EU RESILIENCE BUILDING POLICY: THE CASE OF GEORGIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ASSOCIATED TRIO

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ABSTRACT

Acknowledging the increased security challenges in Eastern Europe, this paper aims to unpack the role and perception of the EU as a resilience promoter; and whether and how Georgia's case illustrates resilience while dealing with external 'shocks'. This article argues that the demeanour and political narrative of the Georgian government is influenced by immediate security threats and the vulnerability of state institutions. At the same time, it finds that societal resilience is a positive source of transformation in the country. The article employs discourse and content analysis to identify whether Georgia's official position has been in line with the quickly changing European integration dynamic.

Keywords:

■**European Union** ■**Resilience policy** ■**Ukraine** ■**Georgia** ■**Associated Trio**

Introduction

Over the past year, security threats in Eastern Europe achieved an unprecedented level. The European Union (EU)'s foreign policy and resilience-building policy towards its Eastern neighbours changed its significance, architecture and perspective. This paper aims to analyse how the EU conceptualises resilience in its policy and how it reflects in Georgia, one of the members of the Associated Trio, together with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The primary question addressed through this research is whether the resilience policy has added value for the Eastern Partnership countries. To do so, the paper focuses on deconstructing the architecture of resilience in the case of Georgia, figuring out its primary layers and construction to better understand the sources of resilience.

Resilience as a concept is understood as the capacity to inherently change, transform and reform, while facing social, economic and political crises. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries deal with several local and external threats and share the experience of limited statehood, where state

The concept of resilience in the EU scholarship: theoretical framework

The definition of resilience is a contentious issue in both theory and practice. Interpretations are not unequivocally contradictory but rather complementary. The ontological understanding of resilience states that it is not merely about the conceptual and methodological definition, as it may have multiple meanings (Bourbeau, 2018). The most recent approaches in the literature explain that resilience analysis could outline a system's vulnerabilities to various types of shocks, which explains its capacity to resist, recover, and transform by following a new development pattern (Pascariu and Rouet, 2019).

The dynamic vision of resilience evolved to return to the initial balance and transform substantially (Martin and Sunley, 2014). Regional economic resilience is defined as "the capacity to withstand or recover from shocks to its developmental growth path, if necessary, by undergoing adaptive changes to its structures and its societal and institutional arrangements, to maintain or restore its previous developments path, or transit to a new sustainable path" (Martin and Sunley, 2014).

In international scholarship, resilience is considered a form of governance, where the responsibility is shifted onto the governed (Walker and Cooper, 2011). This approach explains the EU's strategy to integrate the resilience concept into its foreign policy and, in this manner, respond to vulnerabilities beyond its borders.

According to the pragmatist theory in the EU scholarship, resilience directs attention to new possibilities and opportunities for transformation (Juncos, 2017). Fostering the resilience of democracies within and beyond the EU borders to consistently live up to the values, the EU's credibility and influence do not replace the EU's transformative and rule-based approach towards third states (Grabbe, 2006). The case of Georgia demonstrates that the EU's rule-based and value-based approach is an integral part of its resilience.

While acknowledging the EU as one of the principal actors in Eastern Europe and Georgia, executing its normative (Manners, 2002) and transformative power (Grabbe, 2006), the primary objective of this paper is to focus specifically on the self-portrayal of the EU as a resilience promoter (Nitoiu, 2018). The EU's actorness and effectiveness cannot be taken for granted, given its nature as a multilevel and semi-supranational polity (Niemann and Bretherton, 2013). The EU's external policy procedures and instruments, as well as its claim to represent an actor globally, have significantly developed in the recent past (Niemann and Bretherton, 2013). Acknowledging the value of the empirical findings concerning the critical approaches to the EU as a normative power (Tocci, 2008), the implication of values in the transformative process of EaP countries is considerable. Concerning the EU's role and performance, the EU scholarship and studies go far beyond the actorness and consider the effectiveness of EU action, including the "capacity-expectation gap" (Hill, 1993). The concept of coherence is one of the most fervently discussed factors associated with the effectiveness of the EU external policy (Gebhard, 2011).

The EU's global effectiveness also depends on its ability to communicate its policies with its partners. Therefore, whether defined as a soft, normative or transformative power, the EU's influence is found in a complex mix of economic attractiveness, interdependence, the promotion of international norms and the potential of deepening integration processes for the EaP countries (Grabbe, 2006; Manners, 2002; Manners 2010). Promoting resilience, as the EU's foreign policy priority, is a readaptation of the EU's communication language for achieving changes at the domestic level.

