Resilience-building in grey security zone countries

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Abstract.
EU Global Strategy of 2016 assesses vulnerabilities and fragility in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods as a threat to the security of the Union and addresses them with a relatively new concept of resilience building. Given undertheorizing of the concept as well as the EU’s intention to employ the resilience as a tool of its foreign and security policy to its neighbourhoods, the author aims to show the particularities of the Eastern and Central European states’ approach to resilience. This could provide some corrections to the EU tailored-made to each region policies and measuring of resilience building to ensure peaceful transformations in its eastern borderlands.

Keywords:
resilience
grey security zone
EU
Eastern neighbourhood
The characteristics and parameters of a grey security zone in which the EU eastern neighbours are currently located challenge the existing approaches the EU used to employ in the area. Emergence of the resilience concept in the EU Global Strategy of 2016 that is still undertheorized indicated a lack of democratization, transformation concepts’ efficiency in the neighbourhood area and on the other hand, signalled the EU’s readiness to adapting to changing environment as well as undertaking pragmatic actions. Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine fuels challenges and threats flaring up from the neighbouring area. Whether the EU will be ready to contribute to its own security and ensure safe eastern bordering areas is the issue to be addressed in the near-term future.

Theoretical approach to employing the resilience in EU practice.

Starting from late 90s a bunch of researches have been conducted on resilience as a remedy for democratic transformations and prevention governance breakdown [1, 2], form of a governance [3] and societal resilience [4]. After conceptualizing resilience building as one of major EU strategic priorities of foreign and security policy in the EU Global strategy of 2016 [5, p.23] the subsequent researches were focused on the analysis of the resilience building from the EU actorness perspective and assessing this tool as a success multiplier [6]; as a compound of the EU foreign and security policy in particular, towards eastern and southern neighbourhoods [7, 8, 9, 10].

Some scholars assess prioritization of the resilience in the EU foreign policy and security toolkit as a shrinkage of the EU international engagement [11], some of them [7] believe the EU is drifting from a normative Europe that looks beyond its borders to a pragmatic EU that looks inward. Sven Biskop, one the most prominent researchers of EU foreign policy, proves that this transition to "Realpolitik with European characteristics" is exactly a retreat from the normative approach, that is a recognition of reality and lowering of ambitions [12].

The EU approach to resilience building manifested an ambiguity in approaching the resilience as a resistance [13]
and stability tool on the one hand, and a transformative values-based approach of modernization and democratization on the other hand [14, 15]. Understanding resilience as a resistance correlates with external threats that in case of the EU eastern neighbours are posed by Russia. This resonates with the 2019 EU Report which designates the internal stability of the EU as an integral part of the EU's policy towards Russia [16]. Such an approach can be well explained by the concept of grey security zone where the EU eastern neighbours are located and elaboration of an effective EU response embedded in resilience.

Gray security areas constitute a context condition of our analysis. These areas are formed by countries with the security deficit, without reliable security guarantees, with partly occupied territories, ongoing military provocations, neighbouring powers’ asymmetric potential, hybrid threats, economic pressure and restrictions, domestic threats (inconsistent reforms, political turbulence, weak economies) [17, p.69]. Eric Stollenwerk, Tanja Börzel, Thomas Risse use some other adjacent concepts that characterize EU Eastern neighbourhood (with pre-full-scale Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia examples) as an area of limited statehood and contested order where “central state authorities lack administrative capacities and/or do not fully hold the monopoly of the use of force” and with contested orders [4]. So, these parameters of the eastern neighbours’ security environment strongly affect the universality of the EU resilience building approach. The tailor-made approach to employing resilience concept is strongly needed for eastern neighbours especially given the perspective of Ukraine’s recovery after the repercussions of the Russia’s full-scale aggression.

