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Published online: 21 Oct 2019.

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From principle to practice? The resilience–local ownership nexus in the EU Eastern Partnership policy

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ABSTRACT
By emphasizing concepts such as resilience and local ownership, recent updates in the EU's foreign policy strategy have marked a narrative turn and signaled a shift in EU external governance toward its neighborhood. This article has two aims. First, we unpack the EU's conceptual understanding of resilience and local ownership as reflected in its recent strategic documents. Second, we examine the implications of the EU's narrative turn on actual policy practices in Eastern Partnership countries. We highlight a gap between the EU's broad understanding of resilience and local ownership and the narrow operationalization of these concepts in the EU's eastern policy. The article shows that the EU continued relying on the previously established policy frameworks, according to which resilience develops through approximation with EU templates. This strong path dependence precluded any effective policy turn toward local ownership.

The revision of the European Union (EU) foreign policy in 2015–2016 has resulted in a major narrative turn toward resilience and local ownership.[1] Whereas both concepts have, for over a decade, been advanced in development and peacebuilding policies (see, e.g., European Commission, 2012), they have gradually made their way to *other* external policies of the EU and became the central points of the European foreign policy as outlined by European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) (High Representative, 2016; Tocci, 2020; Korosteleva & Flockhart, 2020). This turn can arguably be explained by the need for a more efficient use of resources and more effective and adaptable policies in the context of multiple crises and growing uncertainty challenging the EU both

internally and externally (Davis Cross, 2016; Tocci, 2017). The EU's discursive shift therefore mirrors "a middle ground between over-ambitious liberal peacebuilding and under-ambitious stability" (Wagner & Anholt, 2016, p. 414).

The "spill-over" of the concepts of resilience and local ownership from the security and humanitarian domains to other EU external policies deserves further scrutiny. This is because other external policies unfold in less fragile environments and imply less asymmetric relations between international and domestic actors, compared, for instance, to humanitarian crises. Such a different context may have implications for the meaning attached to resilience and local ownership. More equal relations between international and domestic actors may also be conducive to both greater local ownership and an easier application of this policy principle in practice.

In light of the EU's "special relationship" with its neighbors (Treaty on the European Union: article 8) and the role envisaged for resilience and local ownership in the recent European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) revision, the ENP is fertile ground to both unpack the EU's understanding of resilience and local ownership, and test whether these notions yield policy change outside the humanitarian and peacebuilding contexts. Indeed, as argued by Smith, "if the EU cannot effectively build resilience, stability, and cooperation with its own close neighbors, its internal legitimacy and its credibility as a strategic actor elsewhere could be undermined" (Smith, 2016; see also Korosteleva, 2018).

Focusing on the eastern dimension of the ENP, where the EU has developed a highly ambitious cooperation agenda, we ask how the EU conceptualizes the resilience–local ownership nexus in the relationship with its neighbors and whether the narrative turn translates into change of practices in the Eastern Partnership (EaP). By answering these research questions, we aim to contribute to the literature by (i) exploring further the nexus between resilience and local ownership as reflected in EU policies, (ii) investigating how the principles of resilience and local ownership translate from policy formulation to policy implementation, and (iii) empirically tracing and explaining recent trends in the EU foreign policy towards neighborhood. Thus our research sits on two bodies of literature—the analysis of EU external action in the neighborhood and the security/humanitarian aid literature on resilience and local ownership. Drawing on the insights from both strands, our article aims to bridge the gap between these literatures which rarely speak to each other.

Our research is carried out in two steps. First we conduct a discourse analysis of 30 EU official documents in order to illuminate the meaning attached by the EU to resilience and local ownership in the EaP context. In particular, we look at how both notions are defined, what the scope of action is, what mechanisms are envisaged for policy implementation and what actors are identified in the EU documents. In total, nine multilateral and 21 country-specific documents are analyzed. For each of these sets we selected key documents, e.g., EUGS and Strategic approach to resilience, ENP policy reviews, as well as

European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) single support frameworks, Commission implementing decisions, and Association implementation reports. While the study is based on the analysis of all sources, only some of them are quoted in the article for illustrative purposes.

Second, we analyze EU policies as part of the EaP, with a focus on three issue areas: trade and economic development, mobility, and governance and the rule of law. These three sectors were selected because they constitute priority areas of the EU cooperation with the EaP states (EEAS, 2018) and provide a good mix of "high" and "low" politics issues. As such, they are at the heart of both the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the EaP. In our analysis, we focus on the bilateral track, which was designed as the core instrument to "create a closer relationship" between the EU and each country (European Commission, 2008, p. 3) and therefore was developed as the backbone of the EaP. Even though we cover all six EaP countries, we pay specific attention to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine because the EU has deployed a more comprehensive array of policy instruments for these countries. Our comparison between the EU's discourse and practices highlights a disconnect between the EU's narrative shift toward a hybrid approach to the resilience–local ownership thinking and the continuation of top-down practices inherited from the modernization approach in the EaP.

The article starts by an overview of the major conceptual approaches underpinning the meaning of resilience and local ownership, which remain highly contested in the literature. We then investigate the EU's conceptualization of resilience and local ownership and seek to locate the EU's understanding of these concepts along the continuum of theoretical approaches. The article proceeds with an analysis of how these concepts are operationalized in the EU's Eastern Partnership, drawing upon three short case studies. Finally, we compare the insights from the three case studies and explain why the narrative turn failed to trigger policy change.

