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Can the EU's new global strategy make a difference? Strengthening resilience in the Eastern Partnership countries

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ABSTRACT

This article assesses the European Union's (EU) performance in promoting societal resilience in the Eastern Partnership countries (EaP) on examples of Georgia and Ukraine. We examine two approaches to external resilience-building employed by the EU: support for the sources of societal resilience (social trust, legitimacy of governance actors, design of governance institutions) and prevention of domestic and external risks. Our research shows that while Ukraine and Georgia possess a moderate degree of societal resilience both countries also suffer from a high exposure to domestic and external risks, making them dependent on external resilience-building support from the EU. Analysis of the EU's resilience-building agenda in Georgia and Ukraine shows a mixed record for the EU. While the EU managed to strengthen sources of resilience and alleviate domestic risks in both countries, it failed to mitigate geopolitical risks: leaving the window open for new conflicts and endangering the sustainability of its resilience agenda.

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Introduction

This article seeks to explore the extent to which the European Union (EU) and its member states¹ promote societal resilience in two Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries: Georgia and Ukraine. Both countries suffer from a presence of areas of limited statehood (ALS) and contested orders (CO) and are exposed to various domestic and external risks. To help its neighbourhood countries cope with risks, the EU recently shifted its attention towards building and supporting the societal resilience of these states.² In the article, we seek to answer the following questions: *What are main risks affecting Georgia and Ukraine? How strong is societal resilience in Georgia and Ukraine? To*

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what extent has the EU been successful in mitigating risks and strengthening sources of societal resilience in Georgia and Ukraine?

The article builds on a new conceptual framework developed by Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, (see introduction to this special issue) to understand how societal resilience can help fend off risks and prevent governance breakdown/violent conflict. First, we consider the ALS and CO as default context conditions³ of both Georgia and Ukraine. According to Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, in those countries ALS occur in the form of territorial conflicts, and CO can take various forms from minor societal and political splits to violent protests.⁴

While the EU does not have a clear vision of how to strengthen security in this fragile region, it recently started to focus more on the state and societal resilience of its neighbourhood states so that they can successfully cope with risks. The European Commission (EC) defines resilience as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises”.⁵ Resilience is largely considered a domestic process with external actors supporting or spoiling the process of resilience-building.⁶ For strong societal resilience to exist, three major sources should be in place: social trust, legitimacy of governance actors and effective design of governance institutions.⁷ We assume that the EU and other external actors can promote societal resilience and prevent governance breakdowns and violent conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine in two ways: by boosting sources of resilience or mitigating negative impacts of risks.

Based on our empirical results on the reciprocal interaction between resilience, risks and the role of external actors in Georgia and Ukraine, we draw two broad conclusions: first, both Georgia and Ukraine show a basic quality of domestic resilience able to withhold against some risks and prevent the emergence of violent conflicts or governance breakdown. However, the two countries, due to their economic, social as well as security- and stateness-related vulnerabilities, on their own cannot cope with all risks they face, especially those associated with the external environment. Second, the EU seems to have a mixed record of external resilience-building in Georgia and Ukraine. While the Union managed to somewhat strengthen sources of resilience and mitigate domestic risks, it mostly failed to tackle negative impacts of global and diffuse risks. Some most serious risks, mostly related to the role of Russia, remain partly unresolved by the EU and by Georgia and Ukraine themselves, leaving the possibility of new violent conflicts or governance breakdowns.

The article is built on a critical analysis of academic literature and official documents from the EU, Ukraine, and Georgia concerned with the resilience, as well as on expert interviews gathered during the study trips to Ukraine and Georgia within the EU-LISTCO project (November 2018–December 2019). In terms of theoretical framework, while we follow the conceptual framework of this special issue, we employ a number of theoretical models and concepts from the Europeanization and external governance literature to assess the EU’s performance in promoting societal resilience in Georgia and Ukraine. They include the EU’s usage of democratic conditionality, socialization, capacity building as well as a spoiling role of “Black Knights”⁸ At the same time, the current article is thought to be a heuristic exercise. We acknowledge the temporal limitation of the study subject since only three years have passed since the inception of the resilience as a guiding principle of the EU foreign policy. Known for being a slow animal, it will probably take more time, until the EU’s discursive change towards resilience becomes part of the Union’s actual policy and delivers

tangible outputs. Yet, at this early stage, we seek to identify some trends in the EU's general efforts to promote resilience in Georgia and Ukraine.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we first flesh out CO and ALS in Ukraine and Georgia that pose risks for the EU's stability and security. In the second part, we explore the local dimension of resilience-building in Georgia and Ukraine by looking at three sources of resilience: social trust, the legitimacy of governance actors, and the design of governance institutions. In so doing, we attempt to underline the overall degree of resilience in the two EaP countries. In the third part, we elaborate on the role of external actors, particularly the EU, and assess its potential to strengthen the sources of societal resilience and to mitigate risks in Georgia and Ukraine. We conclude with empirical and conceptual insights.