To conclude, resilience rethinks external governance strategy from a perspective that involves "self-governance" and not necessarily a "conduct of conducts" (Foucault, 2007). The EU's vision of its external governance strategy focuses on resilience and aims at (1) interest-driven and pragmatic relations; (2) a more responsive and adaptable approach to partners' needs to deal with the "predictable unpredictability" (Korosteleva, 2018: 2). Introducing this concept, the EU has emphasised the importance of bottom-up policies in transforming and adapting third states on the international scene.

Integration of resilience policy in the EU's strategic documents

For over three decades, the EU's actorness in Eastern Europe faced several crucial crossroads. While the EU aspires to play a more significant role in its Eastern neighbourhood, external and internal threats impact its foreign policy priorities. One of the EU's main foreign policy objectives is to support resilience in and beyond its formal borders. From the EU's perspective, resilience is the synchronisation of effort and shared responsibility of the EU institutions, member states, partner countries and civil society.

Ongoing security threats require an enhanced EU policy vision to achieve the transformation of the states' and societies' fragility and vulnerability into resilience. The EU scholarship permanently claimed the need to upgrade and modify the neighbourhood strategy of the EU to advance transformative processes in neighbouring countries by adapting their economies and societies to European standards (Pascariu and Rouet, 2019; Korosteleva, 2018).

The concept of resilience, as a comprehensive and complex notion, was integrated into the EU foreign policy in 2016. The European Union referred the resilience as a "multilayered concept" and underlined the versatility of its support (EEAS, 2016). The resilience of the EU's foreign policy strategies refers to a new form of governmental logic (or rationality), emphasising the complexity and uncertainty (Juncos, 2017: 7). The EU explicitly mentioned in its Global Strategy that fostering external resilience reflects the interests of the EU citizens and is reciprocally beneficial, more precisely:

> *"It is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies [...] a resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable developments lies at the heart of a resilient state"* (EEAS, 2016: 23).

The notion of resilience doubles some methodological pioneering on the part of the EU and complicates its delimitations of the concept (Korosteleva, 2018). According to the EU's official strategic documents, resilience is defined as "the ability of state and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises" (EEAS, 2016: 23).

The EU's Global strategy of 2016 addressed resilience policy and defined its strategic vision toward the Eastern neighbourhood. More precisely, the EU recognised the willingness of Eastern Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries for closer relations, while highlighting its transformative power as an attractive partner and conceptualising resilience as a priority in the ENP and beyond. The

EU also declared resilience as a multilayered concept by noting that the EU will support different paths of resilience and defined vulnerable elements of resilience in the context of its Global Strategy towards East and South and targeted governments, societies, economies, climate and energy. The EU aims to achieve resilience within its borders and beyond. In its 2016 Global Strategy, the EU increasingly integrated the resilience of states and societies in and around Europe.

The EU's strategic approach to resilience building focuses on ten significant methodological aspects, which include: strengthening resilience is a means, not an end; understanding the resilience factors helps in planning effective responses; resilience requires tailor-made approaches; tracking and responding to vulnerabilities that require identification and construction of positive sources of resilience; resilience is about transformation, not preserving the status-quo; resilience requires a political approach and risk-informed programming; flexibility and adaptability are core principles of resilience; early warning needs to link to early actions; the complex interdependence between actors requires a broader analysis of strengths, vulnerabilities and pressures (European Commission, 2017: 23-24).

The EU acknowledges that *"the primary responsibility [of the governments is] integrating resilience into national and local policy frameworks lies within each country. However, the EU and its Member States can support the strengthening of resilience through raising the issue as an integral part of its political dialogue, including at the highest level"* (European Commission, 2017: 23-24).

Resilience building increases the legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU's external action by directly engaging targeted countries. Therefore, the EU's foreign policy instruments acquire new meanings (Wagner and Anholt, 2016: 4), and the EU's foreign policy, as a comprehensive approach, requires several elements to work: local ownership, capacity-building, partnerships, responsibility and a joint approach (Juncos, 2017: 8). Those elements acquire upgraded meaning under the resilience paradigm, especially local ownership. The concept of responsibility is also an essential part of resilience-building, since, on the one hand, the EU takes responsibility foremost within its formal borders and surrounding regions while recognising that there are no quick solutions for the crisis (EEAS, 2016: 17).

