



# The EU, Resilience and the Southern Neighbourhood After the Arab Uprisings

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Resilience is a recurring concept in foreign policy. Since 2015, it has become a guiding principle for EU external action in and towards neighbourhood partner countries. This chapter aims to critically examine and put into perspective the evolution of resilience in EU foreign policy towards the EU's southern periphery, which has been undergoing seismic changes since the emergence of Arab uprisings in 2011. Since then, the trans-nationalisation of negative spill-over effects due to protracted or new conflicts, radicalisation, failing states and stubborn authoritarianism, has intensified the EU's concerns with insecurity and instability in its southern neighbourhood. Volatility in the EU's South has been regularly reproduced as a situation that requires a new EU approach and response. The short-lived popular revolts in 2011 have heightened EU decision-makers' awareness for the multilayered security challenges

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emanating from Europe's southern periphery, forcing Brussels and the Member States to rethink how to reconcile normative ambitions with hard security challenges—and thus realism-inspired thinking.

Already since the early 1970s, the forerunners of the EU (the European Economic Community and the European Community, respectively) have embarked on various processes destined to design their relationship with Mediterranean countries through several policy frameworks. These include, *inter alia*, the Global Mediterranean Policy of 1972 (Bicchi 2007), the Euro-Arab Dialogue of 1973 (Allen 1977), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)/Barcelona Process of 1995 (Gillespie 1997; Youngs 2015), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 2003/2004 (Schumacher et al. 2017), as well as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) of 2008 (Bicchi and Gillespie 2011).

To date, the ENP remains the main framework regulating bilateral relations between the EU and its southern neighbours. It originated in the context of the EU's envisaged 'big bang' enlargement of 2004/2007 and the then realisation that incorporating new members implied the emergence of new neighbours and borders, as well as exposure to previously more distant challenges. In 2002, the United Kingdom and Denmark, two of the initial policy entrepreneurs, proposed an ambitious, differentiated and long-term cooperation framework limited to eastern neighbours such as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, while Sweden suggested to include also countries participating in the EMP. This proposition provided the European Commission with the final impetus to develop a policy scheme that would include both eastern as well as southern neighbours.<sup>1</sup>

In anticipation of the EU's upcoming enlargement, formulations such as 'new neighbours' (2002), 'Wider Europe-Neighbourhood' (2003) and the much quoted 'ring of friends' (2003) became parts of the EU's foreign policy discourse. At the time, this discourse was further complemented by the euphemistically articulated objective to make the 2004/2007 enlargement beneficial for both the EU and its new neighbours without generating dividing lines between them (European Commission 2003: 4; European Security Strategy 2003: 7; European Commission 2004: 3).

<sup>1</sup>Initially, it was even foreseen to include the Russian Federation in the ENP, though due to the refusal of the former, Russian participation never materialised. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were added to the ENP only in 2004, thus shortly after the Georgian Rose Revolution.

The EU aimed at achieving these goals by offering its neighbours substantive financial assistance through EU instruments such as the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (MEDA), the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument and its successor, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (Maass 2017). Legally, EU-neighbourhood relations became embedded in Association Agreements concluded with most neighbourhood countries (except for Belarus, Azerbaijan and Syria). This was complemented by wide-ranging cooperation (including offers of integration) between the EU and neighbourhood countries in common policy domains such as trade, competition, services, the foreign and security policy, justice, freedom and security.

Indeed, the EU resorted to the ENP in 2011 in response to the Arab uprisings, and subsequent events demonstrate the continuing significance of the ENP framework, despite the many prophecies of doom (Smith 2005). In light of internal (e.g. EU enlargement, the Eurozone crisis, the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty, etc.) and external developments in the southern neighbourhood, the EU engaged twice in overhauling the ENP. Overwhelmed by regional dynamics, the EU revised the ENP throughout the first months of 2011, though, strictly speaking, this revision was already initiated in the second half of 2010 (Schumacher and Bouris 2017) and thus at a time when Brussels was negotiating an upgrade of bilateral relations with the Tunisian regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The revised ENP's ineffectiveness to accommodate the promise of the Arab uprisings and support emerging processes of political liberalisation (European Commission 2011), in conjunction with the outbreak of new conflicts, triggered the second revision of the ENP in 2015. Ever since subsequent events in the southern neighbourhood have put into question the existing orders of regional governance and dramatically altered Brussels' perceptions of the southern neighbourhood from a 'ring of friends' to a 'ring of fire'.