Areas of limited statehood and order contestation: risks to resilience in Georgia and Ukraine

We start from the assumption that both Georgia and Ukraine are characterised by ALS and CO. Areas of limited statehood are territorial, policy, or social areas in which central government authorities and institutions are too weak to set and enforce rules and/or do not control the monopoly over the means of violence.⁹ Order contestations occur where situations in which state and non-state actors challenge the norms, principles, and rules according to which societies and political systems are or should be organized.¹⁰ In Georgia and Ukraine, ALS take the form of unresolved territorial conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, the Donbas region and Crimea in Ukraine) which, if exacerbated, can result in a new violent conflict (eastern Ukraine since 2014) or a full-scale war (the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008).¹¹ Order contestation often plays out in a political and socio-cultural arena among different political, economic and societal actors and with frequent involvement of external powers. The range and severity of governance problems produced by the presence of a CO can vary from total governance breakdown (Georgia in the 1990s) to violent protests (Ukraine in 2014, and Georgia in 2008, 2011 and 2020) or peaceful electoral revolutions (Ukraine in 2004 and Georgia in 2003).¹²

ALS and CO in the EU's neighbourhood countries pose a serious risk to the EU's security and internal stability, but only if they deteriorate and turn into violent conflict and/or governance breakdown do they become immediate threats.¹³ We provide a brief mapping of the most significant domestic and external risks which may contribute to the deterioration of ALS and CO and emergence of new conflicts or governance breakdowns in Georgia and Ukraine. We further suggest for each risk category specific "tipping points" or the threshold at which risks turn into threats,¹⁴ i.e. when ALS and CO turn into governance breakdown and/or violent conflicts.

Domestic risks in Georgia and Ukraine are dominated by factors related to bad governance and socio-economic underdevelopment. *State capture and/or informal power-grab by rent-seeking business-political elites* has been a serious destabilization risk in both countries.¹⁵ They can be further exacerbated by the presence of suboptimal democratic institutional designs which may include distorted checks and balances between different branches of power, a politicized judiciary or a deficient electoral code that favours incumbent candidates.¹⁶ Under conditions of state capture, contested elections or other events with polarizing effects can radicalize societies and act as tipping points leading to violent conflict or governance breakdown. Examples

from the recent past include numerous post-election or otherwise political protests such as electoral revolutions (in Georgia in 2003 and in Ukraine in 2004),¹⁷ Euromaidan protests and near governance breakdown in Ukraine in 2013–2014,¹⁸ and numerous political crises in Georgia (2009, 2011 and 2020).¹⁹

Another domestic risk that may lead to violence or governance breakdown is related to socio-economic underdevelopment. High levels of social inequality coupled with widespread poverty, a high degree of unemployment (11% in Ukraine in 2020 and 11.6% in Georgia 2019)²⁰ and the presence of rent-seeking elites create conditions for social and political radicalization. Under these conditions, any major socio-economic shock can act as a tipping point leading to violent protests or governance breakdowns.

Next to domestic risks there are a number of global and diffuse risks that can have a negative impact on societies and trigger governance breakdown or violent conflict in Georgia and Ukraine.²¹ Many are associated with Russia's heavy presence in these two countries. Russia is seen as responsible for the continuing presence of four ALS (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea and Donbas) in Georgia and Ukraine.²² Currently, the Donbas region in Ukraine represents the most dangerous conflict scene in which military skirmishes between Ukrainian armed forces and Russia-backed separatists have never fully stopped since 2014. Russia's "borderization policy", which refers to unilateral border demarcation policy alongside administrative boundary lines between Georgia and South Ossetia, in Georgia can act as a potential tipping point for a new violent conflict between Georgia and Russia.²³ Russia has also been heavily involved in order contestation in both countries.²⁴ The Kremlin has been using its soft power (including the Russian Orthodox Church and pro-Kremlin organizations)²⁵ to spread social-conservative, anti-liberal and Eurosceptic narratives.²⁶

Georgia and Ukraine are also exposed to other global and diffuse risks including global financial and economic risks (world financial crises or regional currency fluctuations), biological and environmental risks (SARS-CoV-2, grain market crisis, droughts and floods), and demographic and uncontrolled migration risks (problems related to brain drain and a high number of Internally Displaced People (IDP)).²⁷ If accumulated and strengthened by a low level of resilience, these risks can have a severe impact on Georgia and Ukraine and could even lead to new violent conflicts or governance breakdowns.

How to mitigate risks: major sources of resilience in Georgia and Ukraine

In this part of the article we analyse key sources of societal resilience, which is a major factor in preventing risks and stopping ALS and CO from turning into violent conflict or governance breakdown. As Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse argue (see introduction to this special issue),²⁸ "building resilience is largely a domestic process where local state and non-state actors take centre stage".²⁹ Hence, before exploring the role of the EU as a resilience-builder in Georgia and Ukraine, we take stock of the different domestic/local sources of resilience in Georgia and Ukraine and the degree of external assistance those countries need. Following Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse (see introduction to this special issue), we look at the most important sources of resilience: social trust, legitimacy of governance actors and governance institutions.

