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## Resilience

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# THE EUROPEAN CONCEPT OF RESILIENCE AS A TOOL OF GEOECONOMIC COMPETITION WITH RUSSIA: THE CASE OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

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*This article aims to examine how the European Union (EU) exercises the concept of resilience to achieve its strategic foreign policy goals. Specifically, the case of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) is covered. The article proceeds as follows. First, the origins and definition of resilience are explored to provide the background for further reasoning. Second, the connections between the concept of resilience and the geoeconomic strategy of the EU are examined. Subsequently, Russia's geoeconomic approach is outlined to provide a counterexample and demonstrate the distinctiveness of the EU's policy. Finally, the approaches are compared emphasising the structural process of introduction of policy instruments, as well as their implications for the strengths and weaknesses of the EU as a geoeconomic power vis-à-vis Russia.*

## Introduction

The concept of resilience was coined as a response to the multifaceted and constantly changing set of risks and threats. Within the European context, the concept was developed specifically as an instrument directly intended to impact the policymaking in the European Union (EU). Moreover, the resilience concept seems to be not only designed for implementation within the EU member states but also to serve as a guiding principle for the neighbouring states. In this context, the instance of the Eastern

Partnership (EaP) is especially fascinating as the stand-off between Russia and the EU is also happening in the geoeconomic domain<sup>1</sup> where the interests of the two states clash through various policy instruments and approaches, thus delivering various outcomes.

## Origins & Definition of Resilience

The concept of resilience is relatively new. It first appeared in official European documents in the 2012 EU Approach to Resilience, where it was applied in the

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1 Here, to omit any complex discussion about the nature of geoeconomics and its differences from geopolitics, the term is understood as geopolitics conducted with economic means. In other words, security or political objectives are achieved through the application of economic means.

context of food security crises<sup>2</sup>. Resilience was there first defined as “the capacity of States and societies to reform, to resist and recover from internal and external crises”. However, the later EU Global Strategy document broadened the notion, and several more dimensions were included as structural parts of the concept. For instance, the Strategy mentions state and societal, economic, energy, and environmental resilience. An important role is devoted to the rule of law, good governance, and human rights which in the EU are considered as fostering peace and stability in the neighbouring countries.



***the European concept of resilience emphasises both security and humanitarian dimensions, acknowledging the existence of new kinds of threats and attempting to integrate them into the previously purely normative power-like policies***

An essential turning point can be traced when comparing the 2016 EU Global Strategy with the previous edition of 2003<sup>3</sup>. In the later version, Brussels emphasises the EU’s strategic interests in building resilience and stabilising the neighbouring region,

thus consigning the objective of civilian transformation to the backseat. Indeed, a great deal of attention has been put into securing the common neighbourhood, considering the geopolitical developments in Eastern Europe. The shift in the EU’s approaches to foreign policy was, therefore, demonstrated by the concept of resilience becoming central to the Global Strategy. While moving away from the under-ambitious objective of stability, the EU simultaneously avoided over-ambitious plans of liberal peace-building approaches, which had dominated the European, policymakers’ minds at the beginning of the century<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, the Global Strategy states that “principled pragmatism” represents both a “realistic assessment of the current strategic environment” as well as an “idealistic aspiration to advance a better world”<sup>5</sup>. However, the transformational features of European foreign policy thinking, as well as the basic premise of the democratic peace theory, were not entirely abandoned but rather transformed. In the Global Strategy, resilience still features as “democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development”<sup>6</sup> which reflects the basic European view on security. Resilience implies constant transformation as a response to a crisis and allows entities to build mechanisms of reformation and change to account for fluid international and internal environments. As it is put in the Global Strategy: “resilience – the ability

- 2 *The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises*, European Commission, 3 October 2012, [[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/resilience/com\\_2012\\_586\\_resilience\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/resilience/com_2012_586_resilience_en.pdf)].
- 3 *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Council of the EU, 8 December 2003, [<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15895-2003-INIT/en/pdf>].
- 4 W. Wagner and R. Anholt, *Resilience as the EU Global Strategy’s New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic Or Promising?*, “Contemporary Security Policy”, September 2016, pp. 414-430, [<https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1228034>].
- 5 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, European External Action Service, June 2016 [[https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)].
- 6 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, European External Action Service, June 2016 [[https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)].

of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises”<sup>7</sup>.