Conceptual perspectives on resilience and local ownership: A theoretical continuum

As discussed by Korosteleva & Flockhart (2020), resilience and local ownership are ambiguous concepts. This article suggests looking at the conceptualizations of resilience and local ownership as a continuum ranging from modernization theory to post-liberal approach. This continuum reflects different accounts of interrelations between the "local" and the "global," which are analyzed here based on the rights and responsibilities assigned to the internal and external actors. More precisely, we look into different approaches to actors, scope, and mechanisms of cooperation (Table 1). Actors are understood as the participants of international cooperation. Scope refers to the extent of the subject matter which is seen as relevant for resilience-building. It includes issue areas and

Table 1. Conceptual perspectives on resilience and local ownership.

Approach	Actors	Scope	Mechanisms	Interplay resilience/local ownership
Modernization theory/ transition paradigm	State structures, international NGOs, domestic actors involved only in policy implementation	Narrow: liberal reforms agenda	Top-down, ready-made policy templates and resources, one-size-fit-all cooperation frameworks	Externally driven resilience-building policies, limited local ownership
Communitarian perspective	Local communities, external actors if involved by local actors	Broad: all policy areas	Bottom-up, flexible tailor-made cooperation frameworks	No resilience from outside, extensive local ownership
Hybrid approach	Consensus between internal and external stakeholders, state structures, local communities, society at large, domestic actors are involved (to varied degrees) in all stages of cooperation	Broad: adaptation of liberal reforms to local conditions	Fusion of top-down and bottom-up approaches, flexible tailor-made cooperation frameworks	Resilience and local ownership tightly intertwined

institutions involved in cooperation. Mechanisms imply established social processes allowing an actor to achieve the desired outcomes. In what follows, we present the continuum of theoretical approaches and outline their framing of resilience and local ownership.

At one extreme, resilience and local ownership can be seen through the lens of the modernization theory and transition paradigm (Goorha, 2010; Paris, 2010) (also labeled as "liberal peace" approach in peacebuilding studies), which presume the universality of norms and development paths. In this paradigm resilience-building suggests the reform of domestic structures following Western templates to increase their viability, whereas local ownership entails the responsibility of domestic actors to implement externally developed policies. In terms of actors, the modernization theory tends to focus on state structures (Paris, 2010, p. 349) and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Selby, 2013, p. 62). Importantly, domestic agency is mainly expected during policy implementation and is limited at other stages of the policy process. The scope of resilience-building is therefore rather narrow and concentrates on a liberal reform agenda. The mechanisms of resilience-building and local ownership in the modernization theory are essentially top-down (Zaum, 2012, pp. 121–122). Resilience-building is carried out through the provision by external actors of ready-made policy templates and resources (financial aid, expertise) to "the local" (see also Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 774). This vision of resilience-based governance and local ownership is often interpreted by the proponents of critical

theory as a form of neoliberal governmentality, that is a mode of governance from a distance aimed at "disciplining of states, governments and elites" (Joseph, 2013, p. 51) concealed by a rhetoric of empowerment (Richmond, 2012; see also Duffield, 2001, 2007; Sabaratnam, 2013).

At the other end of the continuum, the communitarian approach (Brown, 1992; Bell, 2016) emphasizes the uniqueness of local structures and "rather than relying on a universal template … stress that any viable solution to the problems of order and good governance must 'derive from, and resonate with the habits and traditions of actual people living in specific times and places'" (Bell 2009 as cited in Donais, 2012, p. 5). In this paradigm, resilience-building must draw on local structures even if they do not fit the Western vocabulary, and local ownership implies the predominance of domestic actors in the formulation and implementation of cooperation projects. Thus the primary role in this perspective belongs to local communities. This suggests an "inside-out" logic of interaction (Korosteleva, 2020), where cooperation with external actors should be premised on local preferences and resources (Bush, 1996). The locals are regarded as primary actors at all stages of international cooperation. They are to define problems and develop policies, and policy implementation should rely upon local resources (Nathan 2007). Conversely, the involvement of external actors is defined by the local community. Hence, the communitarian perspective implies a broad and open scope of local ownership, which applies to all policy areas and the whole society of the target state.

Finally, in terms of mechanisms, the communitarian perspective is essentially a bottom-up approach largely relying on self-governance. Cooperation with external actors requires a flexible tailor-made and context-sensitive framework designed to the needs of the local actors as articulated by them. A step further brings this standpoint to the extreme of the post-liberal approach, which, in line complexity theory, contends that systems are characterized by self-organization. Hence, external intervention or efforts of resilience-building from outside "corrupt" local institutions and destabilize societal self-organization (Chandler, 2014).[2]

Whereas the modernization theory still often guides international cooperation, two decades of critique developed by the proponents of communitarian approach has resulted in some fusion of these approaches in practice. Mac Ginty referred to this fusion as hybridity or hybrid peace (Mac Ginty, 2010). He suggested moving away from binary thinking and defined hybridity as "composite forms of practice, norms and thinking that emerge from the interaction of different groups, worldviews and activity. It is not the grafting together of two separate entities to produce a third entity … it is a much more complex process" (Mac Ginty & Sanghera, 2012, p. 3). Hence, as an analytical perspective, hybridity lies in-between the modernization theory and the communitarian approach.

