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Resilience as the EU Global Strategy’s new leitmotif: pragmatic, problematic or promising?

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ABSTRACT
A striking difference between the EU’s 2016 Global Strategy and its 2003 predecessor is the ubiquity of resilience as a new leitmotif, understood as the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crisis. Resilience provides a middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peace-building and under-ambitious stability, (re)directs attention to local resources and practices, and is ambiguous enough to be acceptable to everyone. The Global Strategy’s leitmotif is an example of the rise and spread of resilience in international discourses about crisis management and humanitarian emergencies. Although there are risks inherent to the way in which resilience reframes risks and crises, its added value lies in its power as convening concept, opening up international organizations to new ways of thinking and working, and providing a common ground for engagement.

KEYWORDS Resilience; European Union; Strategy; Security; Emergencies; Development

One of the most striking differences between the EU Global Strategy of 2016 and the European Security Strategy of 2003 is the ubiquity of resilience as a new leitmotif. Whereas the term was entirely absent in the 2003 document, the EU Global Strategy of 2016 mentions it no less than 40 times. This puts ‘resilient/resilience’ ahead of ‘human rights’ (mentioned 31 times), ‘democratic/democracy/democratization’ (23 times), and ‘human security’ (4 times). This raises a number of questions: first of all, what does the EU mean by resilience? Furthermore, what explains the concept’s rapid rise in the EU’s strategic community? And last, but not least, what are the implications of recalibrating EU external action around a new leitmotif?

In this article, we will address these questions in turn. We will first offer an interpretation of ‘resilience’, based on a close reading of the EU Global Strategy and informed by a number of background interviews with those involved
in the process of bringing the strategy about (Section 1). The background interviews were also instrumental to understand what makes the concept acceptable to a wide range of actors (Section 2). Finally, we assess the implications of this new paradigm and situate the rise of resilience into a changing global context. In order to do so, we draw on a vast and rapidly growing body of literature on resilience in the social sciences and on interviews with resilience experts from the international humanitarian and development community (Section 3).

We argue that ‘resilience’ has become the Global Strategy’s *leitmotif* because it is a perfect middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peace-building and the under-ambitious objective of stability. It thus resonates with the principled pragmatism that the Global Strategy embraces. As critics of the concept point out, ‘resilience’ tends to shift responsibility to local communities and individuals. This also implies a risk that it may be used as an excuse to decrease efforts and lower budgets. At the same time, however, ‘resilience’ (re)directs attention to local resources and practices and away from ready-made blueprints. This may appeal to practitioners who see resilience as a convening concept that provides a common ground for engagement.

‘Resilience’—the EU Global Strategy’s new *leitmotif*

One of the reasons why resilience is such an ubiquitous presence in the EU Global Strategy is that it refers to a broad range of referent objects: the EU aims at strengthening ‘the resilience of critical infrastructure, networks and services’, at fostering ‘the resilience of its democracies’, and at investing ‘in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and to the south down to Central Africa’.

The first aim is presented not as a political but as a technical matter and handled in a single paragraph. In contrast, the resilience of the EU’s democracies and of the states and societies abroad is addressed in more detail, suggesting that this is where the strategic challenges lie. Echoing the notion of the EU as a normative power, resilience at home and abroad are presented as being closely connected. Consistently living up to the values of human rights, the rule of law, justice, equality, and respect for diversity at home is being considered as a source of credibility and influence abroad.

The closest the strategy comes to a working definition of the term is in the sections on resilience abroad: resilience is understood as ‘the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crisis’. The further elaboration of the concept reveals that key ideas of the European Security Strategy are still very much alive: the European Security Strategy held that ‘the best protection of our security is a world of well-governed democratic states’. In a similar vein, the EU Global Strategy
states that ‘at the heart of a resilient state’\textsuperscript{5} lies a resilient society, which is further described as ‘featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development’.\textsuperscript{6} The European Security Strategy considered state failure to be a key threat; in a similar vein, the global strategy juxtaposes resilience to ‘fragility’ that ‘threatens all our vital interests’.\textsuperscript{7} Fragility is again linked to democracy and human rights as ‘repressive states are inherently fragile’.\textsuperscript{8} In addition to a general promotion of human rights, the EU emphasizes ‘inclusiveness’ to overcome the marginalization of communities.

