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Resilience in EU-Russian Relations: What is the Meaning?

The term 'resilience' appeared in EEC documents in the 1980s, mostly in the economic context. The Commission as well as the Council stressed the need for resilience in the face of oil price fluctuation, banking crisis, economic stagnation. In parallel the EEC would discuss resilience of the ecosystem (especially in the context of exploitation of various resources). In the 1990s resilience also emerges in various documents on data bases but it was still predominantly used in economics and environment studies.

In the late 1990s the EU started using the term 'resilience' for developing countries (first to describe the need for sound environmental policy but then to denote the danger of financial crises for the global economy). In parallel (but separately) the EU would continue using 'resilience' internally, mostly for various economic processes (transport networks, labour markets, euro). It would also apply it in the field of environment and in the information policy and computer / cyber security.

It is, however, external activities, not internal processes, that led to the development of the EU's current concept of resilience. In 2012 the Commission published a communication that summarised its experience of dealing with food crises in developing countries and made 'resilience' a central category of this document; it became a way to minimise the costs of any eventual crisis. The document also defines resilience as "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks" (European Commission, 2012: 5). The Communication further

specifies that "The concept of resilience has two dimensions: the inherent strength of an entity – an individual, a household, a community or a larger structure – to better resist stress and shock and the capacity of this entity to bounce back rapidly from the impact" (Ibid).

The Council then adopted principles for resilience, among which are the key responsibility of the national government of the country in question, cooperation of the EU and its member states, account for the specificity of the country in question, including potential conflicts there, long-term engagement, cooperation with various international organisations, integration of resilience in various EU policies, cooperation with local communities and civil society and gender equality (Council, 2013). The European Commission further developed a number of supporting documents for promoting resilience in developing countries (European Commission, 2013, 2014).

These activities provided the ground for the EU's 2016 Global Security Strategy where resilience became a central category, mentioned over 40 times (European Union, 2016). It speaks about resilience of states and societies "in Europe and around it". The document further specifies its priorities as resilience of the EU's democracies and integration project, investments in resilience of states and societies around the EU, "to the east stretching into Central Asia, and to the south down to Central Africa", support of resilience of all other EU partners. The EU takes the responsibility to "support different paths to resilience, targeting the most acute cases of governmental, economic, societal and climate/energy fragility, as well as develop more effective migration policies for Europe and its partners" (European Union, 2016).

In 2017 the EEAS and the Commission issued a communication, which further explained 'resilience' as a category of the EU's foreign activities. It inter alia stressed that it includes "all individuals and the whole of society" and features "democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development, and the capacity to reform". It also included the EU's obligation to support resilience by bolstering inclusive societies, strengthening economic stability, attention to the needs that result from prolonged crisis, prevention of military conflicts, fight against climate change, prevention of forced displacement and migration management (European Union, 2017b). The Communication also mentioned the vulnerability of the EU due to hybrid threats, potential dangers, stemming from information technologies, 'strategic communication' (that is alternative interpretations of different events or disinformation), terrorism and extremism as well as vulnerability of critical infrastructure.

Hence, the Global Strategy for the first time merged the EU's resilience with that of its partners whereas the 2017 Communication clarified some aspects of the new concept. The centrality of resilience for the EU is further confirmed in the Global Strategy implementation report

(European Union, 2017a) on a par with integrated approach to conflicts and security /defence).

However, at least, three aspects of resilience need further clarification and are bound to produce conflicts in EU-Russian relations. They are briefly reviewed in the rest of the paper.

Resilience and securitization

Resilience usually provokes a double question: resilience of what and to what. The primary question is about a resource that is vital and governance techniques, which are related to it. The EU defines relatively vague resources of the resilience both for itself and for its neighbours. There are varying definitions in the documents. These definitions are more general for the EU (democracy, integration project) and a bit more specific for its neighbours. At the same time the EU emphasizes risks and threats rather than resources and relevant governance techniques. Hence, there is a securitisation trend. Moreover, in many cases this securitisation is linked to Russia.

Dialectics of stability / resistance and adaptation / change

Due to its genesis, resilience has various meanings. Initially it emerged in the environmental sciences and then gradually migrated to economic and social sciences. Initially resilience meant resistance and ability of the system to recover after risks. However, gradually the term has evolved. It now signifies the ability of the system to absorb shocks while maintain its key characteristics, identity and performance (on multiplicity of meanings of resistance see Brand and Jax, 2007).

The EU's definition of resilience in the 2017 Communication emphasises the ability to resist but also to adapt when recovering after a stress or a shock. The 2017 Communication further emphasises that resilience depends on the context and requires specific approach in each case. At the same time, the final part of this Communication clearly says that "resilience is about transformation not preserving the status quo" (European Union, 2017: 23).

Resilience as it comes out in the EU's documents is about stability for the EU and about change for its partners. This dialectics of change and continuity demonstrates many traditions and patterns of the EU's foreign policy. These are primarily geographical stratification of the space, with security as its justification and inequality between the EU and its partners (crucial for Russia). However, bigger geographical ambitions are certainly a novelty, which is bound to expand the space of EU-Russian geopolitical competition.

Resilience as (non)interference in the domestic affairs of partners?

The publication of the EU's Global Strategy was accompanied in 2016 with the rhetoric about the EU moving to "principled pragmatism". In a nutshell it was interpreted as respect for the values and at the same time honouring foreign policy interests; as a modified value-oriented foreign policy.

The 2016 Global Strategy specifies that the EU will support not only state institutions because "resilience is a broader concept, encompassing all individuals and the whole of society". Moreover, the Strategy maintains that the EU "will reach out more to cultural organisations, religious communities, social partners and human rights defenders, and speak out against the shrinking space for civil society including through violations of the freedoms of speech and association" (European Union, 2016). In this context public diplomacy also acquires a new meaning as well as the dialogue with civil society and support for it as one of the five principles of the EU's relations with Russia, which were approved in 2016 (Mogherini, 2016).

Hence resilience concept is certainly the EU's pragmatism because it allows Brussels to optimise the use of the EU's resources and creates the basis for the minimisation of the EU's responsibility. At the same time it is not pragmatism in terms of the refusal from interference in the internal affairs of other countries or promotion of liberal transformations. Rather it is strengthening of the neoliberal strategy of partners' change.