Growing Resilient Together:
Reshaping EU-Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy in a Geopolitical Era

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Executive Summary

The Conceptual Background Paper provides academic reflections on Europe's resilience and a (re)invigorated EU enlargement and neighbourhood strategy. It first outlines the milestones of the EU's policies with its neighbourhood. A guiding question is whether and if so in how far the EU's enlargement policy can live up to its reputation of being one of the EU's most successful foreign policies again – a label that has seemed too ambitious for the past two decades in view of the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans. Subsequently, the concept of resilience is introduced and critically assessed in the context of EU foreign policy. The InvigoratEU Triple-R-Approach: Reforming, Responding, Rebuilding guides the remaining part of the study, in which the challenges and potentials of EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies will be assessed. These will be analysed in terms of contribution to democratic consolidation, conflict prevention, capacity-building, enhancing security and the protection against hybrid threats and potentials for connectivity and sustainable (social and economic) development.

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1 Introduction

2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the European Union (EU)'s largest round of accession, during which eight[1] Central and Eastern European (CEE) states, together with Malta and Cyprus, joined the Union. In the spirit of the EU – founded as a safeguard for peace and prosperity on the continent – this so-called 'big-bang enlargement' contributed to the consolidation of democracy in the new member states[2], as well as a strengthening of the liberal international world order.

The EU encouraged the countries of the Western Balkans "to follow the same successful path".[3] In doing so it applied an unchanged approach as during the CEE enlargement with the so-called Copenhagen Criteria as key benchmark for the preparation for integration into European structures and for a successful economic, societal and political transition in the Western Balkans.[4] Even more so, in line with a merit-based approach it was promised that "[t]he speed of movement ahead [would lie] in the hands of the countries in the region."[5] We refer to this approach focusing on the adoption of the EU's regulatory norms as the modernisation logic of the EU's enlargement policy[6].

Nonetheless, in the following years the enlargement process slowed down markedly and then almost halted, apart from Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013. Increasing polarisation and contestation within the EU came to the fore, a sense of enlargement fatigue coupled with the concern of the EU's lack of absorption capacity[7] spread and crises mired the EU, such as the global financial and Eurozone crises in the late 2000s, the migrant crisis in 2015 and Brexit in 2016. Additionally, bilateral conflicts between individual EU member states and accession candidate countries blocked any further progress within the accession process.

Meanwhile, Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova – countries willing to join the Union – had not received a membership perspective and instead were relegated to a place 'in-between' when they were offered to join the European Neighbourhood Policy together with the EU's Southern Neighbours in 2004. In 2009, the EU introduced the framework of Eastern Partnership which was aimed at upgrading political and economic relations with

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[1] While Romania and Bulgaria were part of the candidates for the accession of 2004, they did not accede to the Union until 2007.

[2] David R. Cameron: Post-Communist Democracy: The Impact of the European Union, in: Post-Soviet Affairs, 23 (3), 2013; Cristian Nitoiu/Monika Sus: Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood, in: Geopolitics, 24(1), 2019, pp.1-19; Pierre Haroche: A 'Geopolitical Commission': Supranationalism Meets Global Power Competition, in: JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 61(4), 2023, pp.970-987; Stefan Lehne: How the EU Can Survive in a Geopolitical Age, Carnegie Europe, February 2020.

[3] European Council: EU-Western Balkans Summit. Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003. Declaration, C/03/163, 10229/03 (Presse 163), 21 June 2003, p.2.

[4] See Levan Kakhishvili: Report on EU's enlargement & neighbourhood policy toolbox, InvigoratEU, June 2024 (forthcoming).

[5] European Council: EU-Western Balkans Summit, 2003.

[6] see Hannah Brandt/Funda Tekin: InvigoratEU Analytical Glossary, March 2024, https://iep-berlin.de/site/assets/files/3700/invigorateu_analytical_glossary.pdf.

[7] See Tanja Börzel/Antoaneta Dimitrova/Frank Schimmelfennig: European Union enlargement and integration capacity: concepts, findings, and policy implications, in: Journal of European Public Policy, 24, pp.157-176, 2017.

six Eastern neighbours by offering them association and trade liberalisation but still no membership perspective. At the same time authoritarian Russia intensified its activities in the region by initiating a competing project, that of the Eurasian Economic Union and seeking influence also by means of armed conflicts.

Situated between different systems of governance, state authority and political alignment, and in a context of increased geopolitical contestation, multiple crises erupted in the neighbourhood. These began with anti-government protests and uprisings in the EU's Southern periphery in 2011 – the Arab Spring – as well as with Russia's multiple acts of aggression in the countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership – e.g. the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. These crises have transformed the entirety of the EU's neighbourhood and acutely challenged the rules-based order.[8]

With this, the logic behind enlargement changed. The earlier phase of enlargement was dominated by modernisation, as external challenges to state and societal resilience within the EU and in its neighbourhood were less salient. With the intensification of conflicts and threats to territorial, internal and human security, the focus has shifted to external challenges and to a geopolitical approach to enlargement.

The EU reevaluated its "close and cooperative relations[hip] with a ring of well governed countries to the [South and] East"[9] to that of a "ring of fire"[10]. At the same time, it made evident that overlooking key underlying tensions in the neighbourhood regions, i.e. not focusing on the resilience of societies and bottom-up and local approaches, can be detrimental to the EU's efforts to promote democracy and stability.[11] However, even after Russia's annexation of Crimea and occupation of the Eastern parts of Ukraine in 2014, EU member states diverged in their assessments of the threat posed by increasingly aggressive Russia and the development of its relations with Eastern partners. Although in its 2016 Global Security Strategy the EU redefined its policy towards Russia on the basis of five guiding principles[12], it still did not offer membership perspective to the so-called Association Trio of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

No later than February 24, 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale invasion into Ukraine – the most severe military threat on the continent since the Cold War – has it become indisputable not only that the EU's relations with its South-Eastern and Eastern neighbours require reform, but also that the EU must add hard elements of geopolitics to its traditionally soft power approach to foreign policy.[13] Additionally, the new geopolitical context has rekindled enlargement fervour. Ukraine applied for membership within days after the invasion

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[8] David Cadier: The Geopoliticisation of the EU's Eastern Partnership, in: Geopolitics, 24 (1), 2018.
[9] Council of the European Union: A secure Europe in a better world – European security strategy, 8 December 2003, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15895-2003-INIT/en/pdf, p.10.
[10] See The Economist: Europe's Ring of Fire, 20 September 2014, https://www.economist.com/europe/2014/09/20/europes-ring-of-fire (last accessed: 14.05.2024).
[11] Roland Dannreuther: Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the counter-revolution, in: Journal of European Integration 37(1).
[12] European External Action Service: From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1. 2017.
[13] Nitoiu/Sus: Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood, 2019, pp.1-19.

and the Republic of Moldova and Georgia followed suit in the following month. In the same year the EU finally opened accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania.[14] Within two years, the amount of (potential) candidate countries for accession to the EU nearly doubled, from six to ten. With this, the enlargement of the EU has become a geopolitical necessity, possibly to the detriment of the breadth, depth, quality and durability of the EU's traditional modernisation agenda in its neighbourhood. Challenges of both logics will be presented in the paper and proposals made as to how to combine both in a coherent manner. A guiding question is whether and if so in how far the EU's enlargement policy can live up to its reputation of being one of the EU's most successful foreign policies again – a label that has seemed too ambitious for the past two decades in view of the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans.

The Russian invasion has unleashed multiple crises ranging from human and military security to asylum policies, energy supply, safety of critical infrastructure and the economy. Next to overt Russian aggression and its hybrid operations, other actors, such as China, Türkiye and even Saudi-Arabia and other Gulf States[15] exert geopolitical pressure to foster their goals. All these threats pose a significant challenge to Europe in terms of its resilience – a catch-all term to designate the "ability of states and societies to reform thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises", unknown risks and uncertainty.[16] In view of this, the research project *InvigoratEU: Invigorating Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy for a Resilient Europe* (InvigoratEU) addresses its general research question "How can the EU invigorate its enlargement and neighbourhood policy to enhance Europe's resilience?". The necessity to invigorate these policies is driven more than by normative principles, by the realities of international and geopolitical confrontation. While enlargement remains the EU's most important policy with its neighbourhood, its stagnation, particularly since 2007, has failed to respond to a shifting global world order. We thus posit, there is a great need to unite and to unite well to enhance resilience in a context of geopolitical contestation, especially by Russia.