Social trust

Social trust refers to “a cooperative attitude towards other people based on the optimistic expectation that others are likely to respect one’s own interests”.³⁰ It consists of three dimensions: personal, group-based and generalized trust. Georgia and Ukraine show contrasting pictures of the level of social trust. While individual and group-level trust is relatively high in both societies, generalized trust is rather low (see Table 1). While generalized trust seems to have a greater impact on societal resilience, group-based trust has often acted as an important source of resilience in both countries. Group-based trust was of utmost importance during the initial phase of Russian aggression in Ukraine, when volunteer movements provided finances for the basic needs of the armed forces and volunteer battalions operating on the frontline and, therefore, provided military capacity in the absence of effective state mechanisms.³¹ In fact, both the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity proved the high capacity of Ukrainian society for self-organization, which made up for the distrust in state institutions.³² Between 2014 and 2016, building upon existing capacities of Facebook, thousands of Ukrainian civilians engaged in a collaborative effort to provide ordnance and supplies to the Ukrainian armed forces, preventing the violent conflict from spreading further into Ukrainian territory.³³

On the other hand, generalized trust is very low in both countries (see Table 1) and has been on the decline since the dissolution of the USSR.³⁴ A slightly better position of Ukraine in this respect came from the level of poverty in both countries (in Ukraine 3% of the population is living below the poverty line³⁵ while in Georgia this number is around 20%³⁶), as a worse economic situation leads to less generalized trust among society.³⁷

Lack of generalized trust is also related to doubts about the procedural fairness of public services. One survey conducted in Ukraine showed that 84% of the population believed that good connections in the professional sphere were necessary in order to obtain public services.³⁸ On the societal level, it is worth remembering that Georgia remains a conservative and traditional country, and institutions are often secondary to informal networks and bonds such as clan, kinship and family that, in a broad sense, are not limited to the closest relatives.³⁹ Other reasons behind low generalized trust include negative experiences of economic and political turbulence after the collapse of the USSR, low level of socio-economic and human development,⁴⁰ high degree of inequality and underperformance of public services.

To sum up, while generalized trust is relatively low in both countries, group-based trust often acts as a source of societal resilience helping Ukrainian and Georgian societies to survive in times of crisis and prevent full governance breakdown. Supplementing group-based trust with generalized trust in post-socialist transitional societies has been difficult. It requires addressing several long-term socio-political issues which

Table 1. Social trust in Georgia and Ukraine.

	Georgia	Ukraine
Personal trust: trust in “People you know personally” [sum of two responses: trust completely & trust somewhat]	78.5%	85.5%
Group-based trust: trust in “your neighbourhood” [sum of two responses: trust completely & trust somewhat]	85.7%	77.9%
Generalized trust: “Most people can be trusted” [sum of positive responses]	8.8%	23.1%

Source: World Values Survey Association, “World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010–2014”.

are considered necessary conditions for high social trust. They include a high density of civil society and voluntary associations,⁴¹ low degree of corruption,⁴² honest and transparent governments,⁴³ procedural fairness in public institutions,⁴⁴ equitable distribution of resources,⁴⁵ universal social policies, economic equality and equality of opportunities.⁴⁶

The empirical legitimacy of governance actors

Another source of societal resilience is the legitimacy of governance actors. This refers to “the social acceptance they enjoy among the governed population”, which “leads to voluntary compliance and cooperation”.⁴⁷ Both in Georgia and Ukraine, surveys show relatively low levels of legitimacy and social acceptance towards public institutions and political/societal actors. According to the EU Neighbourhood Barometer Survey, political parties are the least trusted actors in both countries: only 25% of Georgians and 13% of Ukrainians trust them (see Table 2). The level of trust in both countries is also below 50% towards government, parliament, and regional and local public authorities (see Table 2). The only institutions that scored relatively well both in Georgia and Ukraine were religious institutions as non-state actors (see Table 2).

Both in Georgia and Ukraine, the low level of trust in state institutions is informed mostly by past experiences, including power abuse, corruption and state capture during Soviet and post-Soviet times. The political process in both countries has been fractured and accompanied by a high degree of informality, state capture, disproportional enrichment of business-political elites and continuous socio-economic hardship for the majority of the population.⁴⁸ There are, however, a few notable exceptions for both countries. In Georgia, trust in the police and army increased significantly after both institutions were reformed and got rid of petty corruption from 2003 onward.⁴⁹ Newly established public service halls also enjoy high popular support.⁵⁰ In Ukraine, lower legitimacy towards public institutions are determined by continuously high levels of corruption. However, after the start of the military conflict in 2014, trust in the military and volunteers has improved due to their vigilance during the conflict.⁵¹

Among the non-state actors, the Orthodox churches enjoy high legitimacy in both countries.⁵² The Orthodox churches in both countries are often considered a social glue that holds societies together and prevents violent order contestation in highly polarized Georgian and Ukrainian societies. On the other hand, they can also act as spoilers of resilience when they challenge certain liberal norms or promote polarizing or discriminatory narratives.⁵³ The recent schism in Ukraine’s Orthodox Church, which left part of the church and clergy under the influence of Moscow’s Patriarchate, also weakens Ukraine’s societal resilience. Allegedly, there have been cases of priests

Table 2. Trust in national institutions by country.