The reference to surrounding regions concedes the EU's increased role in its near neighbourhood and promotes the role of the EU as a responsible and reliable actor. At the same time, it complements its matching and interconnection with the local ownership. However, more emphasis on local ownership does not imply removing responsibility from the EU. Building resilience constitutes a value-based

notion. Therefore, the actors involved in this process have joint responsibility for the consequences of the policies pursued, even if it is not equal.

Consequently, the state's resilience, as a bottom-up approach, implies the existence or formation of local practices and experiences, in conjunction with local ownership and responsibility, while the EU stays as an attractive mentor and reliable partner, providing external support. The EU recognises its restricted capacity to provide top-down changes and shifts its foreign policy strategy – "take it or leave it" – with a new pragmatic approach, "take whatever you are capable of taking", where tailor-made and locally designed decisions facilitate closer cooperation with the EU.

Resilience-building in the framework of the Eastern Partnership

The EU's objective since the introduction of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 is to support the region's political, economic and security stability and prosperity EU's projection of stability in Eastern Europe is broadly based on its internal resilience-building experience. Anticipation of crises and shocks in the EU's neighbouring countries drives the evolution and adaptation of new policies in the EU. For mitigating security threats, promoting stability and capacity building, the EU developed specific policies with appropriate tools and instruments. In order to enhance the partner's national capabilities and make them agile, adaptive and resilient, the EU synchronises its efforts with NATO (Ratsyborinska, 2022).

The EU's global strategy to promote resilience beyond its formal borders was instrumentalised in the EaP framework towards its neighbouring Eastern countries in the post-2020 priorities. The EU's comprehensive foreign policy agenda aims to increase trade, growth and jobs, invest in connectivity, strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, support the green and digital transitions, and promote fair, gender-equal and inclusive societies. The differentiated understanding of the resilience concept, priorities and country-specific needs implies the comprehensiveness of renewed agenda for recovery, resilience and reform in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The Eastern Partnership countries already have a format of both bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the European Union. The primary objective of the EaP was to expand and intensify relations with Eastern European countries, which initially developed through the ENP (Wolczuk, 2011). However, it was understood as a geopolitical project over the years, facing multiple crises in the region (Nitoiu, 2019). Thus and thereof, the EU expected changes on the domestic levels of Eastern European countries, according to the founding goals of EaP: (a) political association, and (b) gradual economic

integration into the internal market of the EU. Under this goal, the EaP framework seeks to support political and socio-economic reforms of the partner countries and to facilitate the approximation with the EU (Council of the European Union, 2009).

Even though the six of Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) have much in common, it is worth mentioning that substantial differences appear among them, despite their common legacies, and in the nature and pace of their relations with the EU (Longhurst and Nies, 2009; Wolczuk, 2011). The reform processes in the EaP countries are context-dependent, and it is up to each partner country to determine its transformation path (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2013).

Dealing with vulnerable systems in tackling various shocks is one of the priorities within the EU's partnership with Eastern European countries, and it is not by chance that the concept of resilience has increasingly become present in European foreign policy, especially regarding the Eastern neighbourhood (Pascariu and Rouet, 2019). By integrating the resilience concept in the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) framework, the EU contemplates taking actions to lead the region towards consolidating a more differentiated and tailor-made approach aimed at reaching the goals of the EaP. It is based on the EaP's bilateral and multilateral experience in dealing with regional and domestic developments. The revision of the EU's foreign policy design attempted to reflect and respond to momentous challenges in the Eastern neighbourhood, including the Russian occupation of Georgian territories in 2008, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014. Through the EaP framework, the EU wanted to achieve the gradual consistent and sustainable strengthening of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms (European Commission, 2017). In addition, by offering economic integration to the Associated Trio, more prosperity in the region was envisioned.

In 2021, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy presented a proposal for the Eastern Partnership priorities and based this framework on five long-term objectives, with resilience at its core, reflecting the vision for the future of the Eastern Partnership outlined in March 2020 (European Commission, 2021a). The *Joint Communication: Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all and the Council Conclusions on the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020* set out resilience as a new overarching policy and its long-term objectives: economy and connectivity, good governance

and the rule of law, environmental and climate resilience, support to digital transformation, and fair and inclusive societies (European Commission, 2020).