In the following article, we theorise that resilience in Europe can only be achieved if it is built on a holistic understanding that includes both the EU and its direct neighbourhood. Because the EU's resilience is not confined to its own territory, there are interdependencies and shared vulnerabilities that are exploited politically by competing states. In view of the increasing contestation of European values and policies, understanding geopolitical ambitions of the EU and other actors such as Russia, China, and Türkiye is essential.

First, we offer a critical examination of the term 'resilience'. We then provide an approach to enhancing Europe's resilience by ways of a triple-R-approach: reforming the current neighbourhood and enlargement policies, responding to geopolitical challenges and re-building Europe. We conclude by discussing main elements that determine considerations

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[14] European Union: EU Enlargement, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-enlargement_en (last accessed 03.05.2024).

[15] Analysis on the influence of the latter countries is beyond the scope of the InvigoratEU research project and grant. For further information, reference here: European Parliament: Saudi Arabia in the Western Balkans, November 2017: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2017)614582 (last accessed 02.05.2024).

[16] Ana E. Juncos: Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: a pragmatist turn?, in: European Security, 26 (1), 2017, p.4.

on how to invigorate the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policy to enhance Europe's resilience.

2 Resilience of the "Inside" and Resilience of the "Outside"

The term 'resilience' originated in the ecology literature of the 1970s, championed by Crawford S. Holling and others, to elucidate how intricate systems endure and reconfigure when facing risks and shocks amidst complexity, uncertainty, and disturbance.[17] Since the early twenty-first century, resilience has been gradually more present in global governance efforts to handle various crises and emergencies, encompassing development, health, food security, energy stability, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, disaster risk reduction, poverty alleviation, and climate change. Although it is sometimes seen as a buzzword and has been interpreted in different ways,[18] resilience is commonly construed as the ability of societies or communities to adapt to complex crises and reorganize within a constantly changing equilibrium.

The EU has used resilience as a framework to cohere diverse foreign policy tools since the early 2010s.[19] To the policy community, resilience seemed valuable as it provided a common language and logic to various policy fields, from development or disaster management to trade and climate change adaptation, while boosting the potential for integration[20]. Resilience also was appealing as it was associated with bottom-up, long-term, human-centric, and transformative approaches to crisis management, which left behind top-down, unilateral, short-term, and state-centric forms of intervention and rule.[21] With this, resilience not only refers to the ability of states to adapt and reform ('state resilience'), but emphasizes the role of societies and communities ('societal resilience'). It was a key framework to correct some of the limitations of approaches to liberal state building or democracy promotion dominant through the decade of 2000s, primarily in the context of the war on terror.[22]

2.1 Focus on the Resilience of the Neighbourhood

At first, the idea of resilience was used to highlight the necessity of aiding communities in managing risks and emergencies. The EU approach to resilience was set by the European Commission in 2012 in response to the food crises in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa[23]. The EU sought to strengthen the resilience of disaster-affected communities, which was

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[17] Jeremy Walker/Melinda Cooper: Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation, in: Security Dialogue, 42 (2), 2011, pp. 143–60.

[18] Myriam D. Cavelty/Mareile Kaufmann/Kristian Søby Kristensen: Resilience and (In)Security: Practices, Subjects, Temporalities, in: Security Dialogue 46, no. 1, 2015, pp- 3–14; Jonathan Joseph: Varieties of Resilience: Studies in Governmentality. Cambridge University Press 2018.

[19] European Commission: The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises, COM, Brussels, 2012; European Commission: Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013–2020, SWD(2013) 227 final, Brussels, 2013.

[20] Nathalie Tocci: Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World, in: Contemporary Security
Policy, 41 (2), 2020, pp. 176–94.

[21] Pol Bargués-Pedreny: Realising the Post-Modern Dream: Strengthening Post-Conflict Resilience and the Promise of Peace, in: Resilience 3, no. 2, 2015, pp. 113–32; Chris Zebrowski: The Value of Resilience: Securing Life in the Twenty-First Century, London and New York: Routledge, 2016.

[22] David Chandler: Resilience: The Governance of Complexity, London: Routledge, 2014.

[23] European Commission: The EU approach to resilience, 2012, pp. 5–7.

defined as "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country, or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks".[24] In the Global Strategy and the Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action, resilience was given a central role.[25] The EU sought to foster the resilience of states and societies to the East and South. The EU approach to resilience sought to eschew externally led and top-down enforcement of policies. Instead, it involved a multi-level process to support state institutions as much as strengthening civil society and nurturing community resilience. Because, as explained in the guiding considerations, 'resilience is context-specific, and requires tailor-made approaches' that align with societies' path dependencies.[26] To enable sustainable processes of conflict or crisis-recovery, the EU pursued the promotion of locally driven initiatives, with responsibilities shared between a variety of actors.[27]

Acknowledging a more unstable neighbourhood, marred by conflict, instability and diverse risks, the EU developed a 'multifaceted approach to resilience' to assist fragile states and societies. In practice, this consisted of deploying an array of tools to foster resilience and adaptability to complex crises:

> "different instruments, including CSDP missions, complement each other in bolstering the resilience of local states and societies. Humanitarian aid helps tackle the immediate crisis of displaced people, while development cooperation addresses the longer-term root causes of poverty, further complemented by actions for job creation, access to education, health and climate mitigation".[28]

Rather than a quick fix solution to a specific problem, resilience had to be fostered over the long term and across fields, "sowing the seeds for sustainable growth and vibrant societies".[29] In pursuing a holistic and sustained approach to consolidate development, resilience enhanced the integrated approach to conflicts and crises.[30] However, critical scholars have pointed out that the implementation of resilience policies often translated into top-down approaches or concealed security agendas, hindering the realization of resilience's bottom-up potential.[31] In these initial formulations of an approach to resilience, it was 'their'

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[24] Ibid., p. 5.
[25] European External Action Service: European Union Global Strategy: Shared Vision, Common Action: Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, 2016, pp. 13–16; European Commission: A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action, 7 June 2017 (JOIN 2017/21 final).
[26] Council of the European Union: A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action – Council conclusions, 14191/17, Brussels, November 13, 2017.
[27] For an analysis and critique, see Elena A. Korosteleva/Trine Flockhart: Resilience in EU and international institutions: Redefining local ownership in a new global governance agenda, in: Contemporary Security Policy, 41(2), 2020, pp. 153–175.
[27] European External Action Service: From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1. 2017.
[28] European External Action Service: From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1. 2017.
[29] European External Action Service: European Union Global Strategy, 2016, p. 23.
[30] Council of the European Union: Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises, 2018.
[31] Filip Ejdus/Ana E. Juncos: Reclaiming the Local in EU Peacebuilding: Effectiveness, Ownership, and Resistance, in: Contemporary Security Policy 39, no. 1, 2018, pp. 4–27; Elena A. Korosteleva:

resilience that had to be attended.[32] That is, the resilience of the neighbours: "State and societal resilience is our strategic priority in the neighbourhood"[33]. Indeed, fostering resilience became the priority, not only in the EU's relations with enlargement countries, but also with the countries in its neighbourhood and beyond, stretching as far as to Central Asia, and to the south down to Central Africa. While the resilience of European member states and their democracies was important, there was a clear determination to invest in the prosperity and resilience of other societies, enabling them to prevent and respond to crises in a sustained manner: "Under its strategic approach to resilience, the EU will develop a more ambitious political, structural, long-term and context-specific approach to addressing vulnerabilities and underlying risks in its external environment, and to factors and dynamics of fragility".[34]

2.2 Focus on the EU's Resilience

Particularly since the beginning of the Von der Leyen Commission in 2019, however, resilience as a concept changed gears. Instead of being oriented to support others' wellbeing, the emphasis has been on the resilience of EU member states and societies. At the end of the decade, in response to a more complex and contested world the discourse of resilience has shifted from 'their' to 'our' resilience[35]. The central aim is to become "a more assertive security and defence actor by enabling the resilience of the Union".[36] The key concern of policy documents, such as the Strategic Compass or the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility is to enhance the EU's resilience to multiple threats, including attacks to critical infrastructure, disinformation, cyberattacks or other hybrid threats, terrorism, climate change effects, or reduce the vulnerability of value chains, and industries.[37]

In recent framings, resilience does not complement the integrated approach to conflicts and crisis outside the Union, but it accompanies the need for strategic autonomy.[38] Particularly in a context of volatility in EU-US relations with the 2016 election of Donald Trump and his candidacy for the 2024 elections, the EU must strengthen its own capacities. The goal is to further cut interdependence and minimize the potential of others to exploit the EU's vulnerabilities; it is to strengthen strategic sectors, to build power capacity in all policy sectors, not only defence. It is crucial for the strategic autonomy discussion to expand far

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Reclaiming Resilience Back: A "Local Turn" in EU Governance, in: Contemporary Security Policy 41, no. 2, 2020, pp. 241–62.