Reflecting the developments in international politics, the European concept of resilience emphasises both security and humanitarian dimensions, acknowledging the existence of new kinds of threats and attempting to integrate them into the previously purely normative power-like policies. Apart from being well-governed, sustainable, and cohesive, a resilient state should also be able to resist hybrid threats (e.g., disinformation, terrorism, cyberattacks, disruptions of critical infrastructure, etc.), reacting to them, promptly recovering and, crucially, transforming the state itself as a response to the shock<sup>8</sup>. Considering the all-encompassing nature of the resilience concept, it is of no surprise that resilience does not substitute other policy goals but rather goes in parallel with them<sup>9</sup>. It provides the necessary common language to guide policymakers (in the EU and the Neighbourhood alike) towards the targeted state of resilience, as well as other established common goals, ranging from the rule of law and good governance to sustainable development and a green economy.

Naturally, the complexity of the term contributes to seeing resilience-building as a multi-level process, simultaneously happening at the state, society, community, and individual levels<sup>10</sup>. Resilience, thus, prevents the creation of universal solutions to various types of crises and conflicts. Indeed, the concept stresses societies’ interior abilities to deal with crises<sup>11</sup>, which enables local entities to become self-organised and to build their resilience projects with external help if necessary<sup>12</sup>. Resilience reflects the EU’s principle of subsidiarity, which indicates the adoption of decisions on a level closest to that of the citizens. Since the implementation of the resilience-building framework is left primarily within the EaP countries’ competence, the local context is included in the equation. This is another sign of the European “values export” underpinned by a more realistic stance on international relations. So, resilience is considered to be an internally developed protection left mostly on the shoulders of partnering states with external entities assisting in it or tampering with the resilience-building activities<sup>13</sup>.

Summing up, resilience in the context of European foreign policymaking focuses

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- 7 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, European External Action Service, June 2016 [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\_stories/pdf/eugs\_review\_web.pdf].
  - 8 N. Tocci, *Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World*, “Contemporary Security Policy”, August 2019, pp. 176-194, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1640342]. S. Colombo, A. Dessi, & V. Ntsousas, (ed.), *The EU, Resilience, and the MENA Region*, Foundation for European Progressive Studies & Istituto Affari Internazionali, December 2017 [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/9788868129712.pdf].
  - 9 N. Tocci, *Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World*, “Contemporary Security Policy”, August 2019, pp. 176-194, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1640342].
  - 10 *A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU’s external action*, European Commission, 7 June 2017, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017JC0021].
  - 11 A. E. Juncos, *Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?*, “European Security”, September 2016, pp. 1-18, [https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2016.1247809].
  - 12 E. A. Korosteleva, *Reclaiming Resilience Back: A Local Turn in EU External Governance*, “Contemporary Security Policy”, November 2019, pp. 241-262, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1685316].
  - 13 K. Kakachia, A. Legucka & B. Lebanidze, *Can the EU’s New Global Strategy Make a Difference? Strengthening Resilience in the Eastern Partnership Countries*, “Democratization”, 2021, pp. 1-19, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1918110].