Recent events in the Eastern Partnership countries demonstrate that resilience building is consistently challenged in the region by Russia's aspiration to increase its military presence in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU. By accepting the application for membership from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and recognising Georgia's European perspective, the EU not only recognised the European identity of the Associated Trio but also provided unprecedented support to the European future of those countries. Geopolitical developments influenced the decision of the EU to enlarge and promote resilience to counter the vulnerability and fragility of the associated countries.

The EU's readiness to enlarge and open its doors to the Associated Trio (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) within the EaP framework emphasises the resemblances of the respective countries' institutional, political and legal experiences. An unexpected wave of enlargement considers national peculiarities on the one hand and, on the other hand, not only differentiates but also reinforces the implication and essence of the internal experience. Thus, the EU expects to promote resilience in complementarity with the country's internal political agenda and legal order, within the framework of European integration and presumes to promote resilience as expected. In this manner, it responded to the "capacity-expectation gap" debate about the membership perspective of the EaP countries.

Contrary to the EU resilience-building goal, the Russian Federation employs aggressive foreign policy tactics against sovereign Ukraine and Georgia. Increasing military presence, constant destabilisation in Eastern Europe, and the creation and military support of conflicting zones prevent all EaP countries from accessing NATO and reduce their capacity to integrate into the EU (Ratsiborynska, 2016). Russian presence has been identified in all six Eastern Partnership countries (Ratsiborynska, 2016), which represents a major threat to their security and resilience.

The resilience policy is an umbrella policy resulting from the Eastern Partnership, instrumentalised in its core objectives and priorities. Achieving resilience in Eastern Partnership countries implies the accumulation and development of domestic experience in all areas and policies of governance and, at the same time, upgrading its framework. The essence of resilience policy is the recognition of differentiated experiences in Eastern European countries, but common regional challenges of the Associated Trio cannot be neglected. Without the European integration process, the resilience policy alters its quality and relevance, which has been granted jointly by the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries.

Recent narratives of resilience: the case of Georgia

The state's resilience, separately from the European integration policy, is inherently the target of any member states and even EU's partners, being part of domestic development policy and order to some degree. Resilience employs several understating: firstly, it explicitly shifts the primary responsibility; secondly, it has an outstanding exposure to societal resilience. A multidimensional resilience assessment tool is offered by the Democratic Resilience Index, incorporating four dimensions: political; media/civil society; economic; external affairs (Global Focus Centre, 2021). For the purposes of this article, the external affairs indicators are relevant, implying addressing the crisis' trigger and determining resilience while facing a sudden shift (Democratic Resilience Index, 2021: 8).

Resilience as a goal implies the state's obligation to enshrine it into the national strategic documents. Georgia shares the vision of a united society and a common national resilience (MOD Strategy, 2021) while acknowledging the importance of closer coordination with NATO and cooperation with the EU relevant structures as a key for security and defence (MOD Strategy, 2021). The case of Georgia illustrates that resilience-building could be an inherent part of the Euro-Atlantic integration discourse.

European integration is characterised by methodological difficulties related to both the terminology and the existence of favourable outcomes, including resilience policy. The Association Agreements constitute a key bilateral element of the EaP initiative to foster resilience in the Associated Trio countries (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia), given that it enhances the legal and political relations between the partner countries and the EU. The Association Agreements are the most extended and detailed documents of their kind that include detailed and binding provisions from the partner countries to align their laws and policies with the EU *acquis*. Therefore, they signal a shift from soft law to hard law commitments and export the EU's extensive regulatory framework in the EaP countries (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2013). Even though Association agreements signed with Associated Trio are highly technical documents, their implementation enhances the societal linkage with the EU.

The resilience-building process in Eastern Europe faces various impediments. Georgia and Ukraine are dominated by factors related to weak governance and socio-economic underdevelopment (Kakachia, Legucka and Lebanidze, 2021). In the political history of Associated Trio, crises have occurred in various spheres of governance: the presence of distorted checks and balances between branches of power, a politicised judiciary, numerous political crises in Georgia (2009, 2011 and 2020), or the Euromaidan protests and near governmental breakdown in Ukraine in 2013-2014 (Lebanidze and Kakachia, 2017; Kuzio, 2009; Corman and Schumacher, 2021). Social inequality, unemployment

and widespread poverty radicalise societies and political elites (Kakachia, Legucka and Lebanidze, 2021).