Although the EU Global Strategy echoes several key themes of the European Security Strategy, at least two differences are worth noting. The first concerns the role of development and prosperity. The European Security Strategy stated that ‘security is a precondition of development’. In contrast, the EU Global Strategy reverses the causal relationship and conceives of development as a root cause of resilience: ‘states are resilient when societies feel they are becoming better off and have hope in the future’.\textsuperscript{9} The EU Global Strategy’s understanding of resilience echoes the Sustainable Development Goals.\textsuperscript{10} Nevertheless, the EU Global Strategy also asks development policy to be better ‘aligned with our strategic priorities’.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, development is at the same time upgraded to a more crucial instrument but it also retains its instrumental value in achieving resilience.

The second difference concerns the idea that ‘there are many ways to build inclusive, prosperous and secure societies’.\textsuperscript{12} Although the European Security Strategy did not propose that one size would fit all, it certainly did not emphasize a plurality of paths that countries may take to become more resilient. In contrast, according to the EU Global Strategy, the EU will pursue a ‘multifaceted approach to resilience in its surrounding regions’.\textsuperscript{13} Compared to the European Security Strategy, such an emphasis on ‘tailor-made policies’\textsuperscript{14} is new. However, a similar development had already taken place in the European Neighbourhood Policy where a one-size-fits-all approach has given way to a new emphasis on ‘differentiation between partner countries’.\textsuperscript{15} In the EU Global Strategy, the new emphasis on multiple, country-specific paths and policies resonates with the ‘principled pragmatism’ that should ‘guide our external action in the years ahead’.\textsuperscript{16}

‘Resilience’—the rapid rise of a concept

As the discussion above demonstrates, the new leitmotif ‘resilience’ is not in contradiction of previous key concepts such as democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. This raises the question as to why the need was felt to introduce a new concept and why it has not stirred much controversy in the process of drafting the strategy.\textsuperscript{17}

To be sure, the EU Global Strategy is not the first EU document to mention resilience. Key EU documents that have already incorporated resilience
include the 2012 *EU Approach to Resilience*, which builds on the EU’s experience in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel;\(^{18}\) the 2013 *EU Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries*, which subsequently establishes an annual EU resilience forum;\(^{19}\) and the EU’s 2014 *Resilience Marker*, which assesses the extent to which programmes funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) integrate resilience considerations into their projects.\(^{20}\)

Our interviews suggest several considerations. First, ‘resilience’ seemed a perfect middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peace-building and the under-ambitious objective of stability. Whereas the 2003 strategy referred to an unprecedented period of peace and stability, the crises in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Mali and various terrorist attacks in European cities would have made a mere repetition of this statement look naive. What is more, the decade since 2003 has been characterized by a growing ‘intervention fatigue’ that results from the failure of peace-, state-, and nation-building especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. Toning down the optimism of the 2003 strategy that suggested the possibility of exporting the Weberian state model\(^{21}\) thus was essential.

At the same time, Europe’s strategic community hesitated to adopt ‘stability’ as a new key goal to replace liberal peace-building. As one interviewee put it, ‘stability would also apply to a dictatorship such as Belarus, and this is not what we want’. ‘Stability’ signalled a post-normative foreign and security policy and thus a break with the idea of a Normative Power Europe that focuses on spreading democracy, the rule of law and human rights. ‘Resilience’ thus seems a perfect middle ground. In addition, one could add, resilience was already established in areas such as development aid and disaster management.

Second, and related to the first point, ‘resilience’ (re)directs attention to local resources and practices and away from ready-made blueprints that are parachuted into conflict zones. As one of our interviewees put it, it changes the mind-set away from catastrophic scenarios to local resources that exist and work. Resilience thus encourages an in-depth engagement with endogenous structures and capacities. This comes with an expectation of enhanced effectiveness (because local resources and practices are crucial to success) and legitimacy (because they contribute to ownership and are respectful of local practices).

Third and finally, the ambiguity, if not vagueness of the term ‘resilience’ helped to gain acceptability. Different stakeholders with different interests and backgrounds came to accept the concept on the basis of different understandings of the term. This echoes what Jegen and Mérand have called ‘constructive ambiguity’, that is, a communicative strategy to advance a political project when clarity risks opposition.\(^ {22}\) ‘Resilience’ can be understood as a call for more defence spending, or as an upgrade of development policy.
within a comprehensive, ‘joined up’ approach, or as a move away from liberal peace-building. In any case, ‘resilience’ comes across as ‘positive’, focusing on solutions rather than problems, and as forward-looking, rather than backward-looking and negative like ‘fragility’.