Please tell us your level of trust for the following institutions (percentage of the population who answered “Tend to trust”)

	Government	Parliament	Regional and local public authorities	Political parties	Religious authority
Georgia	44%	37%	45%	26%	68%
Ukraine	30%	23%	41%	18%	52%
EaP Total	41%	32%	43%	24%	52%

Source: Ecorys, “Annual Survey Report: Regional Overview (5th Wave)”.

from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate advocating against the Ukrainian state and siding openly with Russian-backed separatist Ukraine.⁵⁴ Next to churches, civil society actors (CSO), non-governmental organizations (NGO) and new grassroots movements are the most significant non-state actors in both countries. However, while their impact on political processes is huge, the legitimacy of local NGOs is rather low (in Georgia 18%, Ukraine 22%).⁵⁵ The reason behind the low legitimacy could be their lack of societal embeddedness. Most CSOs and NGOs do not rely on membership funding and are accountable to the donor community about their activities,⁵⁶ which often leaves the impression of them following donor agendas.

Finally, among international actors, Ukrainian and Georgian citizens view Russia as a threat, but they have a favourable view of the EU and the NATO.⁵⁷ Although, they differ in the support for the EU and NATO membership (in Georgia it varies around 50%,⁵⁸ in Ukraine it varies around 80%).⁵⁹

To sum up, with a few notable exceptions, the legitimacy of governance actors in both countries is rather low. Among the domestic non-state actors, the legitimacy of the Orthodox churches is the highest in both countries. NGOs and CSOs play an important role in political life but they do not enjoy high legitimacy within the population. On the other hand, there are few overarching ideational constructs that act as societal glue in both countries. They include the idea of European integration, which enjoys strong support and boosts the EU's legitimacy among Georgian and Ukrainian citizens.

Governance institutions

Some of the most severe domestic risks in Georgia and Ukraine are related to the design of governance institutions in the two states. We focus on state and non-state as well as domestic and international governance institutions, and the extent to which are they are “fit for purpose and able to help ensure effective governance”.⁶⁰

When it comes to state institutions, both Georgia and Ukraine have functioning governance systems and nominally democratic constitutions. However, public institutional settings produce severe governance problems. Both countries suffer from a high degree of elite corruption, politicized and corrupt judiciaries and oligarchic state-capture.⁶¹ Formal institutions are often infiltrated and overshadowed by informal governance practices and personalized politics.⁶² Deficient electoral legislations modelled on the winner-takes-all principle often led to highly polarized and violent political contests and produced governments with too much power and weak opposition.⁶³ Georgia achieved more progress in terms of public administration reforms, including the police, education, fighting petty corruption and the provision of public services.⁶⁴ However, the pace and substance of further institutional reforms in both countries are often slowed down or sabotaged by entrenched political interests.

Next to state institutions, non-state actors also play a significant part in governance in both countries. For instance, civil society actors, especially NGOs have become important agents of democratic reforms and political transformation in both countries.⁶⁵ As one example, youth grassroots movements in Georgia organized series of protests throughout 2019–2020 and successfully forced the government to make a number of political concessions including the adoption of a more democratic electoral legislation.

Civil society actors strengthen resilience against disinformation.⁶⁶ Ukrainian and Georgian NGOs, whose researchers take active measures to check information content, are having a positive impact in the fight against propaganda. There are several such organizations in Georgia (for example, the Georgian Charter of Journalists Ethics (GCJE) and Mythdetector).⁶⁷ In Ukraine, positive results are seen in volunteer initiatives and restrictions on media outlets promoting Russian propaganda. Ukrainian society has organized more such projects, such as *StopFake*, established by Kyiv Mohyla Academy.⁶⁸ This non-affiliated website focused on debunking Russian disinformation. A group of volunteers named Group #IPSO #Trollbusters started its activity on Facebook by revealing the botnets used by the Kremlin.⁶⁹

Yet the effectiveness of NGOs is limited due to various structural problems including donor-dependency, underdeveloped membership structures and difficulty bonding with the population.⁷⁰ Other non-state actors, such as trade unions and various professional organizations, are weakly developed in Georgia and Ukraine and do not play any significant role.

