



Rethinking EU Responses to Global and Diffuse Risks

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 **EU-LISTCO**

Europe's External Action and the Dual Challenges
of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders

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ABSTRACT

This policy paper focuses on impacts of global and diffuse risks on the EU and its neighbourhood regions. It provides a brief overview of six major risk categories that cover majority of global and diffuse risks and suggests their prioritization based on temporality, probability of occurrence and multiplication effect. The empirical evidence dictates that, in order to better cope with the impacts of global and diffuse risks and strengthen the resilience of its neighbourhood countries and with extension - of itself, the EU needs to prioritize the global risks which not only endanger the EU and its surroundings in the long term (climate change) but can also act as major spoilers in the short term (irregular migration & geopolitical rivalries). Finally, the EU should also pay attention to multiple effects of global risks and devise strategies based on regional and country-specific differentiation.

KEYWORDS: global risks, resilience, EU Global Strategy, EU neighbourhood, security, stability

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INTRODUCTION

Both in the East and in the South, the European Union (EU) is surrounded by neighbouring countries with serious security and stateness problems that manifest itself in two forms: areas of limited statehood (ALS) and Contested Orders (CO). ALS are parts of a country in which the central authorities cannot enforce central rules and decisions or do not control the means of violence (Börzel and Risse 2018). ALS in EU's neighbourhood mostly have a form of territorial conflicts (such as in Ukraine, Moldova, South Caucasus) or civil-war like conditions (Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq). Contested orders, on the other hand, refer to "incompatibilities between two or more competing views about how political, economic, social and territorial order should be established and/or sustained" (Börzel and Risse 2018: 12). Contested orders emerge when legitimacy of existing institutions or governance norms are challenged by domestic (radicalized far-right and far-left movements, radical religious groups) and/or external (Russia, Iran, international terrorist networks) actors. It is important to note that the ALS and the CO are the permanent features of EU's neighbourhood and do not per se threaten the EU's security but under certain negative conditions either of them can deteriorate into governance breakdowns and violent conflicts and result in a significant security threat to the EU and its member states. These conditions may emerge as a result of a high exposure of EU's neighbourhood regions to various global and diffuse risks. Therefore, it is of critical importance, to analyse the impacts of global and diffuse risks in EU's neighbourhood and to identify under what conditions these risks contribute to violent conflicts and governance breakdowns. On the other hand, the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) identified *strengthening state and societal resilience* in the neighbourhood countries as a main countervailing factor that can mitigate and deter those risks and prevent negative outcomes in EU's neighbourhood (Eickhoff and Stoltenwerk 2018). Hence, to provide policy-relevant solutions for EU's troubling neighbourhood, one needs to also connect global and diffuse risks and their impact on ALS and CO in EU's neighbourhood with the resilience strengthening mechanisms.

This policy paper focuses on the major impacts of the key global and diffuse risks in EU's two neighbourhood regions – the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Eastern Partnership Area (EaP). It provides a fruitful starting point for thinking about measures to foster resilience and avoid that these risks turn into threats, thereby preventing governance breakdowns and/or violent conflicts in these areas. The paper provides recommendations for the EU on how to prioritize and classify the impacts global and diffuse risks in its neighbourhood regions. It also suggests which tipping points to watch that may exacerbate the impacts of global risks and result in governance breakdowns and/or violent conflicts.

MAIN ARGUMENTS

GLOBAL AND DIFFUSE RISKS IN EU'S NEIGHBOURHOOD NEED DIFFERENTIATED POLICY ATTENTION

The EU-LISTCO project provides a comprehensive conceptualization and classification of global and diffuse risks. It sums up these risks under six broad categories: (1) Geopolitical rivalry and risks of major armed conflict; (2) Unconventional security risks; (3) Biological and environmental risks; (4) Demography and uncontrolled migration; (5) Global financial and other systemic economic risks, and; (6) Technology-driven disruption (Magen *et al.* 2019: 18). Whereas each of the six categories of risks are present in EU's neighbourhood regions, some of them have more immediate and/or severe

impact on ALS and CO in EU's neighbourhood countries; hence need bigger policy attention from the EU in order to avoid negative spill over into the EU. Prioritizing of policy attention towards the global risks should occur along few important criteria including temporality, probability of occurrence and multiplication of impact.

WHICH RISKS SHOULD THE EU PRIORITIZE AND WHY?

In terms of *temporality* we can differentiate between short-term and long-term risks. From this perspective irregular migration is perhaps the most important global risk with a strongest short-term negative impact on the EU. New migration flows as a result of prolonged conflicts in EU's neighbourhood may result in further strengthening of Eurosceptic and populist sentiments in the EU countries or in a re-nationalization of European politics and rollbacking of the European integration (Kaufmann 2018; Lehne 2018). Main developments that could generate new migration waves into the EU for the next few years are the infightings in the Northern Syria (province of Idlib), ongoing civil war in Libya or a new military escalation in Ukraine, but also a further deterioration of the EU-Turkey relations. What is more, accumulation of irregular migration flows also undermines the governance capacity of affected EU neighbourhood states, such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon (Alshoubaki and Harris 2018; Berti 2015) and may result in new conflicts or governance crisis in these countries. Other global risks with short-term negative impacts in EU's neighbourhood could also emanate from some aspects of cyber warfare (such as major attack on critical infrastructure or nuclear facility), or a quick escalation of geopolitical rivalries with involvement of hybrid tactics (e.g., assassination of Qassem Suleimani by US military), proxy wars or private military companies (such as the 2018 direct clashes between US military and the Russian PMC Wagner in Northern Syria in 2018) (Hauer 2019). On the other hand, there are various global risks which could be more probable and have a more severe impact in the medium and long term but their impact exceeds the short time span. They include some environmental risks and some aspects of technology-driven disruption (such as automation of labour force or global competition over technological supremacy).

Regarding the *probability of occurrence*, some global and diffuse risks will continue to threaten the EU and its neighbourhood with a high degree of probability but different degrees of severity: climate change and environmental risks, some developmental aspects of technology-driven disruption such as workforce automation, irregular migration and refugee flows, and global geopolitical rivalries. Other risks, such as outbreak of diseases (such as recent Covid-19 epidemy) and unconventional (nuclear and/or cyber escalation) and some AI-driven risks, possess uncertain or unknown probability but, in case of occurrence, will have equally or more severe impacts for the security and stability of the EU and its neighbourhood.

Finally, *multiplication of impact* refers to the observation that global and diffuse risks always act in tandem and multiply the effects of each other. For instance, climate exposure, environmental degradation, uncontrolled urbanization and population growth facilitate each other resulting in severe competition over basic goods, hence opening a space for a potential violence or governance breakdown (Arsenault 2017; Baconi 2018; Baylouny and Klingseis 2018). In doing so, they "add an additional layer of stress that can increase state fragility and the likelihood of conflict" (McLeman 2017: 105). Prominent examples of multiplication impact in EU's neighbourhoods include conflict over allocation of water resources in Syrian Wadi Barada region, triggered by rapid urbanization and population growth in Damascus and government's decision to divert the river water from Wadi Barada to the Syrian capital (Hiltermann 2016). Hence, a combination of uncontrolled urban-

ization, fast population growth and environmental degradation in a form of water scarcity acted as a catalyst of the Arab Spring uprising in that area (Hiltermann 2016). Similarly, some authors draw connection between the 2010–2011 China drought, breakdown of global wheat supplies and price hikes for cereals in Egypt which “influenced citizen protests, and indirectly led to regime change” (Lampietti *et al.* 2011). Therefore, overall it is hard to isolate the impacts of individual global risks on ALS and CO in the EU’s neighbourhood. What is needed instead, is to move beyond isolated analyses of individual risk factors towards exploring synergic effects of groups of risks in the EU’s neighbourhood.

GLOBAL RISKS, RESILIENCE AND GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

Impacts of global and diffuse risks and the policy solutions for their prevention and mitigation should be analysed in a combination with governance capacity and nature of state institutions of respective countries in EU’s neighbourhood regions. One significant observation is that there are inter- and intra-regional differences in EU’s neighbourhood in terms of governance capacity that requires more differentiated approach from the EU. Overall, it seems that due to better governance capacity (Fund for Peace 2019) some EaP states are better equipped to deal with the global and diffuse risks and also possess better capacities to develop some endogenous resilience measures with a targeted assistance of external actors. On the other hand, the MENA seems to be more fragmented region with few groups of states with very different degrees of governance capacity coexisting next to each other (Fund for Peace 2019). Whereas Israel, Morocco, Turkey and oil-rich Arab states do possess necessary amount of governance capacity to develop internal resilience against global and diffuse threats, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Iraq are widely considered as failed states (Fund for Peace 2019) with diminished capacity to tackle negative implications emanating from global and diffuse risks. The difference in governance quality and institutional design among the neighbourhood states should be translated into differential empowerment by the EU: The Union is advised to focus more on democratic components of societal resilience in countries that combine a better institutional capacity with a stronger civil society (Tunisia, Georgia, Ukraine). On the other hand, in countries that are stuck in civil war and have no strong domestic tradition of inclusive politics the primary focus should be on peace and institution building (Syria, Libya).

DIRECT IMPACTS OF GLOBAL AND DIFFUSE RISKS

Finally, it should also be mentioned that some of the global and diffuse risks also have a direct negative impact on EU’s security and stability, hence bypassing EU’s neighbourhood regions. These risks include, for instance, hybrid and cyber warfare tactics utilized often by Russia and China (stretching from the interference in elections of EU member states to industrial espionage and takeover of high-tech companies by Chinese state-backed corporations). The US unpredictable foreign policy under Donald Trump, which questions the US commitment to NATO and backs up Brexit, for example, threatens the basics of EU’s security and stability. Other direct global risks may include nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, the outbreak of diseases and global pandemics (such as recent outbreak of coronavirus in China) and economic consequences of Brexit (Ries *et al.* 2017) or an outbreak of a new major financial and economic crisis. Hence, when discussing the impacts of global and diffuse risks it is noteworthy to remember that often they can bypass EU’s volatile neighbourhood and have a direct impact on EU’s security, stability and economic prosperity.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. REGIONAL AND COUNTRY-SPECIFIC DIFFERENTIATION OF GLOBAL AND DIFFUSE RISKS NEEDED

For a long time, the EU instinctively tended towards a one-size-fits-all approach in its neighbourhood governance. Yet, the two neighbourhoods of the EU (the MENA and the EaP) as well as individual countries within the two groups differ significantly from each other, both in terms of their exposure to the global and diffuse risks, and the degree of governance capacity they possess to develop internal resilience against the risks. Therefore, the EU needs to develop more differentiated approach which will consider both inter- and intra-regional differences. For instance, in Libya, Syria and Yemen the ending of conflict and rebuilding of peace process should be a key objective of the EU whereas in Tunisia, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine – countries with more stable political systems and pluralist traditions - democracy promotion and support for civil society should also be an integral part of any resilience-promoting initiative.

2. PAY ATTENTION TO MULTIPLICATION EFFECTS OF GLOBAL AND DIFFUSE RISKS

Global and diffuse risks do not act in isolation but have multiplying impact on the effects of each other. For instance, in many countries of the Middle East and North Africa, climate variability, environmental degradation, water scarcity and irregular migration interact with each other in the way that it produces new conflict lines or exacerbates the existing ones. Similarly, geopolitical rivalries coupled with hybrid warfare tactics produce fruitful soil for quick escalation of violence. Therefore, when devising measures to strengthen resilience of neighbourhood countries the EU needs to consider how to tackle synergic negative impacts of more than one global and diffuse risk.

3. DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN SHORT- AND LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF GLOBAL AND DIFFUSE RISKS

Some of the significant global risks, such as climate change and environmental degradation, may have detrimental medium- and long-term results for the EU and its neighbourhood. However, short-term risks may cause even bigger threat to EU's security and stability. For instance, new waves of irregular migration may further embolden Eurosceptic forces across Europe, making EU policies including the green agenda reversible. Therefore, whereas the climate change should remain the main priority, the EU should also pay a prior attention to tackling short-term risks which possess a high spoiler potential in the short run. For instance, the EU should focus on regulating irregular migration, both by consolidating and harmonizing migration policies inside the EU, and devising policies to assist the affected neighborhood countries.

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EU-LISTCO investigates the challenges posed to European foreign policy by identifying risks connected to areas of limited statehood and contested orders. Through the analysis of the EU Global Strategy and Europe's foreign policy instruments, the project assesses how the preparedness of the EU and its member states can be strengthened to better anticipate, prevent and respond to threats of governance breakdown and to foster resilience in Europe's neighbourhoods. Continuous knowledge exchange between researchers and foreign policy practitioners is at the cornerstone of EU-LISTCO. Since the project's inception, a consortium of fourteen leading universities and think tanks have been working together to develop policy recommendations for the EU's external action toolbox, in close coordination with European decision-makers. The EU-LISTCO Policy Papers are peer-reviewed research papers based on findings from the project.

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