**Resilience—promises and problems**

The rise and spread of ‘resilience’ in international discourses about crisis management and humanitarian disasters indicates a profound change in the way in which we understand the world. Violent acts of terrorism, protracted crises and widespread political instability, floods, earthquakes and droughts set off by El Niño, and global financial instability have engendered the idea that we, as the Global Strategy puts it, ‘live in times of existential crisis’. Risks and crises are understood to be endemic to such an extent that continuous disruption of the system, that is, disequilibrium, becomes the new normal. Moreover, they are perceived as inherently complex. Contemporary risks and crises are understood as ‘wicked problems’, characterized by complex interdependencies, transcendence of geographical as well as disciplinary boundaries, and the complete absence of straightforward solutions.

In a profoundly complex world where predicting, identifying, and responding to risks and crises becomes problematic, resilience provides ‘a new basis for engaging uncertainty’. Resilience as a focal point within the EU Global Strategy comes at a time when it is increasingly adopted by various actors in a wide range of international policies concerning security, humanitarian aid, and development.

It is not just the EU that works with resilience. The concept has a distinct presence throughout policies and reports from a wide range of actors within the international community, including donor organizations like the British Department for International Development (DFID) or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UN agencies, international organizations (e.g. the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)), and a multitude of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g. International Alert, Christian Aid). Strikingly, many resilience initiatives are inter-agency or consortium efforts. A notable example concerns the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis (‘3RP’), which brings together no less than 200 partners including national governments, UN agencies, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), and NGOs in an appeal of more than 5.7 billion US dollars.

Despite its omnipresence, ‘resilience’ is rarely unpacked. In fact, there is a ‘worrying consensus across government, business, and some quarters of academia that resilience is an unquestionably “good” value to be striven for, invested in, and cultivated throughout society at whatever cost’. Indeed, resilience’s adoption in such a broad array of fields has triggered intense
debates as to what the concept means and especially what it does. Surrounded by such ambiguity, particularly in global politics, our understanding of resilience should remain normatively open in order to avoid any premature analytical closure. In this section, we review this debate in order to better understand the prospects and problems of re-calibrating European foreign and security policy around this new concept.

Key criticisms

Key criticisms on resilience found within relevant literature orbit around a number of themes. First, resilience intends to change our understanding of contemporary risks and crises from externally generated events that we can learn to control to inevitable events generated by the structures of society itself. Second, resilience purports to create particular subjectivities characterized by depoliticization and responsibilization for non-resilient outcomes. Third, some critiques revolve around resilience’s resemblance to neoliberalism as a governance rationality, whereby responsibility for security is transferred from the government to (civil) society. Finally, the added value of the resilience concept can be questioned, given the possibility that resilience is just another buzzword.

First, and related to the changes in our understanding of the world as described at the start of this section, resilience becomes the blue-chip response to a world that is too complex and riddled with risks and crises that we cannot prevent from happening. Understood as systems’ coping, adaptive, and transformative capacities in the face of inevitable risks and crises, resilience risks overlooking the systemic factors underlying societal vulnerabilities that drive risks and crises. Why, for example, is inequality absent from the resilience agenda? Schmidt offers that the ‘link between the alleged fundamental lack of understanding to solve contemporary problems and the importance of adaptive governance [erases the] obligation or requirement to attempt to … diagnose and tackle today’s complex problems’.

At the same time, it is likely that precisely because resilience naturalizes a state of crises, our attention is directed towards the immediate event (i.e. terrorist attack, earthquake) rather than every day’s structural violence, or the ‘liquid evil’ so pervasive as to almost become invisible. Going one step further, resilience not only renders it unnecessary to try and ‘solve’ risks and crises (as that is impossible), but it actively promotes an understanding of risks and crises as opportunities under a neo-Darwinian presumption that “Keeping out of harm’s way” (something Don Quixote preached but never practised, hence his longevity) may be harmful. Only through exposure to uncertainty, one can develop the ‘desirable attributes of foresight, enterprise, and self-reliance’ and as a result, ‘the ability to change and adapt becomes a virtue in itself’. In the EU’s Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries it is described as ‘an opportunity for transformation, in
terms of adaptation to changing environments, empowerment, improved livelihoods and economic opportunities’.\textsuperscript{38} From a practitioner’s perspective however, the idea that disasters represent an opportunity to ‘build back better’ may be difficult to convey to those who have lost everything due to a crisis, and legitimately so:

\ldots it’s very hard to say let’s try to find opportunity in the middle of misery, or \ldots let’s try to find opportunity out of \ldots crisis. \ldots it’s a very dangerous trap to say \{a\} destroyed Syrian town could be an opportunity to build back a much better town than the one that was destroyed \ldots anybody will tell me no, give me back my old town and you go and have your town bombed and try to find opportunity in that, thank you very much. (Expert interview 4)

Second, the way in which resilience attempts to transform our perception of risks and crises has, of course, implications for our understanding of human agency. A number of key critiques on resilience focus on the subjectivities this new governance rationality purports to create. Above all, resilience conceives of subjects as active agents, not as passive, or lacking agency.\textsuperscript{39} Though what is the meaning of agency in a world over which one has no control? The resilient subject, Chandler and Reid argue, is one that ‘must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world: not a subject that can conceive of changing the world’.\textsuperscript{40} Exactly because resilience assumes that we are no longer in control, it has a profoundly depoliticizing effect.\textsuperscript{41} Understanding risks and crises as opportunities to develop ourselves, and by implication, a necessity to wilfully expose oneself to dangers upon which no control can be exerted, constitutes a debasement of the political subject— reducing politics to a ‘purely technical practice’.\textsuperscript{42}

As it is repeatedly asserted that we must give up our illusion of controlling the external environment, we are tasked with achieving resilience: a learnable skill rather than a natural characteristic. Human attributes are reconfigured into coping strategies and skills that can be learned by anyone: making resilience ‘a technology of the self that can be both learnt and taught’.\textsuperscript{43} This way of thinking is illustrated by the vast number of ‘resilience-building initiatives’ that currently exist, such as the EU’s Supporting Horn of African Resilience (SHARE) and the l’Alliance Globale pour l’Initiative Résilience Sahel (AGIR). Problematic in this conceptualization is that if resilience can be learned, it can also be failed to learn, de facto responsibilizing subjects for their own vulnerabilities— regardless of whether these are the product of socio-economic and political inequalities. In the case of resilience training for the military,\textsuperscript{44} Howell\textsuperscript{45} asserts that soldiers are responsibilized for their own mental well-being, thereby dismantling the moral basis upon which veterans can claim healthcare entitlements.\textsuperscript{46} Chandler warns that resilience should not play the role of ‘apologia for the limits of international
intervention, ideologically reifying the limits to transformation as internal products of the societies being intervened upon.\textsuperscript{47}

In fact, integral to contemporary understandings of the nature of risks and crises, is the notion that emergencies do not ‘just happen’ to us, but rather, we create them, consciously or unconsciously.\textsuperscript{48} Resilience is no longer about an autonomous subject’s internal resources and capacities to deal with externally generated stressors—but about ‘an interactive process of relational adaptation’.\textsuperscript{49} This clashes with resilience as a process of assigning responsibilities to citizens and communities rather than the institutions of the state:\textsuperscript{50} on the one hand, society is supposed to be the ‘active and responsible contributor to security’ while at the same time, society is problematized and understood as the architect of its own risks and crises.\textsuperscript{51} As a consequence, the foundations on which the division between internal and external security rest, become shaky,\textsuperscript{52} best illustrated by an excerpt from Frederica Mogherini’s foreword to the Global Strategy: ‘my neighbour’s and my partner’s weaknesses are my own weaknesses’.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, in creating micro-vigilantes of all of us, Evans and Reid\textsuperscript{54} argue, we are tasked to ‘police our locales in a manner which complements the outsourcing logic of neoliberal governance’.

Third, critics have turned to the implications of resilience as a new governance rationality, and have in particularly expressed their concern with the resemblance between resilience thinking and neoliberalism. Considering the state cannot control nor direct the external world,\textsuperscript{55} resilience propagandizes the impossibility of security, hence why resilience would be an expression of liberalism’s growing influence.\textsuperscript{56} A critical argument for this is that resilience governance decentralizes power and responsibility to the locale, ‘inverting traditional security logics based on state level control’\textsuperscript{57} Responsibility for security is redistributed from government to municipalities, from the national to the local, and from security authorities to citizens, stimulating self-organization and protocological control that in nature, are strongly liberal.\textsuperscript{58}

As a governing rationality then, resilience seeks to

displace both top-down direction and attempts to instrumentalise market rationalities by self-reflexive constructions of bottom-up solutions … necessary for governance in a society which is changing fast and where neither the market nor the state seems capable of directing or addressing the changes required.\textsuperscript{59}

It is not unfathomable that in a time where governments are faced with an inability to provide security alongside a depletion of funds, that delegating responsibility to citizens is killing two birds with one stone. The \textit{EU Approach to Resilience} argues that resilience is a cost-effective strategy, not only better for the people involved, but also cheaper.\textsuperscript{60} Howell nevertheless reminds us that interpreting resilience as \textit{serving} austerity fails to take resilience serious enough, and the responsibilization argument not only betrays a nostalgia
for the welfare state, but also treats governance as a very top-down process. Furthermore, Schmidt argues that resilience should be understood as a response to neoliberalism’s inherent frustrations, rather than a continuation of it.