Among the external actors, the EU and the US are the main players who participate in the governance of Georgia and Ukraine. They co-shape the evolution of institutional designs and reform agendas of the two countries in various ways. They provide advisory and financial support and various capacity-building measures, and act as “disciplinary powers”⁷¹ to ensure democratic quality of institutions and prevent the autocratic rollback. To conclude, the design of governance institutions in both countries is only partly fit to produce effective governance to some extent. Georgia is slightly more advanced in a few areas when compared to Ukraine, including reforms in public services, but both countries encounter similar challenges. State institutions are being slowly reformed but remain vulnerable to corruption and informal governance. Non-state actors, including churches, NGOs and grassroots movements have emerged as significant players, but they often lack the institutional capacity to shape public policy.

The EU’s resilience-building in Georgia and Ukraine

In this part of the article, we explore the extent to which the EU has been successful in mitigating risks and strengthening sources of societal resilience in Georgia and Ukraine. External resilience-building can generally follow two approaches: strengthening the three sources of societal resilience or preventing risks from occurring to help societies avoid their negative impacts.

Strengthening sources of resilience

Since the inception of resilience as a guiding principle for the EU’s foreign and security policy, the EU’s record of external resilience-building in the EaP countries has been rather mixed. The EU’s engagement with Georgia and Ukraine involves instruments that can conceptually be linked to the aims of strengthening the sources of resilience in the two countries, but their actual impact remains to be seen. The EU has been streamlining its support to Georgia and Ukraine through two major reform-inducing strategic platforms: Association Agendas, which oversee implementation of AAs, and the 20 Deliverables for 2020 (20for2020) platform. The latter was introduced in 2017 and was aimed at “improving lives of the people” through extensive reform packages in

various policy areas.⁷² Both platforms attempted to strengthen the three sources of resilience in Georgia and Ukraine in various ways.

Regarding social trust, the main challenge remains how to improve the degree of generalized trust, which is very low in both societies. Börzel and Risse identify two causal mechanisms for improving it: “generalisation of group-based trust through the inclusiveness of social identities” and “building generalised trust through the impartiality of institutions”.⁷³ With regard to the first mechanism, the EU recently started to cooperate closely⁷⁴ with the Georgian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, which happen to be highly trusted institutions and “the bearer of national identity”⁷⁵ in their respective countries. Cooperation includes frequent visits to Brussels by clergy, educational activities and enhanced communication.⁷⁶ By drawing both Orthodox churches closer to itself, the EU may ease both churches’ “conservative identity politics”,⁷⁷ ensure their commitment to European integration and overcome the normative frictions in both societies between conservative and liberal scripts. Doing so would make the construction of national identities in Georgia and Ukraine around the idea of European integration socially more inclusive, also contributing to increased generalized trust.

The EU-induced public administration and decentralization reforms also contributed to the improvement of generalized trust through the impartiality of institutions. Both the AAs and the 20for2020 provided impetus for public administration reforms. Within the 20for2020 platform, Georgia and Ukraine took steps to improve public services and local self-governance bodies. Georgia established country-wide community centres and public Service Halls – effective single-window systems which unified “more than 300 different types of services under a single roof”.⁷⁸ The latter are among the most trusted institutions in Georgia, and their proliferation in the regions could also improve generalized trust through increased perception of procedural fairness and impartiality of public institutions. The same applies to Ukraine, where EU-supported and funded⁷⁹ decentralization reform has been underway since 2015. Ukraine’s decentralization reforms resulted in improvements of “governance at the municipal level” and also promoted local democracy,⁸⁰ leading to improved trust of Ukrainians in local public institutions.⁸¹ To conclude, success of the EU-inspired decentralization reforms in Georgia and Ukraine may lead to improvement of both generalized social trust among citizens and empirical legitimacy of local governance institutions. Initial data show positive change in public attitudes towards the reforms and increased legitimacy of reformed public institutions in both countries.⁸²

Since the inception of the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016, the EU also contributed to an improvement of legitimacy of governance actors and quality of institutional design in Georgia and Ukraine. Over the last few years, the EU changed its state-centric approach and stepped up its financial and advisory support to CSOs in Georgia and Ukraine. What is more, through political empowerment the EU contributed to CSOs and newly emerged grassroots movements to become influential parts of institutional design and have an impact on policy outcomes in both countries. For instance, the EU’s political support for a recent series of peaceful protests in Georgia organized by grassroots movements and CSOs significantly changed the political balance of power in the country.⁸³ It strengthened the empirical legitimacy of civil society actors and improved the institutional design of the country by forcing the state authorities to embark on democratic reforms including a highly contested reform of electoral system.

Mitigation of risks

The second approach of external societal resilience-building lies in mitigation of risks that negatively affect resilience in third countries. Here again the EU has a mixed record. While it has been able to alleviate domestic risks, it has failed to reduce the probability of external risks turning into threats.