Given the aforementioned context, this article contributes to a bringing together the EU’s approach to resilience building and the Eastern neighbourhood states’ vision with a particular attention to Central European vision as of EU’s eastern flank most involved and vulnerable to the threats flaring up from the Eastern neighbourhood. The survey of experts’ opinion will show how the security threats are prioritized by Eastern neighbours for which addressing a set
of hard security threats is of paramount importance – for Ukraine and Moldova as well as South Caucasian states. This research aims to support and develop the approach suggested by Eric Stollenwerk, Tanja A. Börzel, Thomas Risse [4] approaching the resilience building as a tool that prevents violent conflicts in the EU’s neighbourhood.

For the purposes of this research, we will interpret resilience as a capacity of state and non-state institutions complemented by procedures and measures, creation conditions which enable adaption, responding to and recovering from shocks and calamities in a way that preserves their ability to perform functions efficiently. The Global Strategy emphasizes a resilient society as the one that demonstrates a commitment to democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development [5]. Accordingly, the priority areas for building resilience in the Eastern Neighbourhood are fight against corruption, judicial reform, the security and defence sector reform, respect for human rights, free market development, civil society support, development of strategic communications, protection of energy and other infrastructure, cybersecurity, connectivity improvement, transit of migrants [18, p.10]. The most recent researches emphasize the need to develop societal dimension of resilience, e.g., “resilience ought to be seen as a form of ‘self-governance, which places the emphasis on the ‘local’ and the ‘person’ in inside-out processes of learning and capacity-building to help a self-referential agency to find its own equilibrium” [8, p.158].

Though the resilience in this sense implies quite a technocratic approach to making institutions stronger, different actors still have individual approaches to interpretation of what the resilience building is, its tasks and functions as well as the share of internal and external factors affecting it that is heavily influenced by the strategic culture of the states (particularly reliance on own forces and capabilities or on external help), their political systems and practices. And here the approach to resilience building of Central and Eastern European states might be helpful for elaboration of a more efficient tailor-made EU response policy to the Eastern neighbourhood given a
Results and interpretation of the experts’ survey on security challenges and resilience-building.

The author conducted the expert survey within the research stay at Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica (Slovakia) in spring-summer 2022, to be able to compare the preliminary conclusions, based on the analysis of the relevant studies and official documents, with opinions of the Central and Eastern European experts who are professionals in security and international relations.

The survey included three main stages: the first included drafting a questionnaire based on the desk research preliminary conclusions. At the same time, the process of selection of the experts to be surveyed was based on the analysis of their relevant field of expertise (grey zone, security issues, resilience, conflict studies, EU foreign and security policy) as well as geographical representation (to include experts from both the Central and Eastern European countries). During the second stage the invited experts filled out the questionnaire via Google Form: totally 28 experts provided their answers within the survey, where 16 experts from Central European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) and 12 experts from Eastern European countries that have signed Association Agreements with the EU and have been actively involved to the European Neighbourhood Policy (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine). During the third stage, the author analysed, compared and summarized the results of the survey.

Majority of surveyed experts from both Central and Eastern Europe consider that the existence of a grey security zone in Eastern Europe negatively affects the security of Europe and that it is the joint responsibility of the EU and NATO to address this issue (Figure 1).

Speaking about the key security challenges to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia (experts could choose one to three options), there was a consensus on “Russia's aggressive policy” named by the absolute majority of all experts. At the same time, experts from Central and Eastern Europe have quite different views on the importance of the “Domestic political and economic problems (inconsistent reforms, weak
institutions, uncompetitive economy etc.): this option was marked by 68.75% of the experts from Central European countries and only by 33.33% of their colleagues from the Eastern Europe.

Figure 1
How does the existence of a grey security zone in Eastern Europe, between EU/NATO and Russia affect the security of Europe as a whole?

The opposite situation is concerning the “Lack of reliable international security guarantees”: this option was chosen by 50.00% experts from the Eastern European countries and only by 31.25% of their colleagues from Central Europe. So, one can speak about the tendency of experts from Eastern European countries to focus rather on external challenges then on internal ones. The averaged results of answers to the question are presented in Figure 2.