on creating an environment able to resist, promptly recover from the damage caused by the internal or external shocks, and, resulting from that, transform the state and society. Resilience is not simply protection from risks, but a state-society configuration in which constant updates of practices and institutional design are in place, providing constant evolution. To build a resilient state, crucial underlying realms should also be accounted for. Particularly, social trust, legitimacy of the governance actors, and effective design of governance institutions are important<sup>14</sup>, so that the political and social environment supports the necessary changes. The concept of resilience might seem ambiguous and flexible which, naturally, has positive and negative implications. On the one hand, elasticity allows resilience's application by a variety of actors and in different contexts<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, it also brings limitations to the measurement and operationalisation of resilience: while different communities have a distinct set of priorities to improve their resilience, universal measurement techniques become less useful. Still, resilience represents the ability to withstand crisis situations which can be measured via the parameters of recovery. For instance, Alessi et al. provide a measurement technique by testing the

actors' capacities for absorption, adaptation, medium-run absorption, and adaptation, as well as transformation (rebounding after the crisis)<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the EU is aiming not only at creating a safe surrounding region, but also establishing necessary conditions for the surrounding region to be able to create a safe environment for themselves.

## Resilience as a Policy Framework for Geoeconomic Competition

The EU is often referred to as a "civilizational"<sup>17</sup> or "transformative"<sup>18</sup> power, to reflect the Union's focus on non-coercive approaches to influence-building and establishing external ties. However, with the introduction of the concept of resilience in EU documents and the reorientation of foreign policy priorities towards its establishment in neighbouring states, it can be argued that the EU has become more concerned about geopolitical considerations than it was before<sup>19</sup>.

Moreover, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) at its roots included geopolitical elements (which, however, were not explicitly mentioned in ENP-related documents). Geopolitical issues were mostly included in the objective of stabilizing the surrounding states and keeping them

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- 14 K. Kakachia, A. Legucka & B. Lebanidze, *Can the EU's New Global Strategy Make a Difference? Strengthening Resilience in the Eastern Partnership Countries*, "Democratization", 2021, pp. 1-19, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1918110].
- 15 W. Wagner and R. Anholt, *Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic Or Promising?*, "Contemporary Security Policy", September 2016, pp. 414-430, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1228034].
- 16 L. Alessi, P. Benczur, F. Campolongo, J. Cariboni, A. R. Manca, B. Menyhart, A. Pagano, *The resilience of EU member states to the Global Crisis*, "VOX EU CEPR", 26 September 2018, [https://voxeu.org/article/resilience-eu-member-states-global-crisis].
- 17 T. Mario, *Europe: A Civilian Power? European Union, Global Governance, World Order*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2007. R. Niblett, *Strategic Europe: Still a Civilian Power*, "Carnegie Europe", 5 October 2011, [https://carnegieeurope.eu/2011/10/05/strategic-europe-still-civilian-power-pub-45665].
- 18 T. A. Börzel, B. Lebanidze, *The Transformative Power of Europe Beyond Enlargement: The EU's Performance in Promoting Democracy in its Neighbourhood*, "East European Politics", February 2017, pp. 17-35, [https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2017.1280473]. H. Grabbe, *The EU's Transformative Power. Europeanization Through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2006.
- 19 S. Lehne, *How the EU Can Survive in a Geopolitical Age*, Carnegie Europe, February 2020 [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2-24\_Lehne-EU\_Geopolitics.pdf]. I. Mihalache, *Principled pragmatism in EU foreign policy: A return to Realpolitik or rapprochement with Russia*, "Center for Geopolitics & Security in Realism Studies", 8 September 2016 [http://cgsrs.org/publications/80].



closer to the EU, thus excluding Russian influence in the region<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, in the EU Global Strategy, resilience is directly mentioned as a means to achieve security and prosperity: “Together with its partners, the EU will therefore promote resilience in its surrounding regions. A resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy”<sup>21</sup>. This objective is geopolitical, as it pursues security through establishing the EU’s influence vis-à-vis Russia. This is especially visible in the criticism of Russia by the Central European countries which tabled the geopolitical vision of the Eastern Partnership<sup>22</sup>.