The 2015 review process, drawing on the support of all EU Member States, became a watershed for EU-neighbourhood relations that ushered in the de facto abolition of the EU's long-standing ambition to pursue a values-based agenda in favour of democracy promotion (Delcour 2015). This shift has paved the way for a new framework that focuses primarily on stabilisation, transactionalism and sector-specific cooperation disconnected from the principle of negative conditionality that underpinned (at least discursively) previous editions of the ENP.

What is more is that the 2015 revision of the ENP incorporated resilience-building, albeit vaguely and abruptly, for the first time into the realm of EU foreign policy towards the southern neighbours. Subsequently, a multitude of resilience-related expressions has pervaded EU foreign policy documents, constituting a substantial part of the June 2016 EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS). The latest ENP review was concluded in November 2015, eight months before the adoption of the EUGS. It was, however, closely coordinated with the deliberations leading to the EUGS (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 14; European Commission 2015: 4; European Union 2016). The EUGS elevated resilience-building to a 'strategic priority' (European Union 2016: 25) in EU external action. Embedded in 'principled pragmatism', the EUGS charts new rules for the EU's engagement in and towards its neighbourhood in conjunction with the ENP.

In this chapter, we argue that the notion of resilience in EU foreign policy towards its southern 'near abroad' is unsettled and continues to undergo a seemingly ever-evolving process of constitution and reconceptualisation. As will be demonstrated, relevant EU foreign policy documents are continually ascribing new notions to resilience and keep upgrading and changing its meaning. This chapter, therefore, adopts a cautious approach and argues that the EU's conception of resilience is work in progress that, first, disguises the EU's struggle to come to terms with the multifaceted fallouts of instability in the southern neighbourhood and, second, downplays Brussels' recent shift from transformative to status quo-oriented aspirations. Consequently, as will be demonstrated, the elusiveness of resilience as a guiding rationale in EU-southern neighbourhood relations, together with ensuing inconsistencies in the practical pursuit of promoting resilience, renders the EU unfit to enhance stabilisation in the southern neighbourhood.

The chapter is structured as follows: it begins by exploring how the notion of resilience was introduced to the ENP framework and subsequently became a foreign policy priority in the context of the EU's ambition to focus on the neighbourhood's stabilisation. The next section presents a critical reading of the conceptual understanding of resilience in EU foreign policy, deemed to be an antidote to most challenges and problems in the neighbourhood. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on the role resilience-building plays in EU peace-building and conflict

resolution to safeguard Europe's own security. The final section provides indicative examples of EU resilience-building in the southern neighbourhood in order to demonstrate the nature and type of interventions EU foreign policy classifies as resilience and generate an advanced understanding of what resilience-building may entail in practice. The last section synthesises the findings and concludes.

### THE STABILISATION AGENDA OF THE ENP

In 2003/2004, the EU adopted the European Security Strategy (ESS) (Biscop and Andersson 2007; European Security Strategy 2003) and the Wider Europe strategy (Verheugen 2004; European Commission 2003), both of which converged with the ENP. While the ESS was drafted to set out the EU's global security objectives, it shared with the ENP the aim of offering a blueprint for the future design of the relationship between the EU and its southern neighbours after the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004/2007. Sixteen countries to the east and south of the EU have coalesced into a single geopolitical space, ever since called the European neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is predominantly represented as an unstable space and source of threats to the EU and its Member States (Christou 2010; Verheugen 2004)—a perception that has begun to widely resonate in EU decision-making circles since the outbreak of the war in eastern Ukraine and the persistence of the conflicts in Syria and Libya.

The core objective of the ESS was to 'promote a ring of well-governed countries' in the 'troubled areas' in the EU's neighbourhood (European Security Strategy 2003: 8). Conjointly, both the ESS and the ENP provided the EU with discursive reference points to draw a 'ring of friends' around itself and determine its external borders and thus what is foreign (Campbell 1998; Verheugen 2004). The southern segment of this imaginary ring is considered to be 'Europe's main source of security threats, linking the hazards of terrorism, illegal immigration, weapons of mass destruction, and cultural and ideological confrontations' (Verheugen 2004: 3). The ENP's underlying aim was to tackle the threatening and unstable Other(s) by transposing European norms, rules and regulation to neighbourhood countries (Browning and Joenimmi 2008; Christou 2010; Diez 2005; Meloni 2008; Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005).

Campbell (1998) has cogently displayed the extent to which foreign policy is embedded in the process that constructs the mutually

constitutive ‘foreign/external’ and ‘domestic/self’ realms (see also Cebeci and Schumacher 2017). Boundary-making and threat externalisation underlie the EU’s foreign policy towards southern neighbourhood countries. Furthermore, the temporary fixation of these boundaries is contingent upon processes of enlargement and contraction (as exemplified by the Brexit) as well as EU ambitions to act as a normative empire (Del Sarto 2015). Nowadays, enlargement (Browning and Joeniemmi 2008: 16) and the prospect of contraction, even disintegration (European Union 2016; Tocci 2017), are conceived as potential, yet serious threats for Europe and its ontological security. In this context, the ENP is poised to serve as a tool to define the limits of Europe, blurring the borders (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005) and establishing a buffer zone around it (Browning and Joeniemmi 2008).