The similar tendency of Eastern European experts focusing rather on external factors then on the internal ones is indicated by distribution of answers to the question “What areas of resilience-building in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia should be a priority for the EU?” (experts could choose up to three options). While among the experts from Central European countries the most frequent answers were “Building democratic institutions” (56.25%) and “Economic and social
“reforms” (43,75%), these options were less popular among the Eastern European experts with 41,67% and 8,33% of support respectively.

Instead, experts from Eastern European countries preferred the options related to the integration with the EU: “Accelerating the integration of these countries into the EU” (83,33%) and “Closer engagement to the EU common security and defence policy” (33,33%), which were far less supported by experts from Central Europe: 18,75% and 6,25% respectively. The averaged results of answers by all experts are presented in Figure 3.

In estimation whether the EU succeeded in enhancing resilience in the neighbourhood, that was named a strategic priority in EU Global Strategy 2016, the regional differences in answers are also enlightening. While 75,00% of the Central European experts answered “Partly succeeded, partly not”, at the same time, only 33,33% of their colleagues from the Eastern Europe chose this answer option. Wise versa, the option “Rather failed than succeeded” was chosen by 50,00% of the Eastern European experts, and only by 25,00% of their Central European colleagues. Thus, the EU deliverables in this sphere are better estimated in the EU countries themselves than in the countries-recipients of the EU support in resilience-building.
Figure 3
What areas of resilience-building in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia should be a priority for the EU (please, choose one to three options)?

As for the averaged results among all surveyed experts, the most frequent answer was “Partly succeeded, partly not” (57,14%), and the second frequent answer was “Rather failed than succeeded” (35,71%). Only 7,14% of the experts chose the answer option “Rather succeeded than not”; and no expert chose the options “Completely succeeded”, and “Completely failed” (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
EU Global Strategy 2016 named enhancing resilience in the neighbourhood a strategic priority. Has the EU succeeded in enhancing resilience in the neighbourhood?
Considering prerequisites that could best contribute to resilience-building in Ukraine, majority of experts named both EU and NATO membership (57.14%), followed by a significant margin by options of only NATO membership (14.29%) and building own military capacities (14.29%). As for Georgia, the option of both EU and NATO membership was also the most frequently named, but only by a relative majority of the experts (46.43%), followed by a significant margin by options of only NATO membership (14.29%) and neutrality with international security guarantees (14.29%). In Moldova case, experts in equal proportions supported the options of both EU and NATO membership (35.71%) and only EU membership (35.71%). The averaged results of answers by all experts are presented in Figure 5.
Conclusions.

Based on the results of the experts’ survey, the existence of a grey security zone in Eastern Europe negatively affects the security of Europe, and it is the joint responsibility of the EU and NATO to address this problem.

Experts from both Central and Eastern European countries share consensus about the threat posed by Russia's aggressive policy, but at the same time, they have tangible differences in perception of other key security challenges as well as the resilience-building priorities. Experts from Central European countries pay more attention to the internal vulnerabilities, while their Eastern European colleagues focus rather on external challenges. Accordingly, experts from the Central European countries, which are already the members of the EU, perceive the resilience-building more in term of transformational power entailing political, economic and social reforms. At the same time, for the experts from Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, which seek EU membership, resilience has more external connotation and relates more to the integration with the EU and NATO.

Previous EU deliverables in enhancing resilience in the neighbourhood are estimated by the experts of the EU countries more positively than by the experts from the countries-recipients of EU policies. This might be caused by differences in approach to key security challenges, but also might indicate the inconsistency between the expectations of Eastern European countries on the one hand and the willingness of the EU to contribute to the development of societal resilience on the other hand. The differences in perceptions of security environment and the EU’s resilience building deliverables in the eastern neighbourhood between the EU members and those who seek membership prove the need for the EU to address this inconsistency when it prioritizes building resilient societies and the recipient states expect hard security support including NATO and EU accession for Ukraine, Georgia, partially Moldova that is perceived by them as an important compound of the resilience building. And this trend will be built up amid Russia’s aggression against Ukraine as well as threats it poses for other EU eastern neighbours.
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS
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References:


