



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

# D7.15 EU-LISTCO Final Conference Report

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EU-LISTCO's Final Conference took place on January 20, 2:00–6:00 p.m. and January 21, 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m., 2021. The program of the conference included a series of working sessions and a public facing event, all hosted virtually by the Carnegie Europe Foundation (hereinafter referred to as Carnegie or CEF) under Work Package 7 (Knowledge Dissemination).

The aim of the final conference was to take stock of the consortium's research work over its three years of existence, review key takeaways, discuss challenges, and map out ways to carry the already completed research forward. The key concepts, namely *resilience and its sources: social trust, legitimacy, and institutional design* in the context of preventing *violence breaking out and governance breakdown in areas of limited statehood and contested orders (ALS/CO)*, formed the basis of the discussions throughout the conference. Building on these concepts, discussions expanded to policy implications and the feasibility of applying the concepts in the EU and abroad. Through the virtual format, it was possible to bring together a wide range of stakeholders from different backgrounds, including members of the consortium, think tankers, and academics from Europe and its neighbourhoods, as well as policy makers and representatives of the EU institutions.

To allow for a productive exchange of ideas and viewpoints, it was decided that four working sessions would be hosted, each designed and jointly led by two work package leaders based on their common findings and research interests. Session I was led by Work Packages (WP) 1 (Limited Statehood and Contested Orders: Conceptual Framework) and 2 (Risk Scanning and Foresight for Strategic Policy Design). Session II was led by WPs 3 (Global and Diffuse Threats and Their Effects on Limited Statehood and Contested Orders) and 4 (Risks and Threats in Areas of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders in the EU's Eastern and Southern Surroundings), and Session III was led by WPs 5 (Analysis of the Preparedness of the EU and its Member States) and 6 (Policy Responses: EU and Member States). Session IV was jointly led by the Freie Universität Berlin and CEF. External participants outside of the consortium were also able to take part in the working sessions, allowing for an exchange of ideas and wider circulation of the project's outcomes.

By convening a public-facing event, the conference also successfully served as a platform to raise awareness of the EU-LISTCO project amongst key audiences in European capitals, across Europe's neighbourhoods, and in the United States. The panellists of the public event took the opportunity to integrate (or challenge) EU-LISTCO research findings into their discussion points.

This report collects all technical details and summarises the major discussions, findings, and insights generated by the EU-LISTCO Final Conference.



## 2. CONFERENCE WORKING SESSIONS

### 2.1 TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The working sessions of the EU-LISTCO Final Conference were hosted online on January 20 and 21, 2021 and consisted of an opening session, four content sessions, and a virtual networking gathering. Additionally, a Steering Committee meeting, an Advisory Board meeting, and a virtual public event were convened as part of the conference's program.

The first working session (Session I), entitled *Key Concepts and Methods: Revisiting Benefits and Challenges*, focused on the research of Work Packages 1 and 2. It took place on January 20, 2021 from 2:15 to 3:30 p.m. CET. **Tanja A. Börzel** from Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) and **Philipp Rotmann** from the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) moderated the session. To facilitate a more detailed discussion on the concepts, participants were divided into virtual breakout rooms that were pre-assigned to maximise academic, hierarchical, and gender diversity (30 minutes). Groups were encouraged to record the results of their conversations on virtual whiteboards, which were then presented by appointed group leaders to the rest of the consortium. They were then put into context by **Tanja A. Börzel**, **Thomas Risse** (FUB), **Philipp Rotmann**, and **Siri Aas Rustad** (PRIO).

The second working session (Session II), entitled *Anticipating Governance Breakdown and Violent Conflict: Tips from the EU Neighbourhood* focused on the research of Work Packages 3 and 4. It took place on January 20, 2021 from 3:45 to 4:45 p.m. CET. **Daphné Richemond-Barak** from IDC Herzliya moderated a panel discussion featuring **Matteo Capasso** from the European University Institute (EUI), **Agnieszka Legucka** from the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), and **Amichai Magen** (IDC Herzliya).

The third working session (Session III), entitled *Resilience-Building as EU Foreign Policy: Successes, Failures, and Ways Forward*, focused on the research of Work Packages 5 and 6. It took place on January 21, 2021 from 9:00 to 10:15 a.m. CET. **Tanja A. Börzel** from the FUB chaired a panel discussion featuring **Daniela Huber** from IAI, **Christian Lequesne** from Sciences Po, and **Pol Morillas** from the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB). **Nathalie Tocci** from IAI joined the conversation as an external discussant.