The ideational borderlines between the EU and its southern neighbours seem less porous than those that exist with its eastern neighbours. Ideationally, the South is conceived not only as a constant threat, but also as an ‘unreformable’ Other that must be excluded and guarded against through ‘impermeable’ and ‘somewhat fixed’ borders (Browning and Joeniemmi 2008: 24–26). Walters’ (2004: 691–93) analysis of the EU’s border-regimes (both visible and invisible) relates to the Euro-Mediterranean frontier as a fixed wall (‘limes’) that is supposed to delineate the perimeters of the allegedly ‘highly organised’ space and ward off the disorder emanating from the ‘profoundly alien’ Other. Therefore, security, migration control, the fight against terrorism, and consequently the management of threats emerging from the southern neighbourhood space have become the key priorities of EU-neighbourhood policies. Indeed, this rationale accentuates the contradiction between the EU’s neorealism-inspired hard security considerations and its past liberal and normative discourse.

Despite the reiteration of its concerns with the promotion of democracy, rule of law and human rights in the southern neighbourhoods countries (European Commission 2011), EU policy has de facto increasingly become obsessed with the fight against a multitude of threats and, in recent years, consolidated past practices of prioritising multi-sector cooperation with authoritarian regimes. For example, the agenda of the latest EU-League of Arab States summit in February 2019 in Sharm el-Sheikh, held under the auspices of the Egyptian regime, disposed of any discussions on human rights and democracy while focusing exclusively on multi-sector cooperation in areas of trade, migration and

security (Council of the EU 2019). Thus, it blatantly overlooked that, all too often, authoritarian regimes are a source of these challenges rather than credible and legitimate solution providers (Malmvig 2006).

In the context of the EU's foreign policy towards the southern neighbourhood, narratives of external threat and duty/responsibility have underpinned the EU's attempts to export its norms and rules (Christou 2010; Nitoiu 2013). Schumacher (2015) stresses the significance of the value-laden duty narrative and its sub-narratives in guiding EU external relations with its southern neighbours. Through discursive foreign policy practice, the Self, the Other (EU/neighbourhood countries) and their respective spaces (EU/neighbourhood) are continually reconstructed (Pishchikova and Piras 2017). The EUGS has assimilated this logic, declaring that the EU will 'take responsibility' in its 'surrounding regions' and beyond (European Union 2016: 18).

According to the duty/responsibility narrative, the EU has a self-ascribed obligation to promote democracy, peace, human rights, economic growth and well-being in the southern neighbourhood. This narrative dominated the EU foreign policy discourse during the initial response to the Arab uprisings and continued to do so until 2014 (Schumacher 2015). Inspired by Article 8 of the Lisbon Treaty, which stipulates the need to foster 'good neighbourliness', the EU sought to export 'its' norms, values and structures of governance (Hillion 2013; Hanf 2011). Consequently, the revised ENP of 2011 re-consolidated the neoliberal, Washington Consensus-based formula in order to trigger structural changes in neighbouring countries. This practice concurs with the first wave of EU initiatives, such as the EMP, the ESS and the 2003/2004 ENP, all of which embraced the democratic peace paradigm and neoliberal market-based reasoning.

In 2013/2014, however, this formula lost its salience and, ironically, the so-called 'strategic option' to support the Arab uprisings (European Commission 2011: 2) turned out to be rather short-termism, as evidenced by the renewed revision of the ENP in 2014/2015, the adoption of the EUGS in 2016, and the foreign and security policy discourse that ensued. As of late 2015, the 'new' ENP pledges to 'strengthen the resilience of the EU's partners' (European Commission 2015a: 4). More than ever before, stabilisation has become the overarching concept guiding the EU's new strategy for 'security and prosperity' through 'more *effective* partnerships towards a more stable EU Neighbourhood'. This goal has to be achieved mainly by building the 'resilience of

[the] partners' with whom the EU will engage to expand 'cooperation on security' and 'migration-related issues', which, in turn, are supposed to open the doorway into 'a wide range of new areas of cooperation under the ENP' (European External Action Service 2016). Against this backdrop, the subsequent section will, therefore, turn to resilience-building as part of the EU's new stabilisation approach.

### RESILIENCE: CURING INSTABILITY AND DEEPENING COOPERATION IN THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Within a short period of time, the term 'resilience' has not only made it into the EU's foreign policy discourse, but also became the key paradigm facilitating the stabilisation of the southern neighbourhood. Arguably, it is the most important addition to the ENP. The EUGS pronounces resilience-building as the ultimate priority in EU-Neighbourhood relations. The concept of resilience has its origins in physics and ecology. The former defines it as the 'capacity of a material or a system to return to equilibrium after displacement' (Norris et al. 2008: 127). The ecology literature eschews the idea of equilibrium in favour of adaptation and transformation. It regards resilience in terms of systems' internal ability to absorb shocks, adjust, transform and reorganise in order to continue functioning in disaster and crisis situations (Norris et al. 2008; Walker et al. 2004; Walker and Cooper 2011). As resilience started to find its way into other disciplines, it has since been metaphorically applied to different phenomena and carries different meanings, depending on the area of study. As such, resilience is a newcomer to EU foreign policy and remains in a process of constitution. In order to understand the function of resilience in the EU's foreign policy towards the southern neighbourhood, it is instructive to reflect on some of its core practical entailments and objectives. This also helps evaluate its adequateness for the purported objective of stabilising the southern periphery.

The main purpose of resilience in early EU policies outside the realm of the ENP was to generate 'disaster-resilient' settings and subjects within the broader framework of 'disaster risk reduction' (DRR), mainly in fragile, low-income countries (European Commission 2009: 9). The 2012 EU approach to resilience suggests three ways for building resilience: (1) 'enhancing the entity's strength' to withstand shocks; (2) 'reducing the intensity of the impact'; or (3) applying the two methods at the same time (European Commission 2012: 5). As the second method



is untenable in a ‘complex, uncertain and contingent’ world (European Union 2016), the focus has recently shifted to the first option: boosting entities’ ‘rapid coping and adaptation mechanisms at local, national and regional level’ (European Commission 2012: 5).

At that stage, resilience-building was primarily an add-on to EU humanitarian and development assistance, largely concerned with natural and man-made disasters and humanitarian crises (European Commission 2012, 2013). In 2013, resilience was linked with ‘state fragility’ and conflicts. State fragility was defined as the ‘lack [of] the capacity to carry out basic governance functions to ensure basic service delivery to the population, and to develop mutually constructive relations with society’. Fragile states were considered to be ‘more vulnerable to internal or external shocks such as economic crises, conflicts or natural disasters’ (European Commission 2013: 1). Accordingly, resilience emerged as a vehicle to stave off fragility abroad.

Throughout the EU’s recent foreign policy discourse, resilience has regularly been associated with threat/responsibility narratives, as discussed above. For instance, expressions like ‘enhance resilience to disasters’, ‘disaster-resilient’ (European Commission 2009: 3–4), ‘reducing risk of crisis’ (European Commission 2012: 5), ‘building resilience in crisis and risk-prone contexts’ (European Commission 2013: 2), or ‘conflict-related crises’ (Council of the EU 2013: 2) are nowadays readily deployed wherever resilience is mentioned in policy documents relating to the EU’s neighbourhood.

In recent years, the EU abandoned its initially optimistic view of the Arab uprisings of 2011 and the supposedly ‘strategic option’ to support the uprisings’ promise to bring about liberty, justice and dignity to societies in the southern neighbourhood (European Commission 2011). The EU interpreted the unfolding events in its southern (and eastern) neighbourhood as phenomena that transformed the space beyond its own borders into a ‘ring of fire’ and an ‘arc of instability’ (Bildt 2015; Hahn 2015). Correspondingly, the ‘crises narrative’ obtained considerable salience in EU foreign and security policy discourses on the South (Schumacher 2016). In 2016, the EUGS scaled-up the crises narrative to include the entire world as a ‘complex, uncertain and interconnected’ environment abound with rampant contingencies and threats (European Union 2016). This narrative is closely interlinked with the EU’s approach to resilience-building, hence the need to embrace insecurity and learn to live with it pro-actively (Duffield 2012; Evans and Reid

2014). In other words, resilience is devoted to the management of risks in the EU's near proximity and further abroad.

In 2012, the European Commission defined resilience as 'the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, adapt and quickly recover from stresses and shocks' (European Commission 2012). The resilience-oriented approach to crises and shocks underlines the positive role the latter may play in instilling reflexive learning, adaptation and better management of resources (Berkes et al. 2008; Walker et al. 2004). In a similar fashion, the EU propagates resilience as an 'opportunity for transformation' (European Commission 2013: 4). Furthermore, resilience is used as an element within the security-development nexus (Duffield 2010) to address fragilities at a lower cost, thereby drawing on the means of the EU and Member States against the backdrop of simultaneously pursued austerity measures (Council of the EU 2013; European Commission 2012). While emphasising the security-development nexus, the EU suggests putting a greater emphasis on resilience to ensure that shocks and crises will not preclude low-income countries from pursuing the path of development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (European Commission 2017c). On this account, developing and/or southern neighbourhood countries are supposed to cope and manage risks, crises and insecurities single-headedly and continue abiding by bi/multilateral development agreements.

The EU approach to resilience in the southern neighbourhood (and beyond) fails to specify what transformations it entails when applied to foreign policy actions more concretely. The socio-ecology-related literature's understanding of transformability as the capacity to build new structures when previous ones become untenable in the face of shocks (Walker et al. 2004) seems a perfect fit for EU structural foreign policy (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). Seen this way, crises and insecurities of the Other(s) are considered 'positive' events that open up new opportunities to embed neoliberal structural reforms in cooperation with authoritarian regimes (Amin and El Kenz 2005; Evans and Reid 2014; Walker and Cooper 2011).

Although the term resilience featured nine times in the 2015 edition of the ENP, it acquired elaborate political significance only in the EUGS. The latter has stretched the scope of resilience to include 'all individuals and the whole of society' (European Union 2016: 24). Instead of conveying clarity, the EUGS obscures the meaning and practical implications of resilience, thus letting southern neighbours (and other partners

further abroad) incognisant of the practical scope of resilience-building. Rather than defining it, the EUGS notes that a ‘resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state’ (European Union 2016: 24). Ironically, just a few pages later, the EUGS retracts and restricts the scope of resilience-building to the ‘most acute cases’ and ‘most acute dimensions of fragility’ (European Union 2016: 9, 25). Of significance here is the claim that the EU’s resilience-building in the southern neighbourhood generates ‘long-term social, economic, and political transformation’ that includes everyone (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017). Yet, down the line, one is struck to find that resilience-building is, first and foremost, concerned with the ‘most acute’ situations. This deepens the conceptual confusion and tends to signal intra-EU disagreement and lack of direction. When applied to the EU’s southern neighbourhood, this poses profound questions regarding agenda- and priority-setting. For example, will priority be given to ongoing territorial conflicts (e.g. in Syria and Libya), to cases of considerable re-authoritarianisation (e.g. in post-2013 Egypt), or will cases of severe forms of human suffering (e.g. Gaza) be prioritised? As a matter of fact, none of these questions was ever considered a priority.

### *Resilience, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building*

Building resilience to manage the many convoluted conflicts in the southern neighbourhood is the ‘central external strategic problem’ for the EU (Smith 2016: 451). The HR/VP, Federica Mogherini (cited in European Commission 2017b) emphasised the nexus between resilience and peace-building. As she put it, resilience-building prevents fragile situations ‘from turning into new wars, new humanitarian catastrophes, or new refugee crises. This is what we [in the EU] call resilience’. Furthermore, by capitalising on resilience as the only approach ‘that can work in the complex world of today’ and as ‘the European way to peace, security and human development’, resilience is placed at a high level of EU foreign policy in general and relations with its southern neighbourhood in particular. The association established between resilience and peace-building has opened new pathways for cooperation between diverse security actors within the framework of the ENP. Security actors such as NATO and the OSCE have also started to employ resilience as a commonly shared paradigm to address security challenges in the southern neighbourhood and boost the ‘security and sustainable peace and

prosperity' of Europe itself (European Commission 2016a) (on NATO, see chapter by Larsen and Koehler in this volume). What this practically suggests is that inclusive development and societal and state security of southern neighbours are regarded as subordinate to Europe's security and as a means to shore up the security of the European Self.

According to Wagner and Anholt (2016; see also Anholt and Wagner in this volume), the ability of resilience to capture the 'middle ground' between liberal peace-building and democratisation and stabilisation could be a remedy that, in conjunction with sufficient ambiguity, may placate all stakeholders and concerned actors. The indecisiveness of the EU's approach to resilience provides the pretence of engaging in a 'joined-up' approach. In reality, however, it allows each actor to carry on with 'business as usual', thus disguising the EU's own neorealist-inspired actions as part of a larger contribution to resilience-building. This approach not only exacerbates the incoherence of EU foreign policy, but also offers actors a licence to do whatever they please while interpreting their actions as elements of resilience-building. For example, supplying repressive regimes in the southern neighbourhood with military equipment or technologies (which are often used to censor their citizens' online activities) can easily be framed as resilience-building, given that such support would contribute to 'state security'. Likewise, other actors may choose to fund civil rights movements operating against their repressive states on the basis that these states are 'inherently fragile'<sup>2</sup>—and thus non-resilient. In other words, as long as resilience is conceived as a holistic and all-inclusive 'shopping list' of sorts, the EU fosters, rather than reduces, perplexity and distrust at the receiving end of its neighbourhood policies.

As demonstrated above, resilience is prematurely and without any historical foregrounding articulated as a panacea to address the 'root causes' of conflicts, fragility and vulnerability in the southern neighbourhood and further beyond (Council of the EU 2013; European Commission 2013; European Union 2016).<sup>3</sup> While the official EU discourse deploys resilience as a means to tackle a long and a rather erratic list of

<sup>2</sup>The EUGS (European Union 2016: 25) claims that 'repressive states are inherently fragile in the long term'.

<sup>3</sup>Although philosophical research on resilience is lacking, the existing body of literature suggests that resilience relies on the ontological assumption of complex and uncertain world affairs, which cannot be controlled and, therefore, remain insecure. Subsequently, the notion of resilience focuses on human subjectivities as a means to live with dangers and insecurities. (Evans and Reid 2014; Joseph 2013, 2016).

challenges,<sup>4</sup> resilience-building in the southern neighbourhood has not yet addressed any of the factors that triggered the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the subsequent governance-related sources of instability. Thus, resilience, as conceived by the EU, has hitherto fallen short of responding to the core priorities of societies in the southern neighbourhood that continue to revolve, first and foremost, around *hurriyah* and *karamah* (freedom, justice and dignity). Such objectives continue to drive the popular revolts in the South eight years after the outbreak of the ‘Arab Spring’ as is evidenced by developments in Algeria and Sudan in early 2019.

Moreover, the promotion of resilience in order to stabilise and contribute to conflict resolution and peace-building in the neighbourhood suffers from in-built inconsistencies. First, the EU’s conception of resilience lacks a clear definition, let alone a broader philosophical meaning (Joseph 2013). Second, heralding resilience as an all-inclusive framework to tackle the multiple challenges in an unsettled neighbourhood, allows both the EU and its external partners to engage in cherry-picking—a practice that may usher in conflicting outcomes. Third, this approach to resilience comprises inconsistent facets. Consider, for example, the incoherence emerging from accommodating repressive and undemocratic regimes while considering them to be ‘inherently fragile’ and, therefore, incapable of overcoming societal fragility (European Union 2016: 25). Fourth, resilience is touted as a remedy to address the root causes of conflicts, fragilities and vulnerability. At the same time, however, the EUGS calls for adaptation and coping with problems and conflicts without identifying the means by which to pursue the proposed ‘adaption’ and ‘coping’. Finally, the EUGS regards accession to the EU and ‘fair conditionality’ as mechanisms to enhance resilience and political liberalisation in neighbourhood countries (European Union 2016: 24), although both were de facto foreclosed by the 2015 ENP.

In sum, the purported unity of action by EU institutions and the Member States—the so-called ‘joined-up’ approach presented in the EUGS—to diminish incoherence overlooks these in-built incoherencies at the policy level. The ENP has been suffering from the go-alone attitudes of Member States, intra/inter-institutional bickering and turf

<sup>4</sup>The list of challenges includes issues such as poverty, vulnerability, fragility, violent conflicts, hybrid threats, climate change, migration, gender inequalities, radicalisation, violent extremism, the building of inclusive societies, sustainable economies, accountable institutions, etc. (European Commission 2013, 2016b, 2017c; European Union 2016).

wars, all of which only confirm the ongoing existence of the much-cited ‘capability-expectations gap’ (Hill 1993) and ‘organized hypocrisy’ (Cusumano 2018) in EU foreign policymaking and implementation. This sends conflicting signals which are bound to further undermine the EU’s credibility to focus on resilience-building henceforth.

### EXAMPLES OF RESILIENCE AND STABILITY-BUILDING IN THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

This section discusses some examples from the neighbourhood to help establish a preliminary empirical account of the EU’s approach to resilience-building by exploring the type of questions it prioritises and deals with. The fact that resilience is a newcomer to EU foreign policy imposes limitations on any practice-based examination. It should, therefore, be underlined that the following discussion explores some *indicative* examples of resilience-building from relevant EU policy frameworks (mainly existing Partnership Priorities (PP) and Single Support Frameworks [SSF]) towards southern neighbourhood countries.

