sphere of global governance; the particular normative discourse of the EU as a certain type of global actor; and the multilevel character of the EU with its complex institutional structure and path dependencies. The neoliberal approach has a more pragmatic and individualist character, whereas the EU's normative approach is more universalist. The EU's institutional structure mediates or 'translates' these in various ways. The outcomes are varied.

The neoliberal influence, in line with governmentality analyses, can be characterised as operating from a distance while locking governments and their populations into a regulative network of external monitoring that seeks to ensure compliance on key economic and security issues. It works through the responsabilisation of their action using, the promotion of partnership, ownership, stakeholding, appeal to civil society, calls for good governance and an engagement in networks and peer reviews. This is a politics that presents itself in terms of persuasion rather than coercion, enablement rather than constraint, partnership rather than command.

Examination of the EU's own self-understanding and institutional configuration reveals the contradictions and limits of the EU's resilience turn. Firstly, this has to do with the



EU's own international identity, which limits a turn towards a more pragmatic or post-liberal foreign policy. In promoting resilience and strengthening local capacities, the EU can be presented as exercising a special form of power that is in line with the existing understanding of the EU as a liberal or normative power. This would also fit with the comprehensive security model outlined in the Lisbon Treaty, while causing fewer tensions between member states. However, the EU's support for its core (universal) liberal values sits at odds with an understanding of resilience-building as non-linear, pragmatic and bottom-up. Institutional fragmentation in relation to funding, programming and implementing actors also results in decoupling. Finally, the contested nature of resilience is also the result of different understandings of resilience and competing hegemonic projects at the national level across the member states. This emergentist approach whereby the policy outcome (or adopted strategy) is the product of contestation among different projects and understandings is reflected both in the EUGS and the Joint Communication.

More generally, the adoption of resilience-building as a strategy reflects both the actual weakness of the EU and an awareness of this among key actors. The EU position appears to be contradictory. The empirical evidence reveals an obsession with developing a more integrated, better coordinated, more connected and better engaged approach. Yet, at the same time, the EU's discourse on resilience moves in a different direction by advocating that the EU plays a somewhat distant role, operating at arm's length, cutting back on financial commitments, working through NGOs and arguing that affected states need to take responsibility for developing their own resilience strategies. Resilience allows the EU to commit to a more integrated approach, while placing the onus on local authorities to carry it out. Resilience gives the impression of being part of an integrated and holistic strategy without there actually being one. The resilience discourse is paradoxically more holistic and less engaged. The EU is better able to do this because it is possible to hide its inability to act

coherently at the international level behind more plausible claims to be exercising normative or soft power. However, this is not really what a Global Strategy should be about.

In conclusion, the resilience turn is largely about projection. While the approach of the EU fits with a general turn in global governance, resilience helps project an image of the EU as a normative actor with a coherent strategy. Unfortunately, while it is good at projecting an image, resilience does little to address the underlying divisions among member states and between different actors inside different EU institutions. Indeed, it may make things worse. While succeeding in making the outside world look more complex, it ultimately lacks the strategic tools necessary to deal with the EU's own complexity.

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