Figure 1: Example of a digital whiteboard from a Session 1 breakout room

**WHERE DID EU-LISTCO CONCEPTS TURN OUT TO BE STRONG,  
WHERE DO THEY NEED WORK? WHERE SHOULD FUTURE  
RESEARCH DOUBLE DOWN, WHAT SHOULD IT RETHINK?**



The fourth working session (Session IV), entitled *Final Reflections*, provided consortium members with the occasion to reflect on the work of the consortium overall and particularly amidst the context of the pandemic in the project's last year. It took place on January 21, 2021 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. CET. The discussion was moderated by **Judy Dempsey** from Carnegie Europe Foundation and was followed by closing remarks by **Tanja A. Börzel** and **Thomas Risse**, both from the FUB.

All sessions of the final conference were convened via Zoom except for the virtual networking drinks, which were held via [www.gather.town](http://www.gather.town).



## 2.2 DISCUSSION

### SESSION I – WORK PACKAGES 1 AND 2: KEY CONCEPTS AND METHODS: REVISITING BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

The session kicked-off with an introduction of the concepts that were used in EU-LISTCO's research: areas of limited statehood, governance breakdown, contested orders, resilience, and the sources of resilience. It was noted that, before EU-LISTCO, most of these concepts had seldom been the object of systematic academic research in the context of the EU's external relations. The first task of EU-LISTCO was, therefore, to better understand these concepts, flesh out their definitions, and apply them to a series of concrete case studies selected in the context of the research programme.

Session I was consequently used as an opportunity to review the consortium's conceptual work to try to understand where it proved strong and useful and where it presented challenges, as well as to take stock of what future research in this field may look like in light of EU-LISTCO's findings.

Participants observed that intra-consortium knowledge exchanges helped them to better understand these concepts. Information sharing proved crucial at a time when different work packages focused more in-depth on different concepts.

It was highlighted that the nuances of certain terms (e.g., areas of limited statehood, resilience building) were difficult to grasp for a wider audience. The case study work also showed that certain concepts worked better in some geographical contexts than others. Some research areas (e.g., the influence of external actors on resilience building) emerged as needing further research.

It was noted that there were challenges in discussing certain concepts with policymakers and finding the same language. Differentiations were also made regarding the fact that, while resilience is a strong concept, the EU is not necessarily an effective resilience builder. Participants highlighted that continuing to clarify the different types of resilience, such as EU-LISTCO's emphasis on societal rather than state resilience, would open a meaningful way forward for further research. A case in point was how the coronavirus pandemic offered new insight into the role of societal actors that can lead to increased resilience, while also highlighting the importance of differentiating between societal and state resilience.

The risk of working with under-developed concepts was also pointed out, stressing the need to research them further to avoid the possibility of having the same concepts applied differently. Meetings and discussions throughout the span of the project helped to flesh out concept definitions, operationalizations, and remaining ambiguities. The concept of "tipping points" was discussed, as it can often be misunderstood as a tool to predict the future, but, rather, it is a useful conceptual category for helping understand how a series of conditions may impact one another. A final point was raised about early-warning tools used by the project, noting that the EU-LISTCO frameworks proved more difficult to apply when crucial quantitative data was not easily available. Finding large-N data that fit the very specific concepts was sometimes a challenge. Nevertheless, the project was ultimately able to predict violent conflict quite well.



The session was concluded by a discussion on the difference between order contestation within the rules (policy contestation) and order contestation of the rules (polity contestation). It was pointed out how difficult it can be to make this differentiation since a healthy degree of order contestation is a vital part of democratic systems.

## SESSION II – WORK PACKAGES 3 AND 4: ANTICIPATING GOVERNANCE BREAKDOWN AND VIOLENT CONFLICT: TIPS FROM THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD

This discussion homed in on lessons learned about the risks present in ALS/CO and prevention of governance breakdown and violent conflict.

Specifically, the analysis of risk clusters across the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods have highlighted three categories of risks that can potentially lead to governance breakdowns: geopolitical rivalries, universal risks (e.g., pandemics), and environmental factors such as water scarcity and uncontrolled urbanisation. Overall, these risk clusters are estimated to be prevalent in the southern neighbourhoods than in the eastern ones.

The series of presentations by the panellists kicked off with observations on the traditional research on the causes of governance breakdown and violent conflict. It was noted that this research tends to be focused on local conditions and cross-border dynamics, while societal resilience cannot be understood—nor can effective strategic foresight frameworks be developed—without systematically looking at global and diffuse risks and their interactions with local and regional conditions. In order to overcome existing prevailing “methodological nationalisms”, additional research will be needed to better understand how diffuse risks operate and materialise across the EU neighbourhoods.