#### *Egypt*

While the stability of Egypt, the largest ENP partner country, is deemed critical ‘to guarantee long-term stability on both sides of the Mediterranean’ (European Council 2017: 1), resilience is absent in the EU-Egypt PP 2017–2020, adopted in June 2017. As stated in the PP, *stability* is ‘main strategic objective’ of the EU’s relationship with Egypt, a country which the EU and the Member States view as ‘a key partner to promote peace, and stability in the Southern Neighbourhood’ (European Council 2017: 3). Furthermore, the EU-Egypt SSF, adopted on 30 October 2017 and based on the priorities set out in the PP, speaks of ‘stabilisation and resilience-building’ as the EU’s main objectives that shall be achieved by supporting the Egyptian economy and promoting social and development reforms (European Commission 2017a) (for an elaborate account of the case of Egypt, see the chapter by Viceré and Frontini in this volume).

Both frameworks have overlooked the pervasive authoritarian nature of the Egyptian regime and its repressive practices (Human Rights Watch 2018). Throughout the PP and the SSF, Egypt is presented as a democracy in transition, albeit facing ‘problems’ and challenges (European

Commission 2017a; European Council 2017). From this perspective, the European ‘support [to] the country’s democratic consolidation’ is (supposedly) poised to resolve these challenges and successfully complete the alleged process of democratic transition (European Council 2017: 3). The PP further continues to suggest that the EU and Egypt have a ‘shared commitment to the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights’ (European Council 2017: 1). Of significance here is the EU’s tacit recognition of excessive restrictions on human rights, political and civil liberties and civil society as if they existed mainly as a result of instability and terrorism and thus independently of autocratic rule. Such an assessment invariably whitewashes the deep-seated authoritarian, military rule in Egypt of any responsibility for instability and radicalisation (Sayigh 2012; Rutherford 2018). From the perspective of Brussels, this legitimates deeper cooperation with Egypt to tackle the ‘root causes of terrorism’ and ‘counter and prevent radicalisation’ (European Council 2017: 7) by focusing mainly on resilience-building (European Commission 2016b: 13). This contorted account of the situation in Egypt not only overlooks the inherent fragility of authoritarian states, but also demonstrates a nonchalant shrug on the part of the EU vis-à-vis the fact that authoritarianism and repression are among the root causes of radicalisation and state terror (Ashour 2009).

### *Lebanon and Jordan*

As the Syrian revolt transpired into a full-blown war, many Syrians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Lebanon accommodates approximately one million Syrian refugees, while Jordan hosts 673,000 (UNHCR 2018). By 2014, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ narrative was in full swing and refugees were framed as a threat and a source of vulnerability (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). This framing renders them an ideal subject for resilience mediation. Resilience-building in Lebanon and Jordan usually focuses on alleviating the pressure on the limited capacity and resources of both countries to cater to the needs of such a large number of refugees. In this context, the EU focused on contributing to these basic needs and began advocating for ‘coping with sudden crises’, with a view to ‘mitigate their vulnerability’ (European Commission 2018b: 2). This is consistent with the EU’s neoliberal outsourcing logic which delegates to national

governments and local authorities in both Lebanon and Jordan the task of containing refugees within their sovereign borders and preventing them from seeking safe havens in Europe.

In the case of Jordan, low-cost—or ‘cost-effective’—contributions to labour market development and basic services delivered to Syrian refugees are classified as resilience-building. For example, the establishment of six new employment centres to match workers with potential jobs, the facilitation of exports of certain Jordanian products to European markets by simplifying pre-existing rules of origin (six factories were granted the authorisation to benefit from this rule), the provision of ‘technical assistance and matching’ with the EU market to 21 Jordanian factories are among the prime examples currently classified as EU resilience-building (European External Action Service 2017: 3) in the country.

In Lebanon, too, resilience is usually discussed in relation to the Syrian conflict and Syrian refugees. The interventions proposed by the EU rely exclusively on economy-based reasoning and suggest ‘improving the economic resilience’ of Lebanon to help ‘create a climate in which the cost of borrowing to the [Lebanese] Treasury could be significantly lowered’ (European Council 2016: 4). Meanwhile, the EU-Lebanon PP stipulate that ‘economic disparities’ and ‘deprived areas’ in Lebanon are a ‘threat to its stability’, and they continue to suggest market-based solutions as a means to building a resilient national economy and reduce sectarian and social tensions (European Council 2016: 6–7). Obviously, this market-based reasoning to resilience seems to de-politicise most of the problems which Lebanon is faced with (on resilience-building in Lebanon, see the chapter by Pounds et al. in this volume).