Seen as an analytical tool, a process and an outcome, hybridity has also been framed by some scholars as "desirable political project that could stimulate alternatives and counter what is perceived to be hegemonic externally driven liberal programming" (Peterson, 2012, p. 10). For instance, Donais (2012) argues that this paradigm entails that cooperation projects should be the subject of broad negotiation and contestation. Opening the political process is expected to eventually lead to "a stable, long-term consensus" (p. 143) between international and local stakeholders, which should build the foundation for sustainable local ownership and resilience-building embedded in local structures. As such, in terms of actors the hybrid approach implies the involvement of the state, communities and society at large. Agency is exercised by both internal and external actors at all stages of cooperation, which results in a wide scope of resilience and local ownership. In terms of cooperation mechanisms, the hybrid approach is characterized by a combination of top-down and bottom-up logics (Mac Ginty, 2010), as well as tailor-made cooperation frameworks, rather than the application of a single cooperation template. Donais maintains that a hybrid perspective implies negotiation and re-negotiation processes that might lead to consensus-building and hence improved policy outcomes.

The conceptualization of resilience and local ownership also generates major implications for their interplay. Whereas in the modernization theory local ownership is confined to channeling externally driven resilience-building policies, in communitarian approaches it de facto precludes any attempts to introduce resilience from the outside (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). In a liberal perspective, both notions are tightly intertwined in practice. Therefore, the articulation between resilience and local ownership can reflect patterns of subordination, cooperation or exclusion, thereby yielding different policy practices.

Resilience and local ownership: The EU's conceptualization in the Eastern Partnership

The EU's conceptualization of resilience and local ownership in the EaP has been deeply influenced by the EU's narrative turn reflected in the revision of EU foreign policy in 2015–2016. In this section, we do not delve into either the substance or the drivers of the EU's discursive shift, as these elements have been abundantly analyzed elsewhere (Mälksoo, 2016; Juncos, 2017; Tocci, 2020). Building on these studies, we rather seek to explain the implications of this narrative turn for the EaP.

The EU's conceptualization of resilience

The European Commission's strategic approach to resilience highlights a strong interconnection with local ownership. Resilience is not regarded as

an end goal, but rather as a means to attain a country's national development goals, to achieve security, to build inclusive societies or to recover from shocks (European Commission, 2017a).

However, perhaps paradoxically, resilience-building in the EU's neighborhood is primarily justified by the EU's own security:

> it is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa. Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests. By contrast, resilience … benefits us and countries in our surrounding regions, sowing the seeds for sustainable growth and vibrant societies. (High Representative, 2016. p. 23)

Such a rationale certainly echoes the primary objective of the ENP itself, namely the creation of to a "ring of friends" around the EU's borders (Council of the European Union, 2003), but it contradicts both the understanding of resilience as a concept of uncertainty and the vision of resilience as a locally grown capacity.[3]

In terms of agency, the EU sets a focus on two types of actors—states and societies—which coincide with the top-down and bottom-up logics of cooperation respectively. Whereas state resilience is perceived as a priority, it is argued that agency needs to be expanded from state to the entire society:

> to ensure sustainable security, it is not only state institutions that we will support … resilience is a broader concept, encompassing all individuals and the whole of society. A resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state. (High Representative, 2016, pp. 23–24)

The list of issue areas to be addressed in the context of resilience-building in the neighborhood is broad and includes democracy as well as economic, climate, energy, environmental, and migration policy resilience (High Representative, 2016, p. 9). In terms of sectoral resilience, EU mechanisms include increased cooperation, extension of the EU's institutions and agencies to the neighborhood, capacity-building, and a range of financial assistance mechanisms. Thus the toolbox of resilience-building is coherent with the previous approach of external governance characterized by the extension of the EU's legislation and institutions beyond its borders without granting access to the decision-making process (Lavenex, 2004). Yet, in the sphere of democracy promotion, the EU's strategy demonstrates a combination of continuity with the previously established mechanisms and novel approaches. In essence, it largely draws on the EU's normative and soft power—"power of attraction can spur transformation" (High Representative, 2016, p. 9), as well as diffusion and spill-over effects. It is anticipated that the "success stories," such as Tunisia and Georgia who are said to have established "prosperous, stable and peaceful democracies … would reverberate actors their respective regions" (High

Representative, 2016, p. 25). However, an important innovation is the emphasis placed on broader societal engagement for the emergence of sustainable resilience. The EUGS specifically refers to people-to-people contacts and the need for increased connections with "cultural organisations, religious communities, social partners and human rights defenders" (High Representative, 2016, p. 25). It thus goes beyond the mere emphasis on NGOs introduced in the 2011 ENP revision.

The EU's conceptualization of local ownership

Next to resilience, local ownership is the most prominent novelty of the 2015–2016 policy revision. While this principle had already been occasionally mentioned in EU official documents since 2004, the ENP revision of 2015 sought to establish an ambitious and innovative approach in the EU's cooperation with the neighborhood by placing local ownership at its core. The ENP review plays down the EU's own experience and acknowledges that "not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards" (European Commission & High Representative, 2015, p. 2). This new approach is expected to result in new patterns of relations based on greater policy ownership from the partners.

The rationale behind this paradigm shift is explained by a range of factors. The ENP revision directly points to the fact that it is a demand-driven change: "the consultation has further indicated that ownership by both partners and EU Member States needs to be stepped up" (European Commission & High Representative, 2015, p. 3).[4] Furthermore, it is expected that greater local ownership will provide more legitimacy and resonance to EU-driven domestic reforms (Ejdus, 2017; Mahr, 2018) and will allow to avoid the perception of an imposition of the EU's agenda (European Commission, 2004). Therefore, genuine local ownership is predicated to contribute to greater policy effectiveness and sustainability.