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However, such influence-building activities largely contrast with the traditional geopolitical instruments of power politics. Instead of coercing states, the EU opted for stabilisation instruments, inducing domestic democratic processes through different association arrangements, to prevent negative security spillovers from the

neighbourhood. This logic was defining for the Union’s enlargement process in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>23</sup>. By exporting the values developed within the Union, the EU tried to exploit the conditionality approach: rewarding states for internal reforms and moving domestic legislation closer to the European model by providing neighbours with additional benefits. Most endorsements provided by the EU implied some sort of technical/economic assistance or, naturally, financial help which allows this approach to be perceived as a geoeconomic one though with more liberal features.

Generally, incentives included in the conditionality approach lie in three dimensions: financial aid and loans, gradual access to the EU markets (via free trade agreements), and visa-free regimes<sup>24</sup>. This approach builds on the experience of successful (although to various degrees) transformation of the countries that joined the EU during the 2004 enlargement wave.

Thus, the EaP initially was not deprived of geopolitical thinking, but it was only in the objectives, while the instruments remained on the liberal side of the aisle. Instead, “principled pragmatism” and resilience represent a mix of the EU’s liberal profile (conditionality, a transformational agenda as a source of security) trimmed by a realist’s notion of the external environment being a source of risks (recognition of the multiplicity of risks and challenges). Youngs calls this strategy “liberal-redux geopolitics”,

20 N. Hajdu, *Geopolitics on the EU’s Eastern Borders*, “Green European Journal”, 14 August 2020 [<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/geopolitics-on-the-eus-eastern-borders/>].

21 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, European External Action Service, June 2016 [[https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)].

22 D. Cadier, *The Geopoliticisation of The EU’s Eastern Partnership*, “Geopolitics”, 2018, pp. 71-99, [<https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1477754>].

23 V. Jakovlevski, *The Logic of the E.U. Enlargement: Exporting Stability or Inheriting an Empire*, “Journal of Public and International Affairs”, Spring 2010 [<https://jpia.princeton.edu/sites/jpia/files/logic-of-eu-enlargement.pdf>].

24 D. Cadier, *Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia Competition in the Shared Neighbourhood and the Ukraine Crisis*, “Global Policy”, October 2014, pp. 76-85, [<https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12152>].

highlighting the enhanced orientation of the EU's strategy towards security objectives<sup>25</sup>. Interestingly, realists might argue here that the pursuit of resilience towards external shocks might conversely diminish the overall resilience of the system and lead to the security dilemma<sup>26</sup>.

However, the concept of resilience introduces some of the *realpolitik* features in the EU foreign policy toolbox, since after the Global Strategy, resilience has added another dimension to the EU's transformational profile. Resilience is understood as a method to resist hybrid threats. Hybrid warfare is intended to exploit vulnerabilities in democratic states and institutions in various areas: political, economic, military, societal, or information<sup>27</sup> (e.g., societal division, lack of political cohesion, corruption, inefficient law enforcement, weak and dependent media infrastructure, or vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure<sup>28</sup>). Considering the clandestine nature of the hybrid threats<sup>29</sup>, which makes them difficult to detect, the resilience framework serves as a measure to prevent damage caused by hybrid intervention, as demonstrated by the

joint NATO-EU declaration<sup>30</sup>. A resilience framework aiming at strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and institutional trust should undermine hybrid efforts which would be less efficient in systems with transparent, trustworthy, corrupt-free institutions, high social and political cohesion, as well as a sustainable economic development model. Exploiting vulnerabilities in EaP countries<sup>31</sup>, Russian policies resemble hybrid tactics, usually aimed at excluding European and Western influence. Furthermore, while the effect of resilience might be limited in a military hybrid domain, it still reduces social division, thus diminishing the basis for such interventions.

Still, this resilience-fostering via conditionality instruments is not part of an offensive strategy – it puts much of the burden on the participating states. The choice of which path of development to follow is largely left up to the EaP states, as no punishments for policy deviations are included in the agreements. Nevertheless, the tailor-made partnerships and resilience as a flexible concept allowing variation

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- 25 R. Youngs, *Is 'hybrid geopolitics' the next EU foreign policy doctrine?*, "LSE blogs", 19 June 2017 [<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/06/19/is-hybrid-geopolitics-the-next-eu-foreign-policy-doctrine>].
- 26 C. Nitoiu & F. Pasatoiu, *Resilience and the World Order: The EU and the RIC States*, "International Politics", July 2020, pp. 444-61, [<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00259-z>].
- 27 The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, *Hybrid threats as a concept*, [<https://www.hybridcoe.fi/hybrid-threats-as-a-phenomenon>]. Council of the EU, *Countering hybrid threats: Council calls for enhanced common action*, [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/12/10/countering-hybrid-threats-council-calls-for-enhanced-common-action/>].
- 28 Y. Yanakiev, P. Dimov & D. Bachvarov, *Conceptualizing the Role of Societal Resilience in Countering Hybrid Warfare*, "Information & Security: An International Journal", 2018, pp. 77-89, [<https://doi.org/10.11610/isi.3907>]. M. Wigell, *Hybrid interference as a wedge strategy: a theory of external interference in liberal democracy*, "International Affairs", February 2019.
- 29 M. Wigell, *Hybrid interference as a wedge strategy: a theory of external interference in liberal democracy*, "International Affairs", February 2019.
- 30 NATO, *Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 8 July 2016, [[https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133163.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm)].
- 31 K. Zarembo & S. Solodkiy, *The Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare: The Case of Ukraine*, "Center for European Policy Analysis", 29 January 2021 [<https://cepa.org/the-evolution-of-russian-hybrid-warfare-ukraine/>]. I. Romanchyshyna, *Hybrid Wars in Post-Soviet Spaces as a Challenge to the West*, "Humanity in Action", October 2016 [[https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/hybrid-wars-in-post-soviet-spaces-as-a-challenge-to-the-west](https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/hybrid-wars-in-post-soviet-spaces-as-a-challenge-to-the-west)]. K. Gogolashvili, V. Pasa, M. Hovhannisyán, V. Ohienko, *Hybrid Threats in the EaP Area: Building a Common Response*, "Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies", 2016.

across countries sends signals about the EU abandoning attempts to universalise the EaP region based on common strategies. The pragmatism of European foreign policy towards the EaP is visible and also enhanced by the new focus and acceptance of variety on the EU's eastern flank. Resilience as a common goal becomes particularly useful, providing a rationale for reforms as a direct path towards better protection against external shocks. It is not directly connected to the hard security; however, strengthening of resilience is seen in the EU as a necessary element of this hard security<sup>32</sup>.



***Despite the hardships in the operationalisation of resilience (which is one of the concept's major points of criticism), its flexibility allows resilience to be applied as a guideline for the ultimate objective: adaptation to a fluid insecure international environment, while not abandoning the more concrete aims of state-building in EaP countries***

Naturally, some of the conflicts in the Eastern Partnership countries have played a role here. Eastern Partnership countries have become a nexus of interests of the EU and Russia, which has caused the deterioration of Russia's relations with the EU and the West in general. What is striking is the different approaches which Russia and the EU take in pursuit of their foreign policy goals. Primarily the difference is in the various degrees of acknowledgment of the EaP countries' sovereignty. These various stances on sovereignty manifest themselves

in different policy tools. Resilience is a loose policymaking instrument that leaves the primary responsibility for its implementation with the countries participating in the resilience-building. Despite the hardships in the operationalisation of resilience (which is one of the concept's major points of criticism), its flexibility allows resilience to be applied as a guideline for the ultimate objective: adaptation to a fluid insecure international environment, while not abandoning the more concrete aims of state-building in EaP countries (anti-corruption and rule of law reforms, macroeconomic and fiscal stability efforts, etc.).

### **Counterexample: Russian Geoeconomic Strategy**

Russia's policies, aimed at establishing security in the neighbouring region, follow a completely different logic. While the EU aims to build resilient and stable states on its eastern flank, and, thus, limit negative spillovers from the region, Moscow intends to accomplish EaP countries' policy alignment with Russian preferences, and to ensure their loyalty. Two underlying points help to explain the Russian geopolitical stance concerning its geoeconomic strategy.

First, Russia's immediate neighbourhood plays a major role for Moscow, both historically and politically. The Kremlin's focus on its regional neighbourhood was even more strengthened by the dissolution of the USSR<sup>33</sup>, as Russia's vulnerable position put it on the defensive, instead of looking for ways of extending its influence globally. Second, Russian decision-makers have seen the international arena as a zero-sum contest, where major powers compete for dominance over initially

32 *Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020. Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*, European Commission, 18 March 2020 [[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1\\_en\\_act\\_part1\\_v6.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf)].

33 M. Urnov, "Greatpowerness" as the Key Element of Russian Self-consciousness under Erosion. "Communist and Post-Communist Studies", September–December 2014, pp. 305–322, [doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.10.001].

neutral territories<sup>34</sup>. Moscow aims to bind up Russian neighbours, because “if they are not controlled by Russia, they are dominated by another, competing power”<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, Russia condemns the expansion of NATO and EU<sup>36</sup>, which contributes to the zero-sum logic, since it is perceived as a threat to Russia and drives Moscow to engage in counteractions based on the logic of limited sovereignty, as Russia does not believe in the Westphalian type of sovereignty being granted to the FSU countries<sup>37</sup>.

Different values embedded in separate political contexts might lead to distinct sets of instruments. While values are not necessarily the only predictors of these foreign policy instruments, the EU’s identity serves as an anchor for remaining within the liberal framework in the EU’s geostrategy – the Union focuses on cooperation and negotiation practices. Brussels still believes in the basis for the idea of European integration, which consists of the notion of interdependency leading to peaceful coexistence: “The first steps were to foster economic cooperation: the idea being that countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent and so more likely to avoid conflict”<sup>38</sup>. The EU understands its attractiveness in terms of standards of living, which allows Brussels to

push EaP states to reform so as to be closer to the European models of governance. It is strongly believed that good governance, rule of law, and diversified competitive economies will make states more resilient and less prone to external shocks.

Here lies the core difference in the approaches of the EU and Russia towards the EaP countries. Since in a modern world it is almost impossible to decrease states’ vulnerabilities, the EU aims to increase its partners’ resilience to external shocks, and, thus, counterbalance harmful spillovers from other states, so that any disruptions would not bring critical damage. On the contrary, Russian strategy is aimed at using a complex environment of threats by relying on hybrid methods of influence and coercion. In particular, in the geoeconomic context, asymmetrical interdependencies are weaponised by expanding vulnerabilities and exploiting them to coerce other states, while the less dependent actor enjoys increased bargaining power over a more dependent counterpart, since the former can impose high costs on the latter by limiting access to the object of dependency<sup>39</sup>. This situation is visible in bordering countries’ dependence on Russia’s energy supply and markets<sup>40</sup>. For instance, Russian energy policy often incorporates blackmail and

34 M. Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia*, Ashgate Publishing Group: 2014. S. G. Feinstein, & E. B. Pirro, *Testing the World Order: Strategic Realism in Russian Foreign Affairs*, “International Politics”, February 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00285-5]. M. Galeotti, *We need to talk about Putin: Why the West gets him wrong*, Ebury Press: London 2019.

35 L. Jonavicius, L. Delcour, R. Dragneva, & K. Wolczuk, *Russian Interests, Strategies, and Instruments in the Common Neighbourhood*, “Freie Universitaet Berlin Working Paper”, March 2019.

36 *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 1 December 2016 [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\_policy/official\_documents/-/asset\_publisher/CptICk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248].

37 J. Nixey, R. Sakwa, *The Russia question: Sovereignty and legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, 9 October 2020 [https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/12/russia-question-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-post-soviet-eurasia].

38 The European Union, *Goals and values of the EU*, “The European Union official website”, [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief\_en].

39 R. O. Keohane, J. S. Nye, *Power & Interdependence*, Longman: Boston 2012.

40 M. Wigell, *Conceptualizing Regional Powers’ Geoeconomic Strategies: Neo-imperialism, Neo-mercantilism, Hegemony, and Liberal Institutionalism*, “Asia Europe Journal”, 2015, pp. 135-151. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-015-0442-x]

threats to cut energy supplies<sup>41</sup> (e.g., one might remember the Russia-Belarus gas clashes of 2004, 2007, and 2010 and Russia-Ukraine energy disputes of 2006 and 2009). Russia also offered economic concessions and services to endorse “appropriate” behaviour (e.g., Russia allowed reduced gas prices to test Ukraine’s resolve to join the Eurasian Customs Union in 2012<sup>42</sup>, or to lobby for the extension of the Sevastopol naval base lease agreement in 2010<sup>43</sup>). Similarly, Russia also provides energy subsidies to Belarus in exchange for political concessions<sup>44</sup>. Russian strategy implies the “carrot and stick” approach, where one yardstick is the alignment of foreign and internal policies with those of Russia. The EU’s policy towards the EaP is instead focused on the gradual provision of endorsements provided to external partners which follow the European “guidelines” where a yardstick is the alignment of foreign and internal policies with the EU’s values and norms.


## Comparing the Approaches

When directly comparing the approaches, it becomes visible that the differences are deep – even at the level of basic assumptions about the international system, there are conceptual distinctions that lead to different geoeconomic strategies.

The internal values and self-identity currently prevailing in the two powers serve as a starting point from which their foreign policy outlook is formulated, and respective policy instruments are created. The geoeconomic strategies of

the EU and Russia both imply the exercise of conditionality, but in different ways. Indeed, their viewpoints for assessing the risks in the common neighbourhood are different. The EU considers EaP countries’ alignment with European values as a pathway towards resilience and, hence, security both for the partnership states and for the EU itself. Moreover, the deviation from the established common goal of resilience-building is not punished by the Union. Instead, the deviating government simply does not receive endorsements from the European side.

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***Resilience also implies internal capabilities to overcome the challenges; hence, the EaP states are perceived as sovereign actors, with multiple levels on which resilience could be built***

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Resilience also implies internal capabilities to overcome the challenges; hence, the EaP states are perceived as sovereign actors, with multiple levels on which resilience could be built. On the contrary, Russia assesses risk in the common neighbourhood by comparing EaP countries’ policies with the Kremlin’s preferences, ultimately ignoring national level reforms and developments. Their deviations are punished via the weaponisation of asymmetrical interdependencies of dependent states. Moreover, the EU relies on institutional arrangements, and being a multi-level actor

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41 P. Aalto, & T. Forsberg, *The Structuration of Russia’s Geo-economy Under Economic Sanctions*, “Asia Europe Journal”, June 2016, pp. 221-237, [https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-015-0446-6]

42 A. Moshes, *Will Ukraine Join (and Save) the Eurasian Customs Union?*, “PONARS Eurasia”, 17 April 2013, [https://www.ponarseurasia.org/will-ukraine-join-and-save-the-urasian-customs-union].

43 K. Wolczuk, *Managing the Flows of Gas and Rules: Ukraine between the EU and Russia*, “Eurasian Geography and Economics”, April 2016, pp. 113-137, [https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1174072]

44 N. Martin, *Belarus’ Soviet-era economy still propped up by Moscow*, “Deutsche Welle”, 25 August 2020, [https://www.dw.com/en/belarus-soviet-era-economy-still-propped-up-by-moscow/a-54694876].

Brussels cannot easily instrumentalise geoeconomic tools, as it is constrained by internal identity and joint decision making. Moscow enjoys a high degree of freedom in choosing geoeconomic tools since there are no identity-constructing values that could limit policy choices.