The EU's external action measurement towards the Republic of Moldova shows (1) A narrow and minimalist conception of resilience-building; (2) The need for accountability of the local elites to pursue corresponding reforms, and (3) The absence of a clear-cut resilience-building strategy (Corman and Schumacher, 2021; Moga, et. al. 2021). The authors explain that the EU resilience-building attempts in Moldova between 2014 and 2020 were a *"function of domestic scope conditions and the extent to which governing elites' reform rhetoric was perceived as credible by EU stakeholders"* (Corman and Schumacher, 2021).

When analysing the example of Georgia, democracy remains very important (59%) and essential (33%) to the Georgian population. However, every second citizen says Georgia is not a democracy (NDI, 2022b). In addition, the majority is not satisfied with the government, institutions and leaders (NDI, 2022b). According to Transparency International Georgia, informal governance, the weak oversight role of the parliament, and a high level of corruption impede democratic processes in the country (TI Georgia, 2021). The majority of the Georgian population says that Georgia is not a democracy, while 92% consider living in a democratic country as important (NDI, 2022b). In contrast, the Georgian society increasingly (83%) supports the government's stated goal to join the EU (NDI, 2022a).
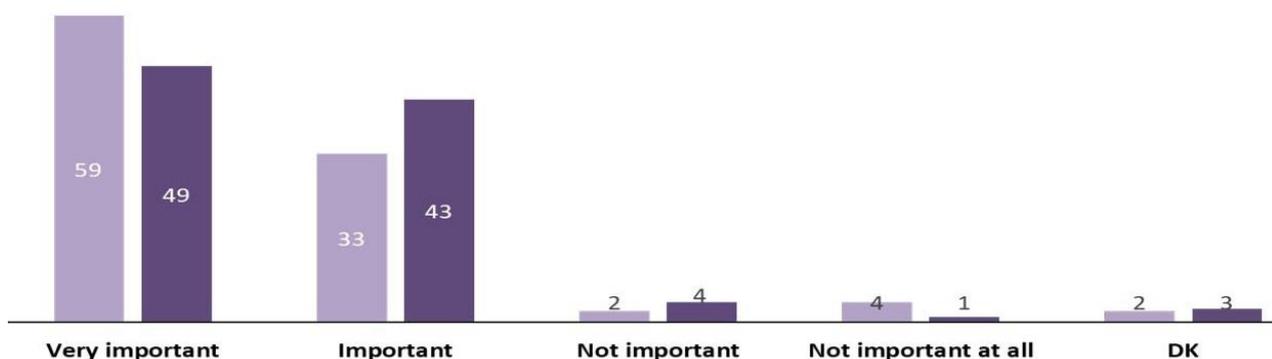

Source: NDI 2022b

Georgians continue to demonstrate resilient support for EU membership

Do you approve or disapprove of Georgian government's stated goal to join the EU? (q27)

■ Approve ■ Disapprove ■ DK
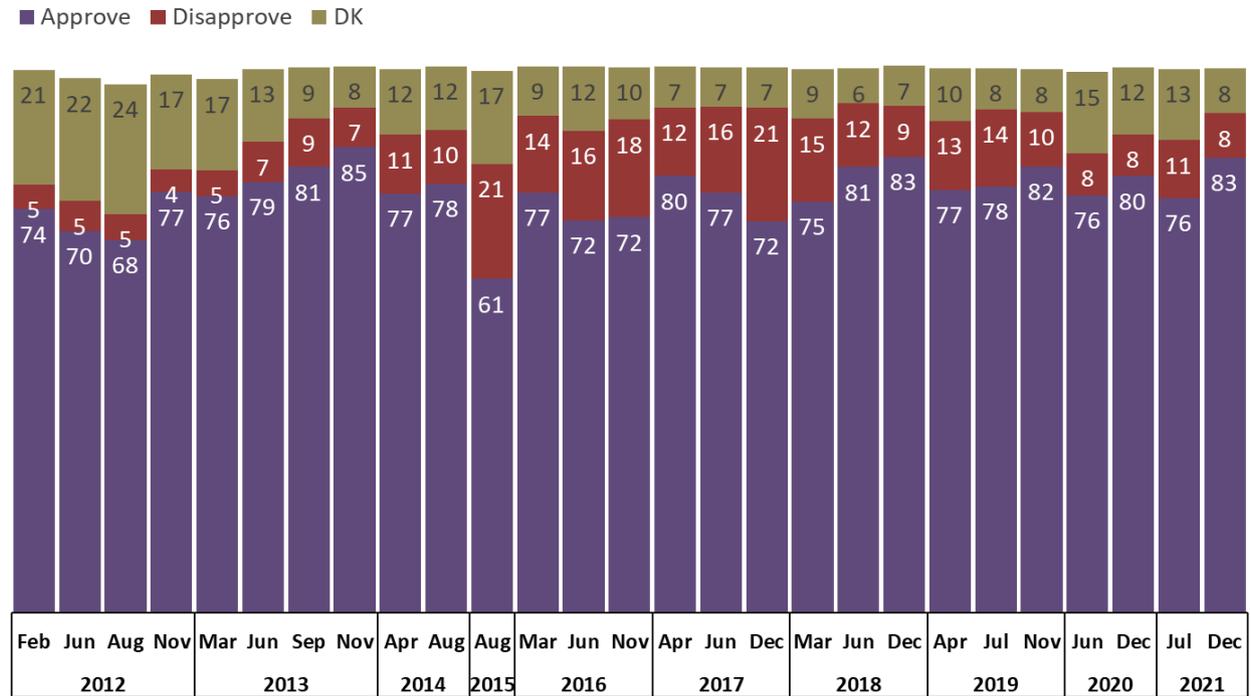
Source: NDI 2022b