Similarly to resilience-building, the EU identifies state and societies as key actors to foster local ownership. The 2015–2016 narrative turn resulted in specific mechanisms being designed for ensuring ownership on both levels. At state level, the strategy puts forward regular consultations with the partner countries with the objective to incorporate their priorities in the ENP. Such consultations may result in "the possibility to jointly set new partnership priorities, which would focus each relationship more clearly on commonly identified shared interests" (European Commission & High Representative, 2015, p. 4). In other words, the new EU strategy envisages common agenda-setting and policy formulation for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the EaP. Regarding policy implementation, a better fit of the cooperation agenda to local practices and resources is encouraged. Finally, in terms of policy evaluation, the EU made another step towards ensuring greater local ownership by rejecting the practice of preparing one set of

progress reports based on a single template. A new system of progress reports has already been introduced, which considers the timing and cooperation priorities with every single partner. Thus the EU's EaP policy-making reflects greater differentiation among, and therefore ownership by eastern neighbors.

Next to the new practices foreseen for each stage of the foreign policy cycle, the EU also introduced innovative mechanisms in order to guarantee greater societal policy ownership. This includes not only the practice of public consultations but also the intention to both engage the representatives of different societal groups and go beyond traditional, yet limited, NGO-focus—"in many neighbourhood countries ethnic, religious and cultural identities and traditions play a crucial role in the way society functions. During the public consultation, stakeholders referred to these factors and asked the EU to allow more co-ownership" (European Commission & High Representative, 2015, pp. 6–7). Besides consultations, the EU claims that "sub-national, national and intra-regional civil society" (European Commission & High Representative, 2015, p. 6) will be engaged through both financial assistance and intensified cooperation. These measures are expected to sustainably increase the sense of policy ownership among the societies of the Eastern Partnership states.

Hence, our analysis highlights the intrinsic connection between resilience and local ownership in the EU's strategic thinking. The new resilience strategy (European Commission, 2017a) stresses the adaptability of domestic structures and emphasizes the shift of responsibility from the EU to its partners, thus implicating greater local ownership. The argument that "positive change can only be home-grown" (High Representative, 2016, p. 25) is asserted throughout the EUGS. By combining continuity with some previous cooperation templates and innovative approaches, the new EU foreign policy reflects a hybrid perspective, which seeks to foster negotiation between external and domestic actors. In this approach, resilience envisages the adaptation of domestic structures based on external templates (as was the case under the modernization paradigm previously used by the EU), but only under the condition that they fit well with the local context. The focus is on state structures, yet it is combined with unprecedented societal engagement. The EU's approach reflects a wider scope of resilience-building and a combination of top-down and bottom-up logics of cooperation. In what follows, we assess the congruence (or lack thereof) between the EU's revised narrative and policy practice under the EaP.

The resilience–local ownership nexus in practice

In this section, we scrutinize the evolution of the EU's toolbox as part of the EaP. We investigate whether the narrative turn away from the transition paradigm and toward hybridity has translated into a change of policy practices. To

do so, we select three sector areas for an in-depth analysis, namely trade and economic development, mobility, and good governance and rule of law. These sectors coincide with three of the four priorities identified during the Riga summit, along which the EaP has been restructured since 2015 (Council of the European Union, 2015; European Commission & High Representative, 2017b).

Trade and economic development

According to the EU, "building the economic resilience of EaP partner countries is at the heart of the EU's contribution towards having a stable neighborhood" (EEAS, 2018). However, while economic resilience features prominently in the EU's narrative, practices of cooperation reflect a continuous influence of the modernization theory in the EU's understanding of resilience. Since 2009, the EU's core approach to trade and economic development has been premised upon a massive diffusion of the EU's own set of rules, with limited attention to local needs. This is especially evident in relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which remain shaped by the trade instruments designed by the EU upon the launch of the EaP in the late 2000s. Thus the EU's narrative turn on resilience-building, in 2015–2016, has not been followed by a substantial shift in policy practice with these countries.

As part of the EaP, the EU has offered deep economic integration to its neighbors, that is enhanced market access by removing import and customs duties and quantitative restrictions, and reducing technical barriers to trade. The key instrument designed to foster economic integration—the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) signed with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine—entails wholesale adoption and application of EU trade-related standards. Interestingly, in the EU's narrative DCFTAs are presented as drivers for foreign investments and economic development in EaP countries. This is because the EU expects its *acquis* to serve as a blueprint for modernization:

> They [the DCFTAs] will contain legally binding commitments on regulatory approximation in trade-related areas and will thus contribute to the modernization of the economies of the partner countries and anchor the necessary economic reforms. (European Commission, 2008, p. 5)

Importantly, the DCFTAs are expected to result in an improved business climate and enhanced competitiveness of the EaP countries (Wolczuk et al., 2017). Therefore, they have a major role to play in enhancing partner countries' economic resilience, even if only over time.

However, the DCFTAs reflect a subordination of local ownership to EU-driven resilience-building. They mirror an extensive reliance on the EU's

model as a driver of development with the role of local actors being circum-scribed to adopting reforms stemming from the agreements and ensuring an effective application of EU rules. In fact, these agreements—whether in their design, negotiations, substance or implementation mechanisms—leave little scope for adjustment to EaP countries' needs and contexts.