Fourth and finally, although ‘resilience’ is a well-known term in engineering, socio-ecological systems science, and psychology, it is a relative newcomer in political science, international relations, and security studies. Considering these and related fields are sensitive to buzzwords (think for example of ‘human security’), naturally the question arises whether resilience is not just another popular but short-lived word, bound to disappear as quickly as it advanced. That depends, of course, on its potential meaning and subsequent tangible effects. ‘Resilience’ is abstract and malleable, and although that may have contributed to its acceptability to policymakers, it also provokes the question whether it is not just an empty catch-phrase or container concept. Indeed, in abstraction, resilience might mean as little as an ontological fact, or ‘a capacity of life itself’, until we start asking ‘resilience to what’? ‘resilience of whom’? and ‘resilience by what means?’

Resilience of what? To what? When, and where? Are we talking about resilience [at] the macro-level? Are we talking about resilience of state structures or the economy as a whole? Or, the resilience of the village, or resilience of the community, or resilience of your household … And resilience to what exactly? Because … our resilience to climate change takes a totally different kind of operation than the resilience to a banking crisis for example … and the word resilience applies perfectly to both. (Expert interview 4)

Answering questions such as these would generate a variety of resiliences, rather than one unitary, uniform understanding, and perhaps not only multiple, but also competing logics of resilience. The EU report Resilience in Practice shows how differently various organizations can define and apply a concept such as resilience, varying according to their own mandates and understanding. That does not need to be problematic per se, but it does demonstrate that as a concept, resilience is fluid enough to be applied in various contexts, adapted to different institutional visions, and translated into diverse strategies.

**Key prospects**

While the ambiguity surrounding resilience is criticized, at the same time it is recognized that as a concept, resilience is abstract and malleable enough to incorporate different worlds, enabling new practices and forms of cooperation. According to Duffield, resilience is a *lingua franca*—a common language—of preparedness, adaptation, and survivability, and is thus radically multi-disciplinary. Pospisil and Kühn, for example, illustrate how resilience has provided a common ground for donors to engage with
BRICS countries and other non-traditional donors (e.g. Turkey, Indonesia, the Gulf States). In similar fashion, ‘resilience’ seems to bring actors together, which historically have been institutionally and philosophically segregated, such as military/security and development actors (development–security nexus); as well as actors from humanitarian aid and development assistance (humanitarian–development nexus). In the Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries, the EU asserts that achieving resilience ‘requires all EU actors (humanitarian, development, political) to work differently and more effectively together’. The EU’s SHARE and AGIR initiatives are generally regarded as testing grounds for humanitarian–development cooperation.

As one interviewee put it: resilience is not a call for an integration or merging of humanitarian action and development assistance per se, but is rather about driving humanitarian and development actors to work in the same place, at the same time, and on the basis of their respective comparative advantage. Indeed, resilience is a convening concept with a broker capacity ‘to bring people (practitioners, policy makers), organizations with different initial agendas, and communities of practice from different sectors, together around the same table with the unique objective of “strengthening resilience”’. Likewise, the Global Strategy speaks of engagement with non-state actors like civil society and the private sector. For some organizations, resilience has opened up new ways of working:

Resilience helped open the shutters, and to say yes, besides our own activities there are a lot of other important issues to address if you want to work holistically. To do so, we have to work together with other organizations. Especially with regards to partnering up with other organizations, resilience really helped. And for an organisation like ours, which was used to working primarily within its own structures—that is a substantial change. (Expert interview 6 [translated from Dutch])

As such, resilience represents a new way of thinking that creates opportunities to think more creatively about hybrid solutions, to build on what is already there, to nudge a system from one state to another and, perhaps most importantly, to preserve a system that functions before a new way of doing things is realistically able to manifest itself. This is absolutely crucial if the EU wants to successfully navigate our ‘more connected, contested and complex world’. Still, other ‘lingua francas’ (such as ‘sustainable development’) have preceded resilience, and it remains to be seen whether resilience will truly bring about tangible changes in the way that wicked problems are addressed by the international community.