### *Palestine*

The de-politicising effect of resilience appears more pointedly in the case of Palestine. There, resilience focuses largely on promoting Palestinians living in the so-called ‘Area C’ (which constitutes 61% of the West Bank and is under full Israeli control) and East Jerusalem to enhance their ability to cope with Israeli occupation and colonialism (European Commission 2018a). However, the means to boost Palestinian ‘resilience’ pale in the face of the colossal power of the occupier and the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in violation of international law. Given the Israeli occupation, resilience as a coping strategy for an entity such as Palestine certainly stands no



**Table 4.1** EU resilience-building initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa

<i>Country</i>	<i>Examples of EU resilience-building measures</i>
Egypt	Promoting stability, economic and social reforms
Jordan	Supporting the basic needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan; helping open job centres; and simplifying roles of origin
Lebanon	Supporting the basic needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon; offering market solutions by reducing costs of borrowing funds
Palestine	Promoting Palestinians in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem to cope with Israeli occupation

prospect of success. Moreover, and paradoxically, the EU's resilience approach fails to prioritise Gaza. This neglect comes despite Gaza's immense fragilities, the devastating destruction of its basic infrastructure and continuous de-development. As a matter of fact, according to the UN, Gaza is expected to be 'unlivable by 2020' as a result of three full-scale Israeli military assaults and the imposed blockade since 2007 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2015; Roy 2007) (Table 4.1).

Overall, as far as the above indicative empirical examples of resilience-building in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine demonstrate, the term resilience is used very sparsely and fleetingly in frameworks by the EU and southern ENP partner countries concluded since 2016. This clearly reveals the uncertainty of EU foreign policymakers on how to interpret and then translate their conceptualisation of resilience into concrete action. With such uncertainty, difficult political issues are dodged in favour of supposedly neutral and technical solutions. Arrangements such as the PP and SSF for the period 2017–2020 hardly define the notion of resilience. Instead, they associate resilience with stability, economic and social development, as well as reforms. Simultaneously, resilience measures, as adopted by the EU, all have a focus on private sector development, governance reforms, specific infrastructure projects (energy, environment and water), and the provision of essential basic services for refugees in host countries in the southern neighbourhood. Such interventions resonate strongly with the notion of resilience and in particular with the EU's ambition to pursue low-cost, private sector-driven and responsibility devolution logics. These interventions seem impotent in the face of the political nature and scale of prevailing challenges.

## CONCLUSIONS

The assumption that the EU has been supporting democracy in its southern neighbourhood, but only suddenly embraced resilience-building as an alternative to ambitious democracy promotion agendas is misleading. As this chapter has demonstrated, the EU's approach of resilience-building mainly is a repackaging of past practices, meant to disguise the continuous support for, and cooperation with, autocratic regimes that regard democracy as their ultimate enemy. As long as the southern neighbourhood is viewed as a 'profoundly alien' space that cannot be democratised (i.e. is 'unreformable'), EU resilience-building, despite its euphemistic rhetoric, will continue to revolve around the perceived need to secure European borders—visible or invisible—with the South. Put differently, the latest shift towards resilience-building in EU foreign policy and external relations remains embedded in past logics of turning the neighbourhood into a security buffer (Browning and Joenimmi 2008; Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005; Walters 2004).

Portraying resilience as a less ambitious alternative to democracy and human rights promotion is unwarranted and a feeble justification that serves the EU's stability-driven foreign policy. After all, tackling the root causes of conflicts, vulnerabilities, climate change, poverty and other complex challenges is far more ambitious than focusing on democracy promotion alone. Approaching resilience as a form of governmentality (Joseph 2013, 2016, 2018; Evans and Reid 2014) may thus be a useful way to critically understand its operative modes. Besides being seemingly cost-effective, resilience outsources governance responsibility downwards to the unit level (i.e. to individuals, local governments, civil society, the private sector, etc.), in the hope that problems will be addressed locally in a 'peaceful and stable manner', thus preventing negative spill-over effects (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 3). Obviously, this requires an 'adaptation of *certain* behaviours by *particular* populations' at the micro-level in a way that 'complements the outsourcing logic of neoliberal governance' (Evans and Reid 2014: 9, 16, emphasis in original).

Security, threat and migration management have underpinned the EU's approach to political liberalisation, democratisation, state- and peace-building in the southern neighbourhood already in the past. These elements continue to underlie the EU's resilience-building while tolerating repression, continuous violations of human rights and climates of fear. This approach glosses over political and economic enervations that

underlie the multilayered structural crises across the southern neighbourhood. Meanwhile, Article 21(1) of the Treaty on the European Union unambiguously points to ‘democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity’ as the guiding principles of EU external action. Thus, embracing resilience is to accept the failure of the liberal project and universality of the EU’s grand claims and ambitions towards its southern neighbourhood. Such an acknowledgement, however, comes at a significant political cost that puts into question the fundamental principles—both legal and moral—EU external action is rooted in.

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