Every second citizen says Georgia not a democracy

In your opinion, is Georgia a democracy now? (q9)

■ Yes ■ No ■ DK
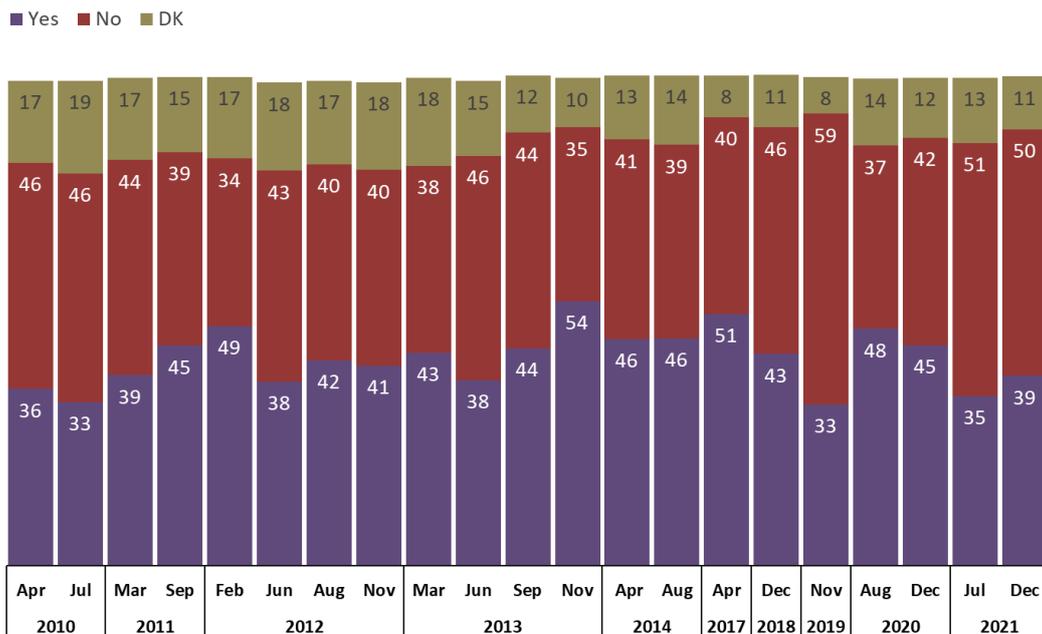
Source: NDI 2022b

Achieving resilience requires the existence and interaction of processes and institutions, domestically and externally, as a mandatory objective for the Eastern Partnership countries. Framing the foreign policy and security role towards neighbouring countries reflects the official discourse of the respective country; as the case of Romania shows its external behaviour has been impacted by the EU and NATO membership discourse (Moga *et al*. 2021).

In addition to domestic shocks, there are external threats to the security and economy of Georgia and Ukraine. Russia's aggressive foreign policy and imperialistic aspirations are increasingly countering the potential of further Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries concerned.