First, the EU's economic offer moved from an initially flexible *design* in the mid-2000s toward a take-it-or-leave-it approach as part of the EaP. This is because the EU gradually established a connection between the DCFTAs and its offer for an enhanced contractual framework in the form of Associ-ation Agreements. Ultimately, the DCFTAs were identified as an "integral part" of the Association Agreements (European Commission, 2008, p. 5). This non-negotiable package strongly limited the options available to, and constrained the choices of EaP countries. For instance, in the late 2000s the Georgian authorities favored a simple free-trade agreement, which in their views was more attuned to the country's liberal reform trajectory as it did not entail wholesale legal approximation (Delcour, 2017). However, ulti-mately they had to accommodate the EU's package deal, in light of the priority given to an enhanced contractual framework with the EU after the 2008 conflict with Russia. Thus, the way in which the Association Agreements/ DCFTA package was pushed forward mirrors the imposition of a single EU template for the partner countries, regardless of their specific trajectories and preferences.

In the context of DCFTA *negotiations*, the EU's imposition of its model was facilitated by the use of ex-ante, sector-specific conditionality. The tough experience of lengthy DCFTA negotiations with Ukraine in 2008–2011 prompted the EU to introduce "key sectoral recommendations" in core trade areas, such as sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards or technical barriers to trade (Messerlin et al., 2011). These "recommendations," which entailed approximation with key EU legal acts in each area, had to be fulfilled before negotiations for DCFTAs could be launched with Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. Therefore, considerable efforts were required upfront from the EaP countries, with limited attention to their immediate effects on domestic structures.

In terms of *substance* the Association Agreements/DCFTAs signed with the EaP countries are the most comprehensive and detailed agreements con-cluded with third countries. The three countries with a DCFTA have to approximate their legal framework with over 90% of the EU's trade-related *acquis* (Duleba et al., 2012, p. 78). They are required to approximate to both the *acquis* in force at the time of signing the Association Agreements and to future legislation (Wolczuk et al., 2017). However, in essence the *acquis* developed as common rules designed for EU member states. Its export outside the context of EU integration and enlargement raises key ques-tions in terms of its adaptation to partner countries' needs (Delcour, 2017).

This is especially salient in countries with both a lower level of socio-economic development and weak institutions, as is the case in the EaP states (Wolczuk et al., 2017). In other words, whether the EU's "sophisticated post-financial crisis legislation is the right medicine for Ukraine's serious financial and economic crisis" is questionable (Van der Loo, 2016, p. 268). Thus the EU's capacity to trigger economic resilience in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine is debatable in light of the sheer gap with the partner countries and limited adjustment to domestic contexts.

This focus on EU-driven resilience-building at the expense of local ownership is only reinforced by the *mechanisms* envisaged to oversee the DCFTAs' implementation. These mechanisms mirror a strict monitoring process inspired by the enlargement toolbox. The associated countries have to report on an annual basis on the measures taken to approximate their legal framework with the *acquis* (see e.g., article 173.6, EU-Moldova Association Agreement 2014). Therefore, "not only the process of legislative approximation but also—and most importantly—the effective enforcement and implementation of the AA is subject to permanent scrutiny" (Van der Loo et al, 2014, p. 27).

In sharp contrast to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, the EU's cooperation with other EaP countries increasingly reflects a hybrid approach. The scope of issue areas addressed by the EU to foster economic resilience is similarly broad to that of DCFTA countries, e.g., support for small and medium enterprises and deepening of trade relations with the EU. However, the cooperation mechanisms drastically differ. In recent years, the EU has designed a tailor-made economic cooperation framework with Armenia (the Comprehensive Enhanced Partnership Agreement [CEPA] signed in November 2017), and it is in the process of doing so with Azerbaijan and Belarus (through the current negotiation of EU–Belarus Partnership Priorities). All three frameworks result from consensus-building between the EU and the respective domestic authorities, and therefore reflect the countries' specific contexts rather than a single template.

It is important to note, however, that the EU's hybrid approach vis-à-vis Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus stems from the partners themselves, more specifically from their rejection (albeit for different reasons) of the EU's offer of deep economic integration. Despite the opening of negotiations in 2010, Azerbaijan refused to sign an Association Agreement and pushed forward its own priorities in the negotiations for a Strategic Modernisation Partnership (Alieva et al., 2017). At the 2015 Eastern Partnership summit in Riga, the Azerbaijani authorities even submitted their own draft of the future agreement to the EU as a basis for negotiations (Alieva et al., 2017, 21). In contrast to Azerbaijan, Armenia initially endorsed the EU's deep economic integration offer, yet in September 2013, a few weeks after completing the negotiations for an AA/DCFTA (including launching the corresponding

reforms) the country moved (under Russia's pressure) to join the Eurasian Economic Union. This decision precluded the signature of a DCFTA and called for designing a new trade cooperation framework tailored to the country's specific circumstances (Alieva et al., 2017). Therefore, while they signal greater local ownership and enhanced flexibility on the part of the EU compared to the three DCFTA countries, cooperation frameworks with Armenia and Azerbaijan do not derive from the EU's narrative turn on resilience-building; in fact, they precede this turn.