Since the inception of the ENP, the EU has been actively pushing Georgia and Ukraine towards inclusive and transparent political processes by using a mix of positive and negative conditionality against political regimes in both countries.⁸⁴ In doing so, the EU managed to limit the extent of state capture by rent-seeking elites and reduced the probability of order contestation turning into violent conflicts or governance breakdown a few times. For instance, in 2012, the EU together with the United States, managed to persuade the Georgian government to undergo a peaceful electoral power transfer, which probably halted a violent post-election crisis.⁸⁵ The EU has not always been successful, however. Two years later, its involvement was not enough to avoid violent conflict and partial governance breakdown in Ukraine. After 2015, the EU further stepped up its conditionality-based engagement in both countries. For instance, during 2019–2020, the EU and the US facilitated political dialogue between Georgia's opposing political camps and persuaded the ruling party to adopt a more liberal electoral code.⁸⁶ This was an important step that reduced the risk of post-election processes turning into violent order contestation between competing parties in the 2020 parliamentary elections. As a result of the EU's active involvement, the radicalization of post-election processes in Georgia was limited but not contained entirely since the opposition contested the election results and decided to boycott the parliament. Overall, the conditionality-based empowerment of democratic actors by the EU underlines the difference between supporting societal resilience and state resilience or regime stability. It can be seen as an attempt by the EU to strengthen societal resilience against the predatory behaviour of incumbent regimes and other illiberal political actors.

Unlike with domestic risks, the EU's record has been more moderate in the mitigation of external risks, which is partly related to its diminished image as a security actor. The EU had little instruments to prevent military conflicts in the EaP area, i.e. the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, annexation of Crimea, and the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014.

So far, the EU's conflict management approach has mostly been confined to stabilizing conflict areas and providing diplomatic support to Georgia and Ukraine.⁸⁷ The establishment of the European Union Monitoring Mission to Georgia (EUMM) and the launch of peace initiatives within the Minsk process and the Normandy Format in Ukraine as well as sanctions against Russia provide certain protections against the outbreak of new full-scale conflicts.⁸⁸ However, despite remaining security challenges, the latest the EU documents indicate that Brussels does not intend to step up its engagement to mitigate security-related risks in the near future.⁸⁹ The recent communication by the EC which discusses the future of EaP policy beyond 2020 devoted only a few sentences to issues of conflict management and security.⁹⁰ The document focuses on cooperation in multiple sectoral areas which may contribute to strengthening the sources of resilience but cannot mitigate the most severe security risks which may lead to new violent conflicts or governance breakdowns in the EaP area.

While criticism of the EU for its neglect of security issues is often justified, it is also true that over the past two decades the Union has silently become a major Western security actor in the region with predominantly civilian and soft security components.⁹¹ Deployment of civilian monitoring missions, diplomatic initiatives, sanctions against Russia, as well as financial and political assistance give enough boost to Georgia's and Ukraine's resilience to survive under the shadow of existential geopolitical risks.⁹² Therefore, it could be argued counterfactually, that without the EU's security governance mix both Georgia and Ukraine would be worse off and the EU's eastern neighbourhood would be even more unstable. Nevertheless, the EU could do or could have done more to boost resilience in its eastern neighbourhood without risking a military confrontation with Russia. Concrete steps could include extending the EU's disinformation framework to Georgia and Ukraine,⁹³ more effective targeted sanctions against Russia,⁹⁴ abandonment of conceptual ambiguity⁹⁵ and improvement of strategic messaging with the EaP countries even if below the NATO/EU membership, strengthening defence capabilities and assistance in security sector reforms.⁹⁶

Conclusions

This article analysed the major risks and sources of societal resilience in Georgia and Ukraine and explored the impacts of the EU as a major external resilience-building actor. We draw several conclusions from our study and answer our research questions. First, Georgia and Ukraine are to a similar extent⁹⁷ affected by various risks, both domestic and external, which may result in governance breakdown or new violent conflicts. Hence, both countries should remain on the radar of the EU and its new resilience approach that acts as a cornerstone to the new integrated crisis management agenda.⁹⁸

Second, in terms of endogenous factors, both Georgia and Ukraine possess a certain degree of societal resilience. Both countries have more or less functioning state and non-state institutions and a high degree of individual and group-based social trust. On the other hand, the generalized social trust and the legitimacy of most state institutions is quite low, and the effectiveness of governance institutions is undermined by numerous structural and political deficiencies. Both countries need support from the international community to strengthen their societal resilience and mitigate negative impacts of domestic and external risks.

Third, the EU as an external resilience-builder has been moderately successful in strengthening societal resilience in Georgia and Ukraine. It has been more effective in helping the EaP countries to strengthen sources of resilience and mitigate domestic risks, but less so in helping against external (global) risks. On the one hand, the EU's policy instruments, consisting of financial and advisory assistance, democratic conditionality and structural cooperation mechanisms, have played significant role in inducing democratic reforms in both countries. On the other hand, the EU has been only moderately successful in mitigating global risks related to the geopolitical rivalry with Russia, even though one could argue that, without the EU's presence, the situation of Georgia and Ukraine would be much worse for both countries.