Finally, it must be noted that resilience is highly context and issue specific, as the term itself prompts the questions ‘resilience to what?’ and ‘resilience of whom?’ Context-specificity is particularly crucial for conflict-affected states, which are more diverse and complex than any other group of countries.
Although the international community has long struggled with making their practices more inclusive, resilience has the potential to revive the push for a recognition of local communities and civil society organizations’ in-depth knowledge of ‘the field’. This is crucial to help tailor policies and practices to the situation on the ground, both within and outside Europe.

To some extent this is already happening by placing national plans and national decision-making central to emergency response (see for example the Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis, which is led by Jordan’s Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation). Local ownership is crucial to the success of any resilience-building activity, because as Chandler asserts: ‘Changing or adapting behaviour and understandings need to come from within; resilience cannot be “given” or “produced” by outside actors, only facilitated or inculcated through understanding the mechanisms through which problematic social practices are reproduced’.

Conclusion

Because strategies are ‘important sources of narrating the EU’s identity’, the ubiquity of resilience in the EU Global Strategy prompts the question what the EU intents to convey and what unintended message it may send in addition. As with ‘human security’, ‘humanitarian intervention’, ‘peace-building’, or ‘sustainable development’, we can expect ‘resilience’ to be debated intensely over the coming years, not the least because the EU Global Strategy is meant as a starting point, not an end point of a comprehensive re-calibration of EU policies.

The most important message that resilience as the Global Strategy’s leitmotif sends, concerns the management of expectations, both in crisis zones and at home: in contrast to the liberal optimism that the European Security Strategy radiated, the Global Strategy reads far more cautious. Rather than expecting new and unprecedented levels of wealth and peace, the Global Strategy accepts that crises will continue to occur. Most importantly, the EU cannot and should not promise that it can effectively protect communities from the recurrence of crises nor fully compensate for the devastation they bring about. In a more pragmatic (some would say: realistic) spirit, the Global Strategy prioritizes the building of capacities of adaptation to minimize the harm done by future crises. This clearly reflects the intervention fatigue in European societies as well as the recent amassment of crises in Europe’s neighbourhood.

A second, related message that the Global Strategy conveys concerns the distribution of responsibilities. Here, the concept of resilience indicates a clear shift of responsibilities from the EU to local communities. The Global Strategy signals a more humble attitude towards the wisdom enshrined in local practices and culture. Rather than relying on blueprints that were
designed in Brussels, the EU pledges to design policies in closer collaboration with local communities.

The biggest risk that resilience as a new leitmotif brings about is its use as an excuse to decrease efforts and lower related budgets. The concurrence of the rapid rise of resilience and Europe’s financial and budgetary crises may just be a coincidence. Nevertheless, from a finance ministry’s point of view, there may be no better concept for the EU’s external relations than resilience because budget cuts can easily be justified by more humble aims and by the prime responsibility of the addressee.

To be sure, the Global Strategy itself does not suggest a European retrenchment and a dodging of the EU’s responsibilities. As argued above, the Global Strategy retains a remarkable number of liberal elements from the European Security Strategy. In spelling out resilience, the Global Strategy refers to human rights, democracy, inclusiveness, and development as building blocs.

The most encouraging aspect of resilience as the Global Strategy’s new leitmotif may be that most practitioners can work with it. Most importantly, practitioners from various corners of crisis management indicate that resilience facilitates cooperation among themselves and with local communities. Resilience is seen as a convening concept that opens up international organizations to new ways of thinking and working and providing a common ground for engagement.

Notes
1. Between April and July 2016, we had a total of 22 background talks with civil servants from the European External Action Service, the European Commission, the European Parliament, diplomats from the German Foreign Office, representatives from various international governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations with programmes focused on resilience. Most of our interviewees preferred to remain anonymous.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.23.
8. Ibid., p.25.
10. Ibid., p.24.
11. Ibid., p.11.
12. Ibid., p.25.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
21. At the heart of Max Weber’s theory of the state is a rational bureaucracy that stands above society and operates independently of it. Liberal peace-building has been criticized for underestimating the difficulties of building such a bureaucracy in a non-Western context (David Chandler, ‘International Statebuilding and the Ideology of Resilience’, Politics, Vol. 33, No. 4 [2013], pp.276–86).


54. “Evans and Reid, Resilient Life” (note 42).


56. Chandler and Reid, The Neoliberal Subject (note 40).


71. Walker and Cooper, ‘Genealogies of Resilience’ (note 65).

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