Mobility

Mobility—one of the four priorities identified for the EaP in 2015—has a critical role to play in strengthening Eastern partners' resilience. This is because it "brings EU and Partner Countries' societies closer together" (European Commission & High Representative, 2017b). In other words, while bringing clear benefits to the citizens of EaP countries mobility is also conducive to enhanced capacities of societies to adapt and reform. This is because it can bring "positive spill-over effects" (Kobzova, 2015) in other areas, including economic development, innovation and skills development (European Commission & High Representative, 2017b). As part of the EaP, the EU offers two key instruments to enhance mobility: first, the visa liberalization process aimed at eliminating the obligation of Schengen visas for EaP citizens, thereby enhancing short-term mobility; and second, mobility partnerships, which were designed to facilitate legal and circular mobility between the EU and its partners, thereby fostering EaP countries' development.

Unlike trade, the EU's mobility toolbox is not premised upon the EU's own corpus of rules. Instead of anchoring Eastern partners' reforms in the *acquis communautaire*, the EU embeds policy change in a series of standards and rules which either emanate from other international organizations or have been developed gradually as *ad hoc* tools and are agreed upon with the partner countries themselves (Hernández i Sagrera & Korneev, 2012). Therefore, one would expect the EU's mobility actions to mirror both an inclusive policy process closely involving the partner countries in the discussion of objectives and tailor-made instruments attuned to the needs of local societies. However, closer scrutiny of how mobility has been operationalized in the EaP highlights an asymmetrical policy process and top-down practices, with little room for local actors.

As part of the EaP, visa policy follows a "phased approach, leading to visa liberalization under specific conditions and with accompanying measures" (European Commission, 2008, p. 6). Eastern partners are first expected to sign visa facilitation and readmission agreements with the EU. While predating the EaP, these agreements have been incorporated in its toolbox as the first milestone towards a visa-free regime. The EU indeed regards the effective

implementation of the readmission agreements (a key policy tool to curb irregular migration originating from, or transiting through, partner countries, Trauner & Kruse, 2008) as a prerequisite to further progress towards the elimination of Schengen visas. All six EaP countries have negotiated such agreements, which have yet to be signed with Belarus. The next steps of the visa liberalization process involve the launch of a visa dialogue with a view to determining the conditions to be fulfilled to have the Schengen visa requirement lifted.

These conditions are then spelt out in the Visa Liberalization Action Plans (VLAPs). They emphasize the need for Eastern partners to issue biometric travel documents, to adopt and enact a legal framework complying with EU standards on migration policy and border management, and to establish high-standards border management procedures at their external borders. They also include a broad set of demands related to human rights and the rule of law, including procedures for asylum, the protection of personal data, the fight against corruption and anti-discrimination. In order to ensure compliance with its demands under the visa liberalization process, the EU extensively relies upon conditionality and gate-keeping. For instance, in contrast to the visa liberalization process with the Western Balkans, VLAPs for Eastern Partners are divided into two phases: an adoption phase, during which partner countries have to approximate their legal framework with the EU's requirements and an implementation phase which requires approximated legislation to be properly enforced. For each phase, evaluation missions (involving experts from EU Member States accompanied by officials of the Commission services and the EEAS) are conducted to assess the fulfillment of benchmarks in all four blocks. Subject to a positive recommendation by the European Commission, the decision to introduce a visa-free regime should then be made by the Council and the European Parliament. Thus far, the EU has lifted the obligation of Schengen visas for Moldovan, Georgian, and Ukrainian citizens.

Such disciplinary governance reflects the EU's perception of its neighbors as a source of threats for its own security (Delcour, 2013). In the operationalization of mobility, this perception has resulted in prioritizing security-related measures. More specifically, the EU "has emphasized migration control measures despite attempts to stress preventive elements in the EU's global approach to migration" (Wunderlich, 2012, p. 1421). When monitoring the application of the readmission agreements, VLAPs and roadmaps, scholars have demonstrated that the EU has given preference to security and sidelined values (Trauner, Kruse & Zielinger, 2013). This prominence reflects the EU's key concern vis-à-vis neighboring countries, namely "protect [its] internal security from outside threats" (Wolff, Mounier & Wichmann, 2009, p. 12). In other words, as part of the visa liberalization process the EU has sought to build neighbors' resilience to what it regarded as dangers (i.e., irregular migration) that could spill-over to its own territory.

In contrast to trade, all six neighbors are engaged in the EU-defined path to visa facilitation and liberalization, even though at a different pace. This is despite the fact that the EU's regulatory approach to migration collided with the preferences of some EaP countries. Georgia, in particular, has consistently pursued a liberal approach to migration since 2004. In the wake of the Rose revolution, migration came to be seen as a pillar of the authorities' economic strategy, which primarily sought to attract foreign investment and to create a favorable business environment (Delcour, 2017). In other words, migration was regarded as an integral part of the country's resilience-building efforts. Yet as a result of the EU's extensive conditionality under the VLAP the country had little choice but shifting toward a stricter regulation of migration flows–an approach which, in the local view, would be detrimental to the country's resilience-building. This example indicates that the EU has done little to incorporate the partner countries' own objectives in the visa liberalization process, which may ultimately undermine consensus and local ownership. Importantly, it also sheds light on different understandings of resilience, which result from the divergence of goals between the EU and the partner countries. Ultimately, the EU's imposition of its approach to mobility and migration undermines EaP countries' resilience as the emphasis on security results in limiting mobility, despite the fact that the latter was identified as a vector of resilience-building by the EU itself.