Finally, the EU can also act as a resilience spoiler when its policies result in negative unintended effects or are too cost-intensive or politically sensitive for local actors to implement. Recent works on the EU's external resilience-building see resilience closely connected to local ownership and they consider the EU's lack of embracing

the latter behind its failure at building resilience in its neighbourhood.⁹⁹ However our empirical insights from Ukraine and Georgia show that while the EU neglected local ownership it still strengthened the sources of resilience in the two countries. Moreover, less local ownership helped the EU to apply stricter conditionality when it was due.¹⁰⁰ Hence, the causality between local ownership and resilience-building needs to be further tested through empirical research.

Future research needs to provide a more accurate assessment of the impact of the EU's external resilience-building on the sources of resilience in the EU's neighbourhood countries. Only three years have passed since the Union formally introduced resilience as a guiding principle of its foreign policy. Strengthening sources of resilience is a lengthy process. While we can observe some EU-induced positive changes in the resilience of Ukraine and Georgia, more time is necessary to assess to what extent these changes translate into higher resilience in the long-run. On the other hand, the EU needs to step up its game in terms of risk mitigation techniques. More focus on cooperation in security area with the neighbourhood countries, even if below military commitments, and a careful consideration of the role of external resilience-spoilers can result in a more resilient and stable neighbourhood.

Notes

1. The paper mostly focuses on the EU institutions, but it also includes the EU member states in the analysis.
2. EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action*.
3. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue," 5.
4. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue." Same applies to the other neighborhood regions of the EU. For the analysis of the Western Balkan region, see: BARGUES-PEDRENY, Pol and Pol Morillas, "From Democratization to Fostering Resilience."
5. EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, 23.
6. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue," 18.
7. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue," 7–10.
8. Tolstrup, "Black Knight."
9. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue," 4.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Ademmer, Delcour and Wolczuk, "Beyond Geopolitics."
12. Bouchet, "Russia's 'Militarization' of Colour Revolutions."
13. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue," 5.
14. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, "Introduction to this Special Issue."
15. Cenusă, Konończuk and Kakachia, *Oligarchs in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*; Hale and Orttung, *Beyond the Euromaidan*.
16. Lebanidze, *Russia, EU and the Post-Soviet Democratic Failure*; Bader, "Party politics in Georgia and Ukraine."
17. Kuzio, *Democratic revolution in Ukraine*; Welt, "Georgia's Rose Revolution."
18. Hale and Orttung, *Beyond the Euromaidan*.
19. Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2020. Georgia Country Report*.
20. IMF, *World Economic Outlook*.
21. We conceptualize and operationalize global and diffuse risks based on typology by Magen, Richemond-Barak and Stav. The authors identify six clusters of global and diffuse risks: Geopolitical rivalry and risks of major conflict; unconventional security risks; environmental; demography and uncontrolled migration; global financial and economic risks; technology-driven disruption. Magen, Richemond-Barak and Stav, *Taking Global And Diffuse Risks Seriously*. Whereas all six clusters are present in both Georgia and Ukraine we focus in this article on risks which are supposed to have most detrimental impact on two countries.