The complexity of the international environment acts as an intervening factor, changing the set of geoeconomic tools applied by the EU and Russia. In the EU, the multiplicity of threats is an incentive to push EaP countries to becoming more resilient. While in the EU's 2003 Security Strategy the focus was placed on the transformational agenda, the Global Strategy has changed the vector towards flexibility and resilience-building, so that EaP states could be better equipped for resistance against the negative impact of the international environment. On the Russian side, Moscow also acknowledges the international complexity, but instead of building a safe region and strengthening the EaP capabilities per se, the Kremlin ensures security through controlling policy outcomes in the former Soviet Union countries. Thus, international complexity serves both as a source of threats (since EaP countries might deviate from Moscow's preferences) and as a source of power (since interdependencies might be weaponised following the "carrot and stick" approach).

Logically, such differentiated policy approaches developed in regional powers have their particular strengths and weaknesses. Assessing the exact successes or failures in achieving foreign policy goals might be a challenging separate task, however, it is still possible to sketch gaps in them.

The EU's approach to building a resilient EaP region is more long-term. The concept of resilience itself implies creating conditions for long-term resistance and flexibility in response to shocks. Thus, the long-

term strength of the European approach is that it brings potential win-win results both for the EU and EaP at all levels, while trusty relations with the EaP countries are supported based on the coherence of interests (provided that the neighbouring countries are interested in resilience-building activities). Yet, resilience-building is not deprived of weaknesses that mainly lie in spoiler activities, both internal (e.g., elites' corrupt interests) and external (e.g., external intervention in the internal political process). In the long-term, resilience might provoke a security dilemma and lead to escalation and, thus, undermine initial security objectives. However, considering the all-encompassing nature of resilience, its promotion has limited chances of being over-securitised.

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***Resilience in the European context focuses less on defence capabilities, but rather on civic, economic, political, and institutional agendas aimed at fast "rebounding" to the pre-crisis conditions, and transforming in the process***

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The Russian approach is, conversely, better suited for their short-term tactics because Moscow exercises prompt operational capacity to change policy outcomes in the EaP countries through heightening the costs of countries' deviations from Russia's desired policies. In the long-term, no conditions on internal reforms are placed on the states, which creates less of a burden on the political elites and allows for the omission of long-term internal strategic developments. Simultaneously, Russian actions might be sometimes harmful to Moscow itself, especially in cases with a limited level of asymmetry in the interdependency. Moreover, the strategy of weaponised interdependence impedes long-

term policy planning for the EaP countries, as Moscow's strategy limits policy options and, thus, leads to EaP countries focusing on the reduction of asymmetries and dependencies.

In this context, the EU should, jointly with EaP participants, develop policy frameworks designed to promptly react to potential "spoiler" activities, which might undermine the resilience-building efforts in participating states. Resilience in the European context focuses less on defence capabilities, but rather on civic, economic, political, and institutional agendas aimed at fast "rebounding" to the pre-crisis conditions, and transforming in the process. To counteract spoiling activities, the EU might create systems of loss compensation after the crisis in return for more deep reforms, thus expanding the conditionality approach, and providing an additional dimension of incentives for resilience-building. This move would be largely consistent with the European foreign policy profile, where liberal instruments are backed up by pragmatic security concerns in the external environment.

In contrast, the Russian approach is effective in the short run, as it imposes on EaP countries additional costs for deviation from Moscow's national interests. However,

it simultaneously impedes long-term orientation towards Russia as a partner, since avoiding additional costs requires constant policy coordination and leads to the limitation of EaP countries' policy options. This leads in turn to the countries' retaliation in the form of economic diversification and political reorientation, as they attempt to cover the losses from weaponised interdependence. Politically speaking, the Russian approach to security building also brings weaknesses, because trust between the partners is undermined. To avoid these failures, Russian thinking on realpolitik and limited sovereignty should be abandoned, but considering the depths of this outlook in their psyche, it is doubtful whether these changes will occur in the near future.

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