Good governance and rule of law

The EU's strategy towards the EaP is premised on the idea that "a resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy. But the reverse holds true as well" (High Representative, 2016, pp. 23–24). The question of *democratic regime resilience* therefore becomes an existential issue. According to the EU, to be resilient, a state must be characterized by deep democracy and strong governance. Hence, enhancing the EaP states' resilience implies strengthening domestic institutions, the rule of law and anti-corruption mechanisms, as well as judicial and public administration reforms (EEAS, 2018). Whereas such vision of resilience presents a strong continuity with the previous modernization approach, the EU encountered two types of responses from its partners. Some EaP member states shared this paradigm and welcomed EU-modeled domestic reforms. Substantial support for such reforms by both domestic political elites and population at large ensured a considerable degree of local ownership in the Association Agreement states (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and, partially, Armenia. Other EaP members (Azerbaijan and Belarus) rejected this approach to resilience, and the EU had to adjust its cooperation agenda. Yet, to what extent has it resulted in change of practices and greater local ownership?

Closer analysis of the EU's vision of resilience in the context of governance and the rule of law demonstrates that in the case of the Association Agreement states modernization theory remains almost unchanged, for instance, for Georgia resilience is framed as maintenance of the democratic reforms conducted in the presidency of Saakashvili. In the case of Ukraine, resilience is understood as keeping up the momentum of the Euromaidan and the pace of reforms, as well as internalizing the ongoing institutional reforms. In Moldova, similarly, resilience is about substantiating the reforms conducted and countervailing illiberal practices (Emerson et al., 2018, pp. 90–91; see also Gaub & Popescu, 2017). The Association Agreements (as well as the CEPA in the case of Armenia) are the main instruments for enhancing these reforms. An important innovation compared to the previous generation of framework agreements (PCAs) is that human rights are included in "dialogue and cooperation on domestic reform" provisions. In addition to that, the "essential elements" clause (referring to human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law) is linked to the "suspension" clause (Petrov, 2018; Khvorostiankina, 2018). This facilitates deep entrenchment of democratic and rule of law principles in the Association Agreements and CEPA, and demonstrates that principles of good governance are at the heart of bilateral cooperation. Association Agreements are therefore set to facilitate constitutional changes that aim at approximation to the EU's liberal democratic norms and values.

Based on these normative commitments, after 2015–2016 the EU continued the previously established practice obliging the Association Agreement states to put in place a standard package of domestic reforms (public administration, anti-corruption, rule of law, justice sector reforms, and others). The EU also ensured that domestic reforms are developed in line with the EU's norms and principles (including the standard recommendations by the Council of Europe and OECD, in particular GRECO and SIGMA), comprise standard benchmarks and are based on the single design and implementation template. Thus, whereas Association Agendas and roadmaps were drafted together by the EU and the respective EaP ministries, the EU remained in control of the bilateral agenda, setting tight limits on the negotiation corridor and pushing its view on the design of reforms. In Ukraine, for instance, despite active internal debates and resistance, "the EU Delegation pressed for the urgent establishment of the three new anti-corruption institutions: The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine; the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption; and the specialized anti-corruption prosecutor" (European Commission, 2016, p. 7).

Yet, beyond agenda-setting, the EU has also remained active at the stages of reforms' implementation and evaluation. It provided consultation, expert and financial support, training and technical assistance and in some cases drafted reform programs. It also carried out close oversight of the reform process,

foreseeing the application of conditionality in case of non-compliance. As such, the EU's approach resulted in limiting local ownership at all stages of policy cycle.

On the other hand, the case of Azerbaijan and Belarus is particularly illustrative for the analysis of whether the EU's narrative change resulted in subsequent practices change, as cooperation with these states implied deviation from the standard enlargement logic of cooperation. These states prioritized their own understanding of good governance and resilience. They opted for a lower level of engagement and have regularly asked for a more equal status and greater local ownership in bilateral relations. Hence, the EU has faced two challenges: firstly, to develop a format for cooperation that would be based on genuinely common agenda, and therefore, allow for the requested level of local ownership; secondly, to develop a cooperation format that would enhance societal resilience, and at the same time not strengthen autocratic regimes resilience.

Both Azerbaijan and Belarus prioritize a pragmatic approach to economic and sectoral cooperation, while trying to scale down the EU's strategy of political norms promotion. The 2015–2016 ENP revision emphasizing policy differentiation acknowledged that partner's preferences will be instrumental in the new format of bilateral cooperation. Given that Azerbaijan and Belarus perceive the EU-modeled good governance reforms as an interference into their domestic affairs, anti-corruption, public administration and judicial reforms moved to the bottom of the bilateral agenda. Nevertheless, the EU still demanded approximation with the European standards: "tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights will remain key for the shaping of the EU's future policy towards Belarus" (Council of the European Union, 2016). Thus the early assessments of the good governance agenda show that the essence of the EU's new "tailor-made" approach entails offering the same package of policy templates to its partners and allowing them to opt out from some, rather than actually including partners in the agenda-setting process (van Gils, 2017). This, however, ultimately limits the potential of local ownership and resilience as understood by the hybrid and communitarian paradigms.