Looking deeper into diffuse risks, the panellists concurred that, in most cases, diffuse risks generally act in tandem and exacerbate the impact of each other. Traditionally, the moment in which global and diffuse risks materialise with high visibility and high impact is referred to as a tipping point. However, the analytical discourse on tipping points needs to be reviewed. Research has shown that triggers for governance breakdown cannot be pinpointed to one single moment. EU-LISTCO research points to the importance of adding notions of a “cascading tipping point” and “multi-layered tipping point” to account for this complexity—the former referring to the interaction of a series of events eventually leading to governance breakdown and violent conflict, the latter capturing a scenario in which no single event can be identified as the primary cause of governance breakdown.

The conversation then moved on to the mechanisms and factors that were identified by EU-LISTCO's empirical research as playing a role in governance breakdown and violent conflict. At least three were indicated: violent extremism, political radicalism, and state capture. The nexus between violent extremism and radicalisation was critiqued, emphasizing that not all forms of radicalisation are violent and pointing to the benefits of involving nonviolent radical political groups in a broader understanding of government. The case of the integration of radical groups into the Ukrainian army was brought up as an example.





EU-LISTCO research highlighted a gap in the theoretical literature on state capture, governance breakdown, and violent conflict. It was demonstrated that state capture can also occur in the global economy and have tangible repercussions on the EU neighbourhood. For instance, tax evasion allowed replication of the state capture phenomenon in Tunisia and Moldova.

The second part of the discussion focused on policy implications for what the EU can do to prevent governance breakdown and violent conflict in its eastern and southern neighbourhoods. The panellists focused on three broad recommendations. First, the EU should address the lack of consistency between its policies at the local and international levels, such as by looking at how capital is governed globally and shared locally in neighbourhood countries. Secondly, the EU should improve and expand its toolkit to build societal resilience by going beyond traditional cooperation with state actors. Thirdly, the EU should continue developing tools and initiatives for early-warning and strategic foresight, using both human capabilities and artificial intelligence.

### SESSION III – WORK PACKAGES 5 AND 6: RESILIENCE-BUILDING AS EU FOREIGN POLICY: SUCCESSES, FAILURES, AND WAYS FORWARD

The panellists kicked off this session by jumping straight into the core of the discussion: the nature of the EU's resilience-building efforts in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. All panellists concurred that the EU is currently failing to fully conceptualise and operationalise resilience and is merely perceiving it as the opposite of fragility, often conflating it with the concept of stability and not articulating a clear resilience-building strategy.

It was stressed that the concept of resilience can also be a useful instrument to address current challenges that are leading to increased socio-economic and political inequalities. At a time when we are observing an exacerbation of these tendencies because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU should take more significant steps towards an integrated approach that includes economic and public health and climate resilience-building components.

During the discussion, the panellists put forward a few policy recommendations for the EU to become more incisive in its resilience-building efforts. First, the EU ought to consider the plurality of local actors and social norms embedded in local political institutions. While institutional reforms and capacity-building programmes do promote resilience abroad, EU blueprints should be flexible enough to adapt to local conditions. Secondly, the EU should strengthen social trust in and social trust bonds with third countries. This requires a better understanding of the local political and cultural environment in these locations. In short, engaging with local state and non-state actors will be key to any EU strategy. In this regard, WP5 and WP6 reached similar conclusions to those identified by WP4.

The panellist then delved into a second theme of the discussion: taking stock of the implications of EU policies in areas of limited statehood. Empirical studies demonstrate that it is complex and challenging to stabilise a state from the outside. Yet, the EU has been successful at containing risks (e.g., Tunisia, Bosnia) and mitigating dire situations. The EU has, however, failed to develop a long-term strategy for building resilience in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. It was



pointed out that one main challenge is the lack of coherence and alignment of EU member states in developing and implementing resilience building instruments.

Although all panellists concurred on the urgency to act on climate change, they disagreed on whether the EU was doing enough in this area. On the one hand, it was argued that EU foreign policy is the main blind spot of the EU's Green Deal, which was announced in December 2019. The EU still perceives climate as an exogenous risk from which it must guard itself. On the other hand, it was argued that most of the climate legwork has been done internally—with the EU focusing on three internal aspects that coincide with the international agenda: climate finance, climate taxonomies, and the coordination on carbon taxation policies.

When the term *resilience* initially became a part of EU jargon, its benefit was that it easily lent itself to different policy worlds. However, as the term became increasingly associated with a range of EU policies, debates flourished on its meaning and implications. A clear message among the panellists was to move beyond debates and to take action.

#### SESSION IV – FINAL REFLECTIONS SESSIONS

The final reflections session had the objective of reviewing the work of the EU-LISTCO consortium from an operational point of view and drawing lessons from those that can be of use to future collaborative efforts.

The first part of the discussion focused on the elements of strength and weakness of the consortium.

The diversity of the institutions involved was identified as one of the assets that led to the project's successful completion. Participants agreed that the geographical and disciplinary diversity facilitated creative, original conversations and findings that could not have taken place otherwise.