[32] Eric Stollenwerk/Tanja A. Börzel/Thomas Risse: Resilience-Building in the EU's Neighbourhood: Introduction to the Special Issue, in: Democratization, 28 (7), 2021, pp. 1219–1238.

[33] European External Action Service: European Union Global Strategy, 2016, p.25.

[34] Council of the European Union: A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action, 2017, p. 3.

[35] See ibid., p.9.

[36] Council of the EU: A Strategic Compass for security and defence for a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security. Brussels, European External Action Service, 2022, p. 30.

[37] Council of the EU: A Strategic Compass for security and defence for a European Union, 2022.

[38] See the strategic vision proposed by Spain when holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU: Spain's National Office of Foresight and Strategy: Resilient EU2030: A future-oriented approach to reinforce the EU's Open Strategic Autonomy and Global Leadership, 2023; see also: Josep Borrell: Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters, A Window on the World – Blog by HR/VP Josep Borrell (blog), 3 December 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (last accessed 14.05.2024).

beyond the issues of defence and security. As such, the COVID-19 crisis or the acceleration of the climate emergency have underscored the significance of becoming sovereign and autonomous in public health, renewable energy sources, and key industrial sectors. [39]

2.3 'Their' and 'Our' Resilience Entangled in the Two Enlargement Logics

This shift has not been unnoticed. There is debate in the literature on whether or not to shift the focus of resilience from that of the 'outside' to 'ours' – that on the inside.[40] On the one hand, some emphasise the EU's main narrative, that the increasingly challenging international context requires the development of a more geopolitical union to which enhancing the resilience of diverse sectors is key.[41] This connects with the need to build the resilience of societies, democracy, and institutions in the light of the rise of illiberal tendencies and contestation inside the Union.[42] On the other hand, others more critical of the official policy discourse underline that the shift to our resilience is merely a defensive move that shuns the transformative potential of an approach to resilience and, in consequence, of EU foreign and security policy.[43] We do not take sides but suggest embracing them both.

Instead, we argue that in order to invigorate a resilient Europe resilience must be understood in a holistic manner that builds on the interrelationship between the EU and its direct neighbourhood. This includes a reconciliation of both the external and internal dimensions of resilience in relation to both the EU and its neighbourhood. That is, there needs to be a connection between the efforts to strengthen resilience to the East (and South) with the commitment to strengthening resilience within the EU borders. This analysis coincides with the bridging of InvigoratEU's two analytical logics: modernisation and geopolitics.

InvigoratEU further expands the response to critiques of the resilience term and posits that societal as well as state resilience must be thought and engaged with together. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine threatens Ukraine's survival as independent and self-determined state, but has also severely impacted economies, societies (including polarisation) and the energy security of member states and the EU's neighbourhood.

Lastly, it is held that Europe's resilience – that of the EU and its neighbourhood – and an invigoration of its enlargement and neighbourhood policies require the consideration of both inherent logics: a modernisation logic focusing on strengthening the internal resilience of candidate countries – the 'inside of the outside' – by means of strengthening democracy, stability of institutions and social cohesion; as well as a geopolitical logic focusing on

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[39] Josep Borrell: Staying on Course in Troubled Waters: EU Foreign Policy in 2021. Luxembourg: Publications Office, 2022.

[40] For an overview, see: Jonathan Joseph/Ana E. Juncos: Conceptual politics and resilience-at-work in the European Union, in: Review of International Studies, 50 (2), 2024, pp. 373-392.

[41] Haroche: A "Geopolitical Commission", 2023; Calle Håkansson: The Ukraine War and the Emergence of the European Commission as a Geopolitical Actor, in: Journal of European Integration, 2023, pp. 1-21.

[42] Tine Flockhart: Is this the end? Resilience, ontological security, and the crisis of the liberal international order, in: Contemporary Security Policy, 41(2), 2020, pp. 215-240; Wolfgang Merkel/Anna Lührmann, Resilience of democracies: responses to illiberal and authoritarian challenges, in: Democratization, 28 (5), 2021, pp. 869-84.

[43] Pol Bargués/Jonathan Joseph/Ana E. Juncos: Rescuing the liberal international order: crisis, resilience and EU security policy, in: International Affairs, 99 (6), 2023, pp. 2281-2299; Korosteleva/Flockhart: Resilience in EU and International Institutions, 2020.

protection against interferences and interventions by geopolitical rivals – strengthening the 'outside of the outside' – addressing the issues and challenges of connectivity, security and defence and countering other global actor's ambitions in the region. However, the two logics present challenges.

3. InvigoratEU's Triple-R-Approach: Reform, Respond, Rebuild

For solving the dilemma between modernisation and geopolitics we propose a 'triple-R-approach', structuring the respective analysis on past trends, current challenges and future prospects. It asks: How can the EU **reform** its neighbourhood and enlargement policies in a new geopolitical phase? How can the EU **respond** to other actors' geopolitical ambitions? How can and should the continent be **rebuilt** in an era of military interventions?

3.1 Reform in a New Geopolitical Phase in EU Enlargement: Revival of Enlargement Policy after the Invasion, Deficits of Enlargement Policies and Accession Procedure

In October 2023, the European Council framed enlargement as "a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability, and prosperity[44]", thereby enhancing the importance of security and geopolitics in enlargement discussions. Additionally, the geographical scope of enlargement widened to include countries in strategically important regions.[45] This shifting context, marked by external pressures, the attack of the international liberal order and the disrespect of territorial integrity and sovereignty, provides the EU with a strong motive to reinvigorate the enlargement process. The most crucial question is as to how the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies are to be **reformed**[46] to ensure political, economic and legal transformation in the candidate countries in this new context of "war diplomacy"[47] and in which the EU faces the challenge to maximise the speed of its enlargement, while ensuring the quality, quantity and sustainability of reform in candidate countries. It is to note here, that the track record of enlargement policies contributing to sustainable democratic consolidation is patchy and not its panacea[48], nonetheless it remains the EU's strongest and most important policy tool with its neighbouring countries. At the same time, these policies are and can be complimented with modernisation projects that do not offer membership perspectives. We thus understand the invigoration of the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies beyond the normative ideal and posit that there is need to unite <u>well</u> and in various formats to confront Russia and other geopolitical challenges and challengers.

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[44] European Council: Granada declaration, 6 October 2023, available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/06/granada-declaration/ (last accessed: 06.03.2024).

[45] Barbara Lippert: EU Enlargement: Geopolitics Meets Integration Policy, SWP-Comment Nr. 1, 2024.

[46] Questions concerning the EU's absorption capacity and its need for internal reform are beyond the scope of this research project.

[47] Lippert, 2024.

[48] See, for example, Frank Schimmelfennig: EU political accession conditionality after the 2004 enlargement: consistence and effectiveness, in: Journal of European Public Policy, 15(6), pp.918–937, 2008.

3.1.1 The Credibility Dilemma

On the one hand, the modernisation logic is undermined by a weakened credibility of the EU's accession conditionality. This is driven by a multiplicity of concerns: unfavourable domestic conditions in candidate countries and member states alike – temporarily reversed by the geopolitical shock of 2022 –, democratic backsliding, the politicisation of the enlargement process for EU members' national benefit[49], an unfavourable track record of previous EU policies, including its focus on stability over bottom-up democracy promotion which provided legitimacy to 'stabilitocraties' in the regions, as well as an ever-growing EU acquis and additional requirements for accession.[50] Exemplarily, the European Commission's Western Balkan Enlargement Strategy of February 2018 upheld the Western Balkan's European perspective and even specified 2025[51] as indicative 'best-case scenario' accession date for frontrunners. Nonetheless, it also included stricter requirements for accession countries, such as the solving of all "bilateral disputes … as a matter of urgency".[52] The lack of credibility then also weakens the appetite for modernising reforms in the candidate countries, which again weakens the appetite for admitting candidates with doubtful democratic and rule-of-law credentials in the EU. The perception of the enlargement policy as the EU's most successful (normative) foreign policy[53], hence, is a narrative of the past.