22. Asmus, *A Little War that Changed the World*; Jonsson and Seely, “Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict.”
23. Kakachia, *How the West Should Respond to Russia’s “Borderization.”*
24. Delcour and Wolczuk, “Spoiler or facilitator of democratization?”
25. Curanović, “Russia’s Mission in the World.”
26. Richey, “Contemporary Russian Revisionism.”
27. Kakachia and Lebanidze, *Global and Diffuse Risks*.
28. Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse, “Introduction to this Special Issue,” 18.
29. About fostering resilience from the EU perspective see Bresan’s and Bergmaier’s contribution to this special issue: Bressan and Bergmaier, “From Conflict Early Warning to Fostering Resilience?” Also see: Ozcurumez, “The EU’s Effectiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean Migration Quandary.”
30. Draude, Hölck and Stolle, “Social Trust,” 354.
31. Worschech, “New Civic Activism in Ukraine.”
32. Zarembo, “Substituting for the State.”
33. Boulègue and Lutsevych, *Resilient Ukraine*.
34. Wike, “Where Trust is High, Crime and Corruption are Low.”
35. World Bank, *Ukraine*.
36. World Bank, *Georgia*.
37. Graafland and Lous, “Income Inequality.”
38. Polese and Stepurko, “In Connections We Trust.”
39. Caucasus Barometer, datasets by CRRC.
40. Algan and Cahuc, *Trust, Growth and Well-being*.
41. Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*.
42. Rothstein and Uslaner, “All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust.”
43. *Ibid.*
44. Tyler, “Citizen Discontent with Legal Procedures.”
45. Rothstein and Uslaner, “All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust.”
46. *Ibid.*
47. Risse and Stollenwerk, “Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood;” Eickhoff and Stollenwerk, *Strengthening Resilience in the EU’s Neighbourhood*, 5.
48. Cenusă, Konończuk and Kakachia, *Oligarchs in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*.
49. “Public Attitudes, Political Ratings in NDI-commissioned Survey,” Civil Georgia.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Kyivpost, “Poll says Ukrainians’ Trust in Volunteers Rises Again.”
52. According to the EU Neighborhood Barometer it is 69% in Georgia and 43% in Ukraine. National surveys indicate even higher support. See: Promote Ukraine. *Ukrainian Trust in Authorities Decreases*. <https://www.promoteukraine.org/ukrainian-trust-in-authorities-decreases/> (accessed September 29, 2020).
53. Kakachia, “Is Georgia’s Orthodox Church an Obstacle to European Values?”
54. Higgins, “As Ukraine and Russia Battle Over Orthodoxy, Schism Looms.”
55. Lutsevych, *How to Finish a Revolution*, 7.
56. Puig, *Situation Analysis of Civil Society in Georgia (Full Report)*, 5.
57. “IRI-commissioned Poll says Mood Somber in Georgia.” Civil Georgia,
58. IRI, *Public Opinion Survey of Residents of Ukraine*.
59. IRI, *Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia June-July 2020*.
60. Eickhoff and Stollenwerk, *Strengthening Resilience in the EU’s Neighbourhood*, 7.
61. Cenusă, Konończuk and Kakachia, *Oligarchs in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*.
62. Lebanidze and Kakachia, “Informal Governance.”
63. Bader, “Party Politics.”
64. World Bank, *Fighting Corruption in Public Services*.
65. Falkenhain and Solonenko, *The EU and Civil Society in Eastern Europe*.
66. Damarad and Yeliseyev, *Forward*.
67. Myth Detector, “Connect to real opposition!”
68. Khaldarova and Pantti, “Fake news.”
69. Maksak and Gerasymchuk, *Ukraine: Disinformation Resilience Index*.
70. Lutsevych, *How to Finish a Revolution*.

71. Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism,” 41.
72. European Commission, *Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020 Reinforcing Resilience*, 2.
73. Börzel and Risse, *Conceptual Framework*, 22.
74. Edilashvili, “Georgia: Project Aims to Boost Orthodox Church’s Support for EU Integration;” Kakachia, “Is Georgia’s Orthodox Church an Obstacle to European Values?”
75. Liik, Metodiev and Popescu, *Defender of the Faith?*
76. Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, *Georgian Orthodox Church visits EU Institutions*.
77. Liik, Metodiev and Popescu, *Defender of the Faith?*
78. Bolkvadze, “Hitting the Saturation Point,” 758.
79. Romanova and Umland, *Ukraine’s Decentralization Reforms*, 6.
80. *Ibid.*, 21.
81. Council of Europe, *Reports: Annual National Opinion Polls*; NDI, *Opportunities and Challenges*.
82. Romanova and Umland, *Ukraine’s Decentralization Reforms*; Georgian Institute of Politics, *Georgia’s Implementation of 20 Eastern Partnership Deliverables for 2020*.
83. News Wires, “US, EU Back Georgia Protesters after Thousands Rally Outside Parliament.”
84. Lebanidze, *Russia, EU and the Post-Soviet Democratic Failure*.
85. Lebanidze, “What Makes Authoritarian Regimes Sweat?”
86. Krastev, “Electoral Reform – the Good News we Missed from Georgia.”
87. Legucka and Legieć, *Protracted Conflicts*.
88. Litra, Medynskyi and Zarembo, *Assessing the EU’s Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Ukraine*.
89. European Commission, *Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020 Reinforcing Resilience*.
90. *Ibid.*
91. Litra, Medynskyi and Zarembo, *Assessing the EU’s Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Ukraine*.
92. Lebanidze, *Russia, EU and the Post-Soviet Democratic Failure*.
93. Pamment, *The EU’s Role in Fighting Disinformation*.
94. Mikhelidze and Tocci, “Europe’s Russia Sanctions are Not Working.”
95. European Commission, *Theorizing the European Neighborhood Policy*.
96. Lavrelashvili, “Resilience-Building in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.”
97. From comparative angle, both countries show similar qualities with regard to sources of resilience and exposure to domestic and external risks. There are some differences in terms of socio-political structures and structural characteristics of two countries which generate some qualitative differences in sources of resilience (Ukraine having more social trust but less empirical legitimacy) and risk mitigation capacities (with Georgia being more vulnerable to external risks due to its smaller size and more vulnerable location). However, overall two countries show more similarities than differences – perhaps making it easier for the external actors to design resilience-strengthening policies.
98. EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action*.
99. Korosteleva, “Reclaiming Resilience Back;” Petrova and Delcour, “From Principle to Practice?”
100. Petrova and Delcour, “From Principle to Practice?”

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