The resilience of the Ukrainian government and people is reflected in the countering of the Russian aggression against Ukraine that is continuously undermining Ukrainian identity, particularly since 2014. The Ukrainian society and government demonstrated an EU value-based resilience (Ciolan, 2022). The implementation of the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), granting also visa liberalisation, notwithstanding their technical character, become fundaments of relations between the EU and Ukraine, and their implementation becomes a political goal as a manifestation of the countries' European choice (Ciolan, 2022).

The Russian Federation's aggression is also having a growing impact on Georgia's societal resilience. In the ongoing geopolitical developments, Georgia considers Russia a potential danger to its national security and stability, as it continuously undermines Georgia's chosen path toward Euro-Atlantic integration (MOD, 2021:9). The increasing military presence of Russia in Georgia poses threats to the peace and economic development of Georgia, and in the broader image, to the region. Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine allows it to increase its military presence and establish an effective platform for power projection (Khokrishvili and Lebanidze, 2022), while Georgia is acknowledging that its main foreign policy objective is to join the EU and NATO (MFA Georgia, 2019).

The resilience-building process achieved its limit within the EaP framework. Therefore, the EU uses its most effective leverage to act as a resilience-builder in the region and open the door for enlargement (European Commission, 2022e). The EU's recognition of Georgia's membership perspective was an unexpected and positive shock for the society and government. The insufficiently prepared application of Georgia kept the country from receiving the EU candidate status (European Commission, 2022a). However, in this historical momentum for the European integration of Georgia, societal demand and

pressure on the government increased through permanent manifestations and a joint declaration of the civil society to follow-up on the European Commission 12-point recommendations for receiving candidate status (RFERL, 2022; OSGF, 2022). Thus, societal resilience in Georgia played the role of backbone in the process of the EU's new enlargement wave and as a positive source of resilience in the country.

Georgian society demonstrates a realistic understanding of the democratic backsliding of Georgia, in addition to its permanently decreasing trust in state institutions (NDI 2022b), as examined above. Measuring the interdependence between the EU and Georgia is a multidimensional endeavour and beyond the scope of this research paper, but several key aspects foster societal resilience: 1. Implementation of the AA/DCFTA; 2. Visa Liberalisation and its tangible benefits for society; 3. Increased trade relations with the EU; 4. Effective and increased engagement of the civil society in the European integration process; 5. EU's financial assistance in various sectors.

Consequently, Georgian societal resilience after the negative shock of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and as a result of the positive shock of the recognition of the European perspective confirms the following tendencies: (1) Increasing identification and self-perception as Europeans; (2) Increasingly support for European integration as a rational choice for prosperity; (3) Increasing demand for democracy; 4) Socialisation of European values – successful examples of the linkage with the EU and EU-related processes. European values, norms and principles are internalised in Georgia on a societal level; as far as positive and negative experiences of shocks, societal resilience was the backbone and driver of the country's foreign policy decisions. The civic movement Back to the European family, as an example of a socialisation paradigm, on the one hand, support broad societal support for the European integration path while countering Russian propagandistic narratives in Georgia. Additionally, the Georgian society is sending messages and aiming to strategically communicate with the EU to compete with the governmental ambiguous political positioning, demonstrating the state's vulnerability.

Conclusion

Resilience constitutes an inherently dynamic concept, capturing the complexity of reality and inevitably targeting the different perspectives of domestic transformations of countries. The introduction of the resilience concept in the Eastern Partnership framework of the EU constitutes a recognition of the complexity of change, which does not itself replace the transformative policy instruments of the EU. The objective of the EU towards the Eastern Partnership countries is

peacebuilding, democracy, protection of human rights and the rule of law, which is not achievable with regard to the Associated Trio countries without a clear membership perspective. Acknowledging the increasing security threats in the EU neighbourhood that also imposes an immediate threat to the EU, the Union opened its doors to the Associated Trio, reaffirming the EU's resilience-building position in Eastern Europe.

This research is limited to the case of Georgia, which draws the line between governmental and societal resilience. It argues that the Georgian government displayed its vulnerability in dealing with external positive and negative shocks, like the EU membership perspective and the Russian war against Ukraine. While society has different standings from the government, that could be a positive source of resilience.

Due to the limited research focus, the paper is not dealing with identifying resilience concerning internal and external shocks (typology, level, duration, intensity) and their measurement. In comparison, it captures the weaknesses of the Georgian political system signalling institutional fragility and weak governance, as well as the gap between societal and governmental resilience.

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