On the other hand, the geopolitical logic, alone cannot provide the full answer either. Already before Russia's war on Ukraine the EU's enlargement strategy had become more concerned with "the Western Balkans becoming one of the chessboards where the big power game can be played".[54] The EU, however, did not manage to transfer this "geopolitical turn" into concrete action.[55] Additionally, a pure geopolitical rationale of enlargement creates another credibility dilemma: it can strengthen the membership promise as it may outweigh the blockage caused by domestic politicisation in the EU, but at the same time it weakens the threat of non-membership if an accession country does not sufficiently reform and transform to meet the accession criteria.[56]

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[49] Milenko Petrovic/Nikolaos Tzifakis: A geopolitical turn to EU enlargement. An introduction, in: Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 29(2), 2021, p.159.

[50] Florian Bieber: Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans, in: East European Politics 34(3), 2018. pp. 337–354; Solveig Richter/Natascha Wunsch: Money, power, glory: the linkages between EU conditionality and state capture in the Western Balkans, in: Journal of European Public Policy, 27(1), 2019, pp. 41–62.

[51] European Commission: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, COM(2018) 65 final, 6 February 2018, p.8.

[52] European Commission, 2018, p.7.

[53] Milenko Petrovic/Nikolaos Tzifakis, 2021, p.159.

[54] In: Sabine Lange/Zoran Nechev/Florian Trauner: Resilience in the Western Balkans, EUISS-Report, 2017.

[55] Milenko Petrovic/Nikolaos Thifakis: A geopolitical turn to EU enlargement. An introduction, in: Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 29(2), 2021, pp.157–168.

[56] Frank Schimmelfennig: The Advent of Geopolitical Enlargement and its Credibility Dilemma, in: Jelena Džankić/Simonida Kacarska/Soeren Keil (eds.): A Year Later: War in Ukraine and Western Balkan (Geo) Politics, European University Institute, 2023.

3.1.2 A Step-By-Step Approach to Membership

Reversibility and an upholding of the merit-based approach as the Union's first step towards reforming the enlargement process point in the right direction. A possible model for reformed enlargement is that of 'differentiated integration'. This concept refers to candidate countries or new members selective participation in EU policies, with the aim of reducing both the opposition to enlargement among the old member states and the need to reform existing policies for the candidates.[57] These models can ensure an effective enlargement process – with accession being driven by geopolitical necessity, as well as used as an instrument of geopolitical competition – all while ensuring that continuous reforms and the EU's acquis communautaire are met by accession candidates.[58] Models include those that seek to decelerate and phase an ultimate accession to the European Union (such as gradual integration or the staged accession model), and those providing other models for engagement with the Wider Europe region without an ultimate membership perspective.

Within EU policy-making these concepts have already found traction. As such, in the June 2022 European Council Conclusions, with regard to the Western Balkans, the EU stated that it would begin to "further advance the gradual integration between the European Union and [the Western Balkans] already during the enlargement process itself in a *reversible and merit-based manner*."[59] This system would have a twofold effect, one by providing an effective incentive structure for the applicant states as a formal membership perspective remains on offer; second, by retaining safeguards in relation to concerns that the EU's institutional structure is not yet adapted and ensuring modalities to reverse statuses on the basis of democratic backsliding.[60] However, this model of gradual integration' that is also mentioned in the first draft of the EU's strategic agenda for 2024-2029, was developed prior to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, it does not take into account the attempted geopolitical expedition of the accession process and would halt most accession candidates in the pre-accession stage until their full compliance with all negotiating chapters. [61] Yet, the accession negotiation framework for Ukraine also states that the gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU internal market is going to be continued within the framework of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.[62]

Within the current context of geopolitical urgency, models such as affiliate membership may be a compromise. It is based on a partial official engagement with the political, administrative and judicial institutions of the Union, and possibly full participation in EU spending programmes. Such an affiliation would not require full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria or the Union's political objectives. Unlike in the early stages of the development of his concept, Duff no longer propagates affiliate membership as a possible "stepping

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[57] Frank Schimmelfennig: Fit through Flexibility? Differentiated Integration and Geopolitical EU Enlargement, in: Göran von Sydow/Valentin Kreilinger, (eds.): Fit for 35? Reforming the Politics and Institutions of the EU for an Enlarged Union, Sieps 2023:2op, 2023, p.16.

[58] Ibid., p.15.

[59] European Council: European Council conclusions, 2022.
    Emphasis by author.

[60] See: Schimmelfennig: Fit through flexibility?. 2023, p.21.

[61] Ibid., p.21.

[62] Conference on Accession to the European Union Ukraine: Accession Document, General EU Position, Ministerial meeting opening the Intergovernmental Conference on the Accession of Ukraine to the European Union, Luxembourg, 25 June 2024.

stone"[63] for eventual full membership of the EU, but as a permanent form of affiliation.[64] The difference to the existing EEA model lies in the institutional integration of the affiliated states. These have voting rights in the Council of the EU in the areas relating to their affiliation. Such a concept further differentiates the existing forms of association and thus the variable geometries of Europe and also differentiates the status of membership in the EU. Due to the clear exclusion of full membership, however, this concept will be even more difficult to communicate politically to current candidate countries. It also contradicts the common goal of EU membership defined in the accession negotiation framework.

All these models have their flaws, as they may as well undermine the credibility of the accession process by keeping countries in lower-tier membership levels or by undermining the usability of the threat of reversibility in the process. A case in point are the protests in Georgia in response to the announcement and then passing of the Russian-inspired 'foreign agents' bill in May 2024.[65] Only in December 2023 had Georgia been granted EU candidate status, on the understanding that relevant reforms were undertaken.[66] Possible responses ranged from 'reversing' Georgia's status, suspending visa-free travel to diplomatic demarches and official condemnations to respond to democratic backsliding.[67] The EU's dilemma is evident. It lacks responses targeted towards the government that do not alienate the people. As such, sanctions that affect the people negatively will not help mobilise the people against the regime and rather alienate them from the EU. Solely relying on its soft power – thus fostering a sense of issue avoidance – plays into the hands of Russia.[68] In the end, the Heads of State or Government of EU member states clarified at the European Council meeting in June 2024 that developments in Georgia had de facto led to a "halt of the accession process"[69]. The case clearly demonstrates in which ways the EU lacks 'teeth' in its relationship with its neighbours. The question thus remains: How can the geopolitical dimension be effectively translated to all aspects of invigorated enlargement and neighbourhood policies?

[63] Andrew Duff: The case for an associate membership of the European Union, LSE Europeblog,, 6 March 2013, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/03/06/associate-eu-membership.

[64] Andrew Duff: Constitutional Change in the European Union. Towards a Federal Europe, Cham 2022, S. 88–90.

[65] Felix Light: Georgian parliament passes 'foreign agent' bill, prompting US anger, new protests, Reuters, 15 May 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgian-lawmakers-brawl-parliament-set-pass-foreign-agent-bill-2024-05-14/ (last accessed: 17.05.2024).

[66] European Commission: Georgia, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/georgia_en(last accessed: 17 May 2024).

[67] European Commission: Statement by President von der Leyen on the situation in Georgia, 1 May 2024, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-president-von-der-leyen-situation-georgia-2024-05-01_en (last accessed: 17.05.2024); European Commission: Statement by High Representative Josep Borrell with the European Commission on the adoption of the "transparency of foreign influence" law in Georgia, 15 May 2024, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-european-commission-adoption-transparency-foreign-2024-05-15_en (last accessed: 17.05.2024).

[68] Frank Nienhuysen: Moskau darf sich freuen – und die EU gerät in eine missliche Lage, Tagesanzeiger Schweiz, 14 May 2024, https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/georgien-das-prorussische-gesetz-und-seine-folgen-607262917211 (last accessed: 17 May 2024).

[g] General Secretariat of the Council: European Council meeting, Conclusions, Brussels, 27 June 2024, p. 10.

3.2 How to Respond to Other Actors' Geopolitical Ambitions: Ever Increasing Geopolitical Rivalry and External Influence, even Threatening Countries' Existence as Sovereign, Independent States

While Russia's war in Ukraine is the most extreme form of exerting influence, external actors have been active in the relevant regions for a long time in different dimensions and on different levels. In the literature this contestation has been clustered into the political dimension[70] (democracy vs. authoritarianism), social and cultural[71], economic and trade[72], migration[73], and security [74] linking up to critical infrastructure, energy supply as well as cyber security and protection, as well as 'hybrid'[75]. The ways of how individual global actors exert influence in the region differs touching upon different combinations of such dimensions. China's influence is strongly focused on extending economic influence by means of its (in)famous dept-trap diplomacy, participation in European tenders and technical infrastructures such as 5G or 6G. Russia's influence is multidimensional including cyber, media outlets, energy and cultural factors such as the orthodox churches. Turkey has foremost soft power influence through cultural and religious aspects; migration is another important dimension.

For the EU to **respond** to external influence resiliently, action must respond on all levels. One may ask: how can the EU credibly defend (and export) its norms and values – internally and externally? How do its values and instruments change in an environment of geopolitical rivalry and contested territory and which impact do they have on the EU's modernisation agenda? How can the EU contribute to sustainable development, economic prosperity and social cohesion in its neighbourhood? How can the EU not only enhance its credibility but also the connectivity and competitivity of its security infrastructure to enhance links between the EU and its neighbourhood in the domains of the protection of critical infrastructure, communication and cyber networks and energy supply?

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[70] See for example Hal Brands: Democracy vs Authoritarianism: How Ideology Shapes Great-Power Conflict, in: Survival, 60 (5), 2018, pp. 61-114.

[71] See for example Ritsa Panagiotou: The Western Balkans between Russia and the European Union: perceptions, reality, and impact on enlargement, in: Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 29 (2), 2021, pp. 219-233; Adriana Cuppuleri/Liridona V. Ashiku: The Multidimensional Soft Power of Illiberal States: Russia in the Western Balkans, in: Nationalities Papers, 2023, pp. 1-21; Robert Dopchie: The increasing influence of emerging powers in the Western Balkans: A brief analysis, in: Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, 8 (2), 2022, pp. 307-320.

[72] See for example Sören Scholvin/Mikael Wigell: Power politics by economic means: Geoeconomics as an analytical approach and foreign policy practice, in: Comparative Strategy, 37(1), 2018, pp. 73-84; Mikael Wigell/Antto Vihma: Geopolitics versus geoeconomics: the case of Russia's geostrategy and its effects on the EU, in: International Affairs, 92 (3), 2016, pp. 605-627; Nina Markovic Khaze/Xiwen Wang: Is China's rising influence in the Western Balkans a threat to European integration? In: Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 29 (2), 2021, pp. 234-250.

[73] See Mark Galeotti: "How Migrants got Weaponized. The EU set the stage for Belarus's cynical ploy", Foreign Affairs, December 2, 2021.

[74] See for example Marcus Willett: The Cyber Dimension of the Russia-Ukraine War, in: Survival October – November 2022, Routledge, 2022; Marco Siddi: EU-Russia Energy Relations, in: Michèle Knodt/Jörg Kemmerzell (Hrsg.): Handbook of Energy Governance in Europe, Springer, Cham, 2022.

[75] See for example James K. Wither: Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare, in: Connections, Vol. 15 (2), 2016, pp. 73-87.

3.2.1 Defending Norms and Values: Internally and Externally

The EU is becoming acutely aware of its need to protect its institutions, citizens and political processes against malign internal and external influence. In which ways can the EU claim to be a credible exporter of democratic norms, given cases of democratic backsliding and autocratisation in Hungary, Slovakia, and far-right party coalitions in countries such as Italy, Portugal, Finland, the Netherlands or Bulgaria? As such, the issues of diminishing pluralism, shrinking spaces for civil society, the retreat from democratic values and the constraint of opposition voices in the EU's member states has received substantial attention in recent years[76]. This included the lacklustre application of the Article 7 TEU provisions against Poland and Hungary, but also the more ambitious December 2020 Rule of Law budget conditionality mechanism, first applied against Hungary in December 2022.[77]

With growing momentum placed on the development of EU policies to defend its members' democracies, strengthen its rule of law, the EU has also been active in protecting (itself) against covert foreign interference – by creating flagship projects, such as EUvsDisinfo[78], and also by way of legislation. The Defence of Democracy package[79], adopted in 2023, and aimed at making the Member States more resilient to foreign interference by enhancing transparency and democratic accountability of interest groups, providing public access and demanding information storage, as well as increasing participation of citizens and civil society organizations in policymaking. It further comprises an international component, with the EU using its normative power to set standards on how to respond to foreign influence on a global scale, all while respecting fundamental rights.[80]

While the EU becomes aware of protection against malign foreign influence, its concepts of democracy change. As such, the liberal script – along the lines of the modernisation logic, where democracy includes both formal (competitive, free, fair and equal elections with horizontal accountability) and liberal elements (citizen participation, political accountability, the protection of human and civil rights and the rule of law)[81] – fails to respond to contexts of internal and external contestation of liberalism and of competing political models. Amid geopolitical uncertainty new forms of EU normative engagement with its neighbours are emerging.

On the one hand, Giselle Bosse and Alena Vieira write of the "dark side" of the support for the development of resilient societies and states in relations with authoritarian regimes.[82]

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[76] Richard Bellamy/Sandra Kröger: How the EU can counter democratic backsliding in its member states, 22 April, 2021, available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2021/04/22/how-the-eu-can-counter-democratic-backsliding-in-its-member-states/ (last accessed: 13.05.2024).

[77] Michael Blauberger/Ulrich Sedelmeier: Sanctioning democratic backsliding in the European Union: transnational salience, negative intergovernmental spillover, and policy change, in: Journal of European Public Policy, 2024, pp.1–27.

[78] European External Action Service, "EUvsDisinfo: About", European External Action Service, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/about/ (last accessed: 04.06.2024).

[79] European Commission: Defence of Democracy – Commission proposes to shed light on covert foreign influence, 12 December 2023.

[80] See, Ibid.

[81] Wolfgang Merkel: Embedded and defective democracies, in: Democratization, 11 (5), 2004.

[82] Giselle Bosse/Alena Vieira: Resilient states vs. resilient societies? The 'dark side' of resilience narratives in EU relations with authoritarian regimes: a case study of Belarus, in: Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 2023, 31(4), p.1059.

They point to the ineffectiveness of EU policies towards autocracies, that may even render EU democratization efforts counterproductive. Pitfalls include enhancing regime legitimacy and strengthening state capacities to oppress domestic resistance. On the other hand, authors such as Richard Youngs, argue that the EU has adapted its tools and ambitions of democracy support to make them more defensive. Defensive democracy support[83] would consist of the strengthening of democracy defence within the Union, as discussed above, the scattering of funding initiatives designed to defend core rights-based activism without any pretension at systemic democratization or regime transformation, a democracy support-global order-defence-nexus enshrined in multilateral coalitions to uphold the rules-based order, indirect spreading of democratic values through economic security and investment projects that uphold democratic values (i.e. EU Global Gateway), and a re-design of the enlargement process around strategic issues as opposed to technocratic compliance to EU standards.

3.2.2 Contributing to Sustainable Development and Resilient Societies in the Region

EU engagement with its partners in Wider Europe expands beyond the field of the promotion of democracy, rule of law and good governance. While legal alignment and compliance with the EU's social acquis was not an EU priority in past enlargement rounds, this issue area and its implications have recently received greater focus. With full or partial accession to the EU come internal tensions over resources, in particular with the enlargement towards countries with weaker economic standing – possibly even post-war economies – and a lesser developed social policy. For the EU, migration and the security of its internal borders gains in importance, while an effective implementation of the EU's acquis in new member countries can help combat brain drain. The EU's 2020 policy framework for the Eastern Partnership pushes for "sustainable reforms, which are key for investing in a resilient economy, democracy, environment and climate, and society."[84] With this the European Union links resilience to sustainability and combines different issue areas. Thereby responding to the challenges the geopoliticised world order presents: increasingly, the EU and its neighbours are faced with a multiplicity of intersecting and parallelly-occurring challenges – known unknowns – such as migration flows, (effects of) climate change, socioeconomic inequality and its effects, overt and covert political influence operations, health endemics to which no predetermined answers exist and which can only be pre-empted by building and maintaining more resilient states and societies.

EU responses in its neighbourhood include, advancing models of circular economies to ensure local and regional value-development, support for regional integration, enhanced connectivity between the EU and its neighbourhood, in particular by way of visa liberalisation and transport connectivity.

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[83] Richard Youngs: The Defensive Turn in European Democracy Support, 14 March 2024, available at: https://carnegieeurope.eu/2024/03/14/defensive-turn-in-european-democracy-support-pub-91946 (last accessed: 19.03.2024).
[84] European Commission, "Q&A: The Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020", European Commission, 18 March 2020, p.1.

3.2.3 Regional Integration and Connectivity

In the field of economic development of the EU's neighbourhood and connectivity, there is increasingly a turn from a "battle of narratives" – previously dominated by an EU-Russia dualism – towards a "battle of offers" in which additional actors, such as China, Turkey and other Gulf states come to the fore.[85] For this reason, intelligent EU connectivity strategies must not only look to present viable options to the region, but must also strengthen the EU's geostrategic competitiveness, its sovereignty and its capacity to act, including physical and virtual infrastructure, as well as norms and technical standards.[86] By ways of bridging modernisation and geopolitical incentives in its connectivity strategies, the EU may signal to its neighbourhood that it is a credible and competitive partner. This includes providing competitive economic offers, all while upholding smart, green, human rights conform and sustainable development values and demonstrating its commitment to peace and stability. The EU's Global Gateway initiative is a prime example thereof. It divides connectivity projects according to the goals they set out to achieve: connectivity as partnership in which sustainable and partnership-oriented investments are promoted; connectivity as opportunity in which investments are linked to principles, such as the Green recovery; and connectivity as European sovereignty through which the EU can enhance Europe's resilience.

Responding to external actors' influence must also include responding to the *effects* of external actors' actions. This includes considerations of how the EU can ensure effective acquis implementation, even by countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Ukraine that do not command control over the entirety of their territory.[87]

3.2.4 Enhancing Interconnectivity: Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Joint Combat against Hybrid Threats

As seen from the modernisation perspective, interconnectivity and economic interdependence contribute to more prosperity and peaceful coexistence. In the EU's approach to enlargement and its neighbourhood this was expressed through removal of barriers to trade, alignment of regulatory norms in the fields of energy, transport and communications, and the provision of funds to be invested into enhanced interconnectivity.[88] After the end of the Cold war, the EU promoted market economy principles such and connectivity on a global stage. This included prospective candidate countries and neighbours and also the welcoming of China's and Russia's accession into the WTO to facilitate a rules-based and mutually beneficial economic exchange.[89]

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[85] See European Commission, "Strategic Foresight Report 2023", European Commission, July 2023, p.3.

[86] Miguel Berger: Why connectivity can strengthen European sovereignty, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2 December 2021, https://ecfr.eu/article/why-connectivity-can-strengthen-european-sovereignty/ (last accessed: 16.05.2024).

[87] Barbara Lippert: Die nächste EU-Osterweiterung wird kompliziert und teuer. Beitrittsverhandlungen, Assoziierung und neue Formate aufeinander abstimmen, SWP-Aktuell Nr. 48, 2022.

[88] Susanne Milcher/Ben Slay: The Economics of the 'European Neighbourhood Policy': An Initial Assessment, in: CASE Network Studies and Analyses No. 291, 2008.

[89] See Bart Gaens/Ville Sinkkonen/Henri Vogt: Connectivity and Order: an Analytical Framework, in: East Asia (40), 2023, pp. 209-228; Matthias Bauer/Dyuti Pandya: EU Autonomy, the Brussels Effect, and the Rise of Global Economic Protectionism, European Centre for International Political Economy, February 2024, https://ecipe.org/publications/eu-autonomy-brussels-effect-rise-global-economic-protectionism/ (last accessed 28.05.2024).

However, interdependences with authoritarian powers can create vulnerabilities, allowing them to exert pressure on other countries in the EU and its neighbourhood.[90] The Baltic States experienced this weaponisation of trade in energy resources by Russia as early as the 2000's. Russian cyber-attacks on Estonian institutions in 2007 highlighted the need for the EU and NATO to increase cyber security and the resilience of information infrastructure[91].

The hybrid nature of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014, which included disinformation, cyber-attacks and military attacks, was also followed closely in the EU and NATO, although the threat perception differed from member state to member state. More recently, China's unofficial economic sanctions applied to Lithuania show the instrumentalization of economic relations.[92] Russia's hybrid war since 2014 and its large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is another sign that authoritarian powers are willing to engage into confrontation with the EU and NATO with connectivity wars. Increasingly, transport, critical infrastructure, communications networks, as well as technical standards and norms have become battlefields of geoeconomic rivalry fought by hybrid means.[93] Hybrid threats blur the boundaries between war and peace by weakening the adversary without expending resources on the conventional battlefield. Their key reliance is that of interdependence, as every connection is susceptible to instrumentalization.[94]

The increase in tensions between the West and authoritarian states led to the securitisation of interdependences and the modification of modernisation perspectives. Resilience to economic coercion and hybrid attacks requires measures such as the accumulation of stocks or procuring secure hardware and software, which can be costly. It also requires more intense coordination between the EU member states and their neighbourhood, creating a dilemma as member states' and international partners' domestic political and economic context might push them towards divergent policy measures (seen for example in the divergence of views considering China or unilateral trade restrictions against Ukraine). More generally, the turn implies dilemmas and trade-offs such as national security vs. open economy, unilateral vs. multilateral policy measures and country-specific vs. country-agnostic policies.

Therefore, the challenges of increased connectivity must be acknowledged, precautions undertaken, and responses developed. The Economic Security Strategy by the European Commission in June 2023 reflects this changing geopolitical context. The principles of promoting the EU's competitiveness, protecting the EU from economic security risks and

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[90] See Mark Leonard (Eds.): Connectivity Wars. Why Migration, Finance and Trade are the Geo-economic Battlegrounds of the Future, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), London, 2016.
[91] See Ramūnas Vilpišauskas: Gradually and then suddenly: the effects of Russia's attacks on the evolution of cybersecurity policy in Lithuania, in: Policy Studies, 45 (3-4), 2024, pp. 467-488.
[92] Bryce Barros/Krystyna Sikora: China's Sanctions Regime and Lithuania: Policy Responses for European Institutions, Alliance for Securing Democracy, 16 August 2022, https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/chinas-sanctions-regime-and-lithuania-policy-responses-for-european-institutions/ (last accessed 28.05.2024).
[93] Vilpišauskas: Gradually and then suddenly: the effects of Russia's attacks on the evolution of cybersecurity policy in Lithuania, 2024.
[94] Pol Bargués/Moussa Bourekba: War by all means. The rise of hybrid warfare, in: Pol Bargués/Moussa Bourekba/Carme Colomina (eds.): Hybrid threats, vulnerable order, CIDOB Report 8, 9/2022.

partnering with like-minded countries, proposed by the European Commission, could be developed further in charting the paths towards coordinated work of the EU with candidate countries and its neighbours through economic integration and common set of policies to deal with the risks to the resilience of physical and cybersecurity of critical infrastructure. These paths forward and the trade-offs involved – economic, security and normative – will be discussed in the further stages of the project with reference to the ongoing debates on the open strategic autonomy of the EU and its economic security.

3.3 How to Rebuild in an Era of Military Interventions on the Continent?

The EU enlargement process has increasingly turned into a geopolitical necessity. The re-invigorated process of integration is clearly being led by the situation in Ukraine which has brought to the forefront an important question: to what extent can the enlargement process provide security for the neighbourhood, as well as make EU member states safer? While NATO and the United States of America remain the predominant guarantors of hard security, and the EU's primary capabilities are in the realm of sort power[95] current revisions of the EU approach to enlargement policy could lead to an enhanced role for the EU as a regional and global security actor. The question remains, what type of geopolitical actor the EU is or will become – will it follow traditional geopolitics or forge an innovative, in its nature *sui generis* form of engaging with Realpolitik? What is a 'European understanding of security' and are its foundations changing? When it comes to **rebuilding** resilience in a new era of military threats and interventions on the European continent, these questions must be answered in the context of the Union's own hard-security and capacity-building, but also for the quality and the nature of the EU's collaboration and connection with states and societies in its neighbourhood.

This should include debates on the European Union's use and development of all its foreign and security policy options, possible credible security guarantees, avenues for inclusion of accession candidates in EU policy processes, agencies and the EU's defence infrastructure, a holistic approach to security and defence alliances, including building on transatlantic cooperation with NATO[96] and robust, integrated and (inter)connected capacity building that is future proof.

3.3.1 The Question of Security Guarantees

For enlargement to succeed as an investment in peace and security, the European Union credible security guarantees – beyond bilateral security commitments[97] – that are both accepted and deemed credible by the candidates for membership, but also by external actors, would be required. This is particularly relevant given that it is unclear if there is a willingness and the means for NATO enlargement to predate EU-enlargement, especially with

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[95] Nitoiu/Sus: Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood, 2018, p.4.

[96] Cynthia Cook/Anna Dowd: Bolstering Collective Resilience in Europe, Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2022.

[97] See for example: The Federal Government of Germany: Security Agreement with Ukraine, 16 February 2024, https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/chancellor-zelensky-security-agreement-2260300 (last accessed: 16.05.2024); Tom Balmforth/Yuliia Dysa: Explainer: What are the security deals Ukraine is signing with its allies?, Reuters, 3 April 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/what-are-security-deals-ukraine-is-discussing-with-allies-2024-02-23/ (last accessed: 16.05.2024).

the countries into which Russia tries to project its influence. At the same time, such guarantees would require radical reform of the EU and agreement among its member states (or a group of them) about centralising defence policy and military resources. Currently, there seems to be little appetite for this within the EU, and only NATO security guarantees could be perceived credible, which is also dependent on domestic politics in the US.

Development of a foreign and security profile for the European Political Community with inclusion of EU and NATO partners, such as the UK and Türkiye[98], and enlargement candidates, or integration of candidates in EU's permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) could present a further move towards a geopolitisation of EU neighbourhood policy. Squaring the geopolitical and modernisation imperatives of enlargement though remains a challenge.

3.3.2 Robust, Integrated, (Inter)connected Capacity Building in the EU and with its Neighbourhood and Inclusion in Defence Policy and Planning

In view of the difficulties of establishing security guarantees on a European level a more incremental approach through more coordinated military procurements, military assistance to Ukraine might be more promising. This even more so as security, democracy and an invigorated enlargement and neighbourhood policy are closely interlinked. Ensuring favourable external security contexts enhance the sustainability of democracy, one of the goals of the EU enlargement process. As such, enhanced cooperation, capacity-building initiatives and connectivity in the defence against hybrid threats, the protection of critical infrastructure and other elements of military and civilian security architecture has become a focus of the EU in cooperation with its neighbours, such as with programs funded through the European Peace Facility or the critical infrastructure directive implementation in the Western Balkans. Additional capacity-building initiatives in the context of the war in Ukraine include training assistance also on Ukrainian territory[99] on a bilateral basis and inclusion in military drills.

Fostering connectivity projects among members of the respective regions and between the Western Balkans and the Association Trio (including non-candidate countries) can serve to strengthen multilateral cooperation, positively influence and enhance security and reform agendas and contribute to a more resilient EU neighbourhood.[100]

An extension of elements of robust, integrated, (inter)connected capacity to the EU's enlargement frameworks could well connect both the EU's geopolitical and modernisation agendas towards its neighbourhood. The inclusion of the need for alignment on common foreign and security policies was a move in this direction. Further the EU's acquis could reflect EU neighbours' security challenges by featuring security reforms, energy

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[98] Lippert: Die nächste EU-Osterweiterung wird kompliziert und teuer, 2022.

[99] Helene Cooper/Julian E. Barnes/Eric Schmitt/Lara Jakes: As Russia Advances, NATO Considers Sending Trainers Into Ukraine, The New York Times, 16 May 2024, https://www.ny-times.com/2024/05/16/us/politics/nato-ukraine.html?campaign_id=51&emc=edit_mbe_20240517&instance_id=123625&nl=morning-briefing%3A-europe-edition&regi_id=90399711&segment_id=166909&te=1&user_id=3aed3534d7bc58c72b3b5745e79f7803 (last accessed: 17.05.2024).

[100] Biscop: Use connectivity to strengthen multilateral cooperation, 2020.

independence, cyber resilience, foreign investment screening, next to the traditional pillars of economic stability and the Copenhagen Criteria in the EU's accession conditionality.

Even more so enhanced interconnectivity of candidate countries in the EU's defence policy planning and security architecture incentivizes EU action to contain malign external actors. Nonetheless, as the cost of destabilization against those countries increasingly spills across the rest of the European Union, "enlargement makes the candidate countries more secure by making the European Union more vulnerable."[101]

Additionally, more integrated security provisions and capacity developments are complicated by military, technical and political obstructions on the level of the EU, not to speak of beyond. Who provides and develops respective weapons systems and military capabilities? Is there a joint procurement and/or payments mechanism? Who covers the additional risks and who makes which political concessions? Which intelligence may be shared by whom and with whom?

3.3.3 EU Capability Development, Contingency Planning and Escalation Management

In order to be a credible security partner and to find answers to the questions above, the EU must invest in its own capacity development and enhance its own readiness. This includes shifting the gaze of policy-planning from short-term weapons deliveries towards long-term considerations of how to ensure steady weapons deliveries to Ukraine while restocking and rebuilding domestic arsenals. This also includes efforts towards a de-politicisation of military assistance. Medium-term perspectives must further include contingency planning efforts and escalation management, while long-term assessments should focus on large-scale reconstruction aid for Ukraine. What conditions will be tied to the allocation of funds for Ukraine, in light of known cases of misappropriation of funds? Should reconstruction financing and funds for accession preparation be tied together or administered separately?[102] How can the EU ensure that insights from Ukraine are integrated in European strategic thinking and planning? The Ukrainian example in particular justifies the EU's focus on both state and societal resilience. The country's resistance has been built on a "hybrid resilience" taking primarily from elements of self-help, self-reliance and self-organisation.[103] Thus, rebuilding the European continent in an era of military intervention fundamentally necessitates a refocusing of priorities, policies and planning in the EU and together with its neighbourhood and the acknowledgement that enlargement is not a replacement for European foreign and security policy.

4. Benchmarking InvigoratEU's Research

This paper has discussed three things. First, there is a need to invigorate the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policy for a resilient Europe because these policies had not only been stagnating for decades but also started to undermine themselves; Russia's war of aggression sparked a sudden dynamic in the EU's enlargement process while at the same time increased the geopolitical context and logic of it; enlargement policy needs to be

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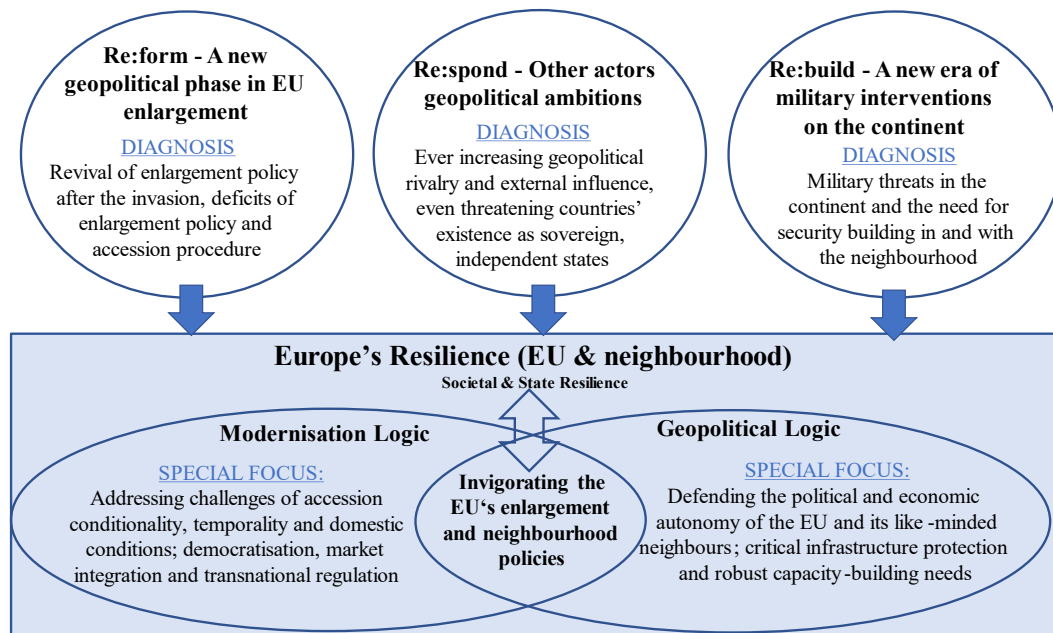[101] Jones: Enlargement and Institutional Reform, 2024, p. 2.
[102] Lippert: Die nächste EU-Osterweiterung wird kompliziert und teuer, 2022.
[103] Andrey Makarychev/Yulia Kurnyshova: Hybrid resilience in insecure times. Russia's war and Ukrainian society, in: Pol Bargués/Moussa Bourekba/Carme Colomina (eds.): Hybrid threats, vulnerable order, CIDOB Report 8, 9/2022.

analysed in the broader context of Wider Europe. Second, the two logics inherent in the EU's enlargement policy – modernisation and geopolitics – each have their benefits and deficits and a combination of both might contribute to a resilient Europe. Third, the accession process needs to substituted with other policies and initiatives that provide fertile grounds for successful enlargement. Table 1 summarises the different components of the concept that frames the respective analysis.