Next to the state level, the EU regards good governance and rule of law as important elements of *societal* resilience. The revised strategy therefore sought to facilitate greater societal ownership of the cooperation agenda and rule of law reforms. To this end, the EU managed to ensure greater engagement of civil society into bilateral cooperation, for instance Association Agreements and CEPA established a new format of "Civil Society Platform," adding a bilateral track to the already existing multilateral EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF). Next to the EaP CSF, national indicative programs allocated 5–10 percent of financial aid to the support of national CSOs and improving their environment. Building on previous *ad hoc* practices, another novelty

in the EU's approach includes an attempt to more actively engage civil society representatives in bilateral cooperation, as well as facilitate dialogue between governments and CSOs.

Overall, the EU's policy in the area of good governance and rule of law in the EaP region is still guided by the modernization vision of resilience. The EU's norms and practices are seen as universal and approximation to EU standards is still expected even from Belarus and Azerbaijan, who opted out from the Association Agreement policy template. Such an approach is likely to result in limited local ownership, and as a consequence, direct, and more often, indirect resistance to the EU's promotion of good governance and rule of law in the EaP states, which can undermine the EU's resilience-building in the eastern neighborhood.

Conclusion

This article departed from the observation that the EaP, as a core priority region for the EU, offers fertile ground to assess the recent resilience turn in EU foreign policy. Attempts at resilience-building beyond the EU's borders imply an increasing focus on the adaptability of the EaP domestic structures and their ability to withstand internal and external crises. As such, the resilience turn was supposed to shift responsibility from the EU to the EaP states, hence, heavily increasing local ownership.

Our analysis of the EU foreign policy documents shows that policy revision resulted in an important narrative turn. Whereas since its launch in 2009, the Eastern Partnership policy had been largely based on the premises of modernization theory, implying wholesale and unilateral approximation to the EU legislation, institutions, and practices, the 2015 ENP review marked a discursive turn towards a hybrid approach. This approach implies opening up the political process of broad negotiation and contestation with a view to building a genuinely owned common cooperation agenda. In line with the hybrid approach thinking, the EU policy review stresses: (i) in terms of mechanisms: tailor-made cooperation agenda, differentiation and "different paths" to enhancing resilience; (ii) in terms of actors: wide societal engagement at all stages of policy-making in addition to the executive level; (iii) in terms of scope: a wide and demand-driven scope of resilience, including resilience of state, society, institutions, and policies.

However, our analysis of the EU practices of cooperation with EaP countries in the priority areas of trade, mobility, and good governance demonstrates that the narrative turn has, so far, failed to translate into an actual policy turn. In fact, the EU's broad conceptualization of resilience and local ownership has resulted in a narrow operationalization in terms of policy instruments. Hence, our analysis shows that the EU continued to rely on previously established policy templates and mechanisms, as

illustrated by the requirement to approximate to *acquis communautaire*, as well as the EU's mobility and good governance legislation. This shows that, according to the EU's approach, the resilience of the EaP states can only be developed via the adoption of the EU's standards. Despite the promise of a tailor-made approach, the cases of Azerbaijan and Belarus are particularly illustrative of the fact that, albeit on the smaller scale, approximation with European standards is still expected even from those partners that insisted on building a truly common bilateral agenda. We argue that the strong path dependence of the EaP policy precluded any effective policy turn towards the hybrid approach to resilience (for similar conclusions, see Joseph & Juncos, 2019).

Our findings invalidate the assumption formulated in the introduction, according to which policy areas beyond the security/humanitarian context may offer an easier ground for translating local ownership from policy principle to policy practice. All three cases show that the EU has left little scope (if any) to accommodate the preferences of those countries seeking closer ties with the EU, when these preferences diverged from its own vision. This continued reliance on the modernization paradigm in resilience-building left little space for increasing local ownership and precluded any significant political contestation and subsequent consensus-building. The 2015–2016 policy review still embraces the practices of local ownership where the role of "the local" is reduced to the demonstration of interest in cooperation and subsequent implementation of externally developed policy templates.

The application of the resilience and local ownership principles as understood by the modernization theory has had important consequences for their interplay. The belief that resilience can only be assured by approximation towards the Western structures has resulted in limiting local ownership. Such a nexus between resilience and local ownership entails a logic of subordination of the domestic to the international actors, despite a narrative emphasizing partnership, ownership and dialogue. Hence, our article confirms the vision of the EU's resilience-building in the neighborhood as a form of neoliberal governmentality (Joseph, 2013; Pogodda & Richmond 2015; Ejdus & Juncos, 2018), aiming at an effective governance of the EaP countries, rather than genuine empowerment of the local, taking their vision of good life as the foundation of the cooperation agenda (Korosteleva & Flockhart, 2020). This conclusion is in line with existing studies in peacebuilding arguing that by shifting responsibility and accountability to the partners, local ownership and resilience are used in the official rhetoric to legitimize interventions by external actors (Wilen, 2009). Hence, despite a discursive shift towards hybridity–forced by multiple crises and the EU's challenged international role in the emergent multi-order world (Flockhart, 2016)—a substantial overhaul of policy practices is still required to match the narrative turn.

Notes

1. The official documents use the terms "local ownership," "joint ownership," and "mutual ownership" interchangeably referring to the same concept. In this article, we use the term "local ownership" as it is more common in the academic literature.
2. For more discussion on this, please see Korosteleva (2020) and Chandler (2020) in this special issue.
3. This argument is developed in-depth in Korosteleva's article (2020) in this special issue.
4. After the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2014, a range of consultations with the stakeholders from the EU and partner states were conducted to reflect on the previous policy cycle of the ENP, its institutions, resources, and lessons learned.

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