Figure 1: InvigoratEU Conceptual Frame

Re:form - A new geopolitical phase in EU enlargement

DIAGNOSIS
Revival of enlargement policy after the invasion, deficits of enlargement policy and accession procedure

Re:spond - Other actors geopolitical ambitions

DIAGNOSIS
Ever increasing geopolitical rivalry and external influence, even threatening countries' existence as sovereign, independent states

Re:build - A new era of military interventions on the continent

DIAGNOSIS
Military threats in the continent and the need for security building in and with the neighbourhood

Europe's Resilience (EU & neighbourhood)
Societal & State Resilience

Modernisation Logic

SPECIAL FOCUS:
Addressing challenges of accession conditionality, temporality and domestic conditions; democratisation, market integration and transnational regulation

Invigorating the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies

Geopolitical Logic

SPECIAL FOCUS:
Defending the political and economic autonomy of the EU and its like-minded neighbours; critical infrastructure protection and robust capacity-building needs

In the previous chapter, dilemmas have been presented when applying both the modernisation and geopolitical logics to the topics of the project's research. As such, we have shown that both logics are interdependent and can shape a different response to reforming, responding and rebuilding the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies. The combination of both elements reframes the discourse of and on enlargement: The geopolitical lens not only serves to situate enlargement in a context of instability, external threats and increasing risks, but also changes how, with which strategies and to what avail modernisation strategies are undertaken.

Hence, policies for a resilient Europe must be understood and researched, taking into account its various dimensions: protecting and reshaping the 'inside of the inside' by adapting EU policies to allow for an invigoration of the enlargement process and upholding democratic legitimacy and the EU model's attractiveness, also as internal divisions and institutional instability can enhance vulnerabilities to the influence and leverage of (malign) third actors; assisting the transformation of the 'inside of the outside' by geopoliticising the modernisation agenda, prioritising holistic reforms and offering enhanced connectivity to the neighbours; enhancing the strength of the 'outside of the inside' by creating a sui generis model of both soft and hard power EU foreign policy engagement, which leads to considerations of how protection of the 'outside of the outside' can be boosted.

Thus, benchmarks for robust capacity-building and security and defence measures of the EU in view of military threats should rely on an integrated understanding of security. The

protection of territorial security will require the EU to enhance its capability development, contingency planning and escalation management. This includes, enhancing the capacities, capabilities and communication of the member states' militaries. Expanding to the territorial security of the neighbours, benchmarks need also to take into account bilateral and institutional comprehensive defence arrangements, joint procurement initiatives, training of interoperability, and policy statements, such as on red lines in the Ukraine-Russia war or on accession of Association Trio countries to NATO and the EU. This means that in the shorter-term, enlargement policy can include a focus on capacity-building and critical infrastructure in addition to regulatory alignment with the EU acquis. Nonetheless, internal security and its protection must also be analysed. This includes benchmarking of capacities to defend against hybrid threats, looking to the creation of institutions, that may enhance information-sharing among member states and the neighbourhood; the development and enforcement of policies to upkeep free and non-polarising communication channels; and enhancing states' social policies to mitigate the risks of internal divisions and brain drain.

Lastly, a holistic approach to security also includes its human dimension, including elements such as the protection and interconnection of sources of critical infrastructure. The studies on resilience of critical infrastructure provide the basis for benchmarking the EU (member states) and candidate countries in terms of their respective public policies aimed at protecting critical infrastructure from natural hazards and, particularly, hostile activities and to what extent they are aligned. In this respect, resilience is understood as the ability of complex systems – transport, energy, telecommunications and information technologies and others – to absorb, recover from and adapt to shocks and stresses with minimal loss of functionality and a rapid return to normal service[104]. Many studies point to the shift in public policies and governance mechanisms from asset protection to system's resilience, suggesting that a coherent system-based approach is best for effectively tackling complexity and interdependencies in infrastructure[105].

Assessing resilience involves assessing the preparedness for potential shocks, mitigation measures, response capabilities and recovery mechanisms. Some countries and organisations use the following criteria to describe the nature of resilience of critical infrastructure: robustness (resistance to a loss of function), redundancy (the level of substitutability), resourcefulness (the ability to direct resources), and rapidity (the restoration of functionality)[106]. The choice of a particular combination of policy instruments is considered important in dealing with challenges for critical infrastructure policies such as cross-sectoral policy integration, coordination across various levels of governance, balance between private and public involvement.

Thus, benchmarking of critical infrastructure resilience requires an assessment of policies which aim at increasing awareness through monitoring and information sharing, preventing disruption through security measures and preparedness actions, minimising the effects of a

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[104] Svenja Keele/Loet Coenen: "Policy for critical infrastructure resilience", Workshop Summary: Arup and Resilience Shift, Melbourne 2019, p.4.
[105] See, for example, OECD: "Good Governance for Critical Infrastructure Resilience", OECD Reviews of Risk Management
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[106] Tim Prior: Measuring Critical Infrastructure Resilience: Possible Indicators, Risk and Resilience Report 9, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zürich, 2014, p. 5.

potential disruption through swift and effective response, redundancy or back-up measures, including restore and repair capabilities, and ensuring timely recovery after a disruption through contingency planning and preparedness[107]. By using policy toolkits developed by the OECD and other organisations, resilience enhancing policies can be benchmarked in terms of how they address the transboundary dimension of infrastructure systems and coordinate national policies with neighbouring countries and beyond to address transboundary dependence.

Further benchmarks for research and policy impact evaluations will be developed according to the respective Work Package's timelines.

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[107] EU-NATO Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure: "Final Assessment report", June 2023, p. 3.

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About InvigoratEU

InvigoratEU is a Horizon Europe-funded project, coordinated by the EU-Chair at the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) together with the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) in Berlin. The project, with a duration of 3 years from January 2024 until December 2026, examines how the EU can structure its future relations with its Eastern neighbours and the countries of the Western Balkans. The consortium has received around three million euros for this endeavour.

How can the EU invigorate its enlargement and neighbourhood policy to enhance Europe's resilience?

Our first goal is to investigate how to re-form the EU's enlargement strategy in a new geopolitical phase, HOW TO RE-SPOND to other actors' geopolitical ambitions in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans, and HOW TO RE-BUILD the EU's foreign policy arsenal in view of a new era of military threats (triple "R" approach) combining the modernisation and geopolitical logics of EU enlargement, leading to new data – e.g. a public opinion survey in Ukraine, a set of scenarios, an external influence index (Russia, China, Turkey), and a social policy compliance and cohesion scoreboard.

Our second goal is to elaborate an evidence-based, forward-looking vision for the EU's political agenda and institutional frameworks for co-designing a multidimensional toolbox (i.e. two tailor-made toolkits), together with InvigoratEU's Expert Hub, Civil Society (CS) Network, Youth Labs, Workshops for Young Professionals and Policy Debates in a gaming set up, which will result in context-sensitive and actionable policy recommendations for European and national political stakeholders and (young) European citizens in particular.

Our third goal is to deploy a CDE (communication, dissemination and exploitation) strategy aiming at recommendations from Day 1 to maximize our scientific, policy and societal impact in invigorating the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies to enhance Europe's resilience. Ultimately, InvigoratEU is a deliberately large consortium respecting the diversity of Europe and political perspectives; 7 out of 18 are from Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the western Balkans (North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia), complemented by our Civil Society Network of 9 representatives from all Western Balkan countries, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

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