A second element of success was the cooperative spirit which allowed participants to bridge the gaps between the diverse range of work packages and disciplinary approaches. Success on this front was due, first and foremost, to the work of the consortium leaders, as well as to the efforts of the work package leaders and the rest of the consortium members.

Thirdly, participants highlighted that some of the formats proposed during the EU-LISTCO project, such as the close cooperation with the foreign ministries of three member states and the European External Action Service, were particularly successful and innovative and ought to be replicated in the future.

On another note, participants reflected on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the activities and outcomes of EU-LISTCO. While it was regarded as unfortunate that some activities involving travel had to be cancelled, such as the study trips (WP6) and the regional forums (WP7), which would have allowed greater contributions from civil society representatives, all consortium members agreed that moving all activities and coordination to an online set-up ultimately worked.



This was possible, once again, thanks to the coordinating efforts of the consortium and work package leaders.

A second part of the discussion took stock of the consortium's research and intellectual outputs. The tension between producing valuable academic research and translating these findings into actionable policy recommendations was stressed. While EU-LISTCO excelled on both fronts, it was noted that further work could be done by engaging foreign policy operative agencies (e.g., EU Directorate Generals) and non-state actors (e.g., the United Nations, civil society). Concrete examples were brought forward of how the research developed in the context of EU-LISTCO has spilled over into new, policy-oriented projects.

### 3. PUBLIC VIRTUAL EVENT

#### 3.1 TECHNICAL INFORMATION

EU-LISTCO's Final Conference included one public-facing event, entitled *How the EU Can Deal With Disorder at Its Doorstep*. It was hosted online and livestreamed to YouTube on Thursday, January 21, 2021 from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. CET.

For the first 30 minutes, **Judy Dempsey**, senior fellow at the Carnegie Europe Foundation and editor-in-chief of Carnegie's *Strategic Europe* blog, sat down with **Linas Linkevičius**, former Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs (2012–2020) and defence (1993–1996 and 2000–2004) for a virtual fireside chat. Dempsey and Linkevičius were then joined by **Riccardo Alcaro**, research coordinator and head of the Global Actors Program at the Istituto Affari Internazionali, and **Tanja A. Börzel**, professor and the director of the Center for European Integration at the Freie Universität Berlin.

In order to promote the event in Brussels, the European neighbourhoods, and with an audience in the United States, Carnegie created dedicated event webpages on the EU-LISTCO website and the Carnegie website. The invitation mailings targeted approximately 11,000 recipients. Tweets from EU-LISTCO's official account and consortium members promoted the event with a coordinated campaign.

The virtual fireside chat and panel were hosted by an external service provider and streamed on the Carnegie Europe YouTube channel. It proved most popular with viewers from Belgium, Germany, and the United States. It was live streamed by 71 unique viewers, while gaining more than 4,700 impressions and 415 total views at time of writing (February 26, 2021).



## 3.2 DISCUSSION

The event kicked off with welcome remarks by Judy Dempsey, who introduced the EU-LISTCO project and invited Linas Linkevičius on the virtual stage.

Dempsey and Linkevičius jumped straight into the first discussion topic: the ongoing protests in Belarus. At first, an overview of how the protests unravelled after the elections in summer 2020 was given. Special emphasis was put on the brutality of the regime's crackdown against peaceful protestors.

The discussion then moved on to take stock of the EU policies towards Belarus. It was observed that the EU has historically acted indecisively and inconsequentially when confronted with crises at its doorstep. At the same time, Russia was criticised for its continued disruptive role across the EU's eastern neighbourhood where, by behaving as a zero-sum-game actor, Moscow is seeking to establish itself as a hegemonic presence.

The panellists pointed at different factors that are currently hindering EU foreign policy. The lack of a direct, deep dialogue on foreign policy issues between EU member states is one of the biggest obstacles to incisive EU action. While the differences between member states can sometimes be deep, national experiences such as the downing of the MH17 flight or the Salisbury poisoning should be leveraged to change the intra-EU discourse and lead to common strategies. In this context, the EU should also make sure to use all the tools it has available, including wider sanctions and the EU's economic leverage.

When transatlantic relations were brought into the conversation, Dempsey and Linkevičius noted that the EU should work closely with the new Biden administration on the foreign policy dossiers crucial to the EU neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, European leaders should not be complacent and be wary that Washington might have different priorities for the regions.

When Alcaro and Börzel were brought onto the virtual stage, the conversation dived deep into the EU's perceived inability to act when confronted with crises. It was suggested that the EU's foreign policy towards its east appears to be more unified than the one towards its south. The existence of a capability-expectation's gap was highlighted, arguing that the EU should either live up to its potential or give up on the idea of a common foreign policy.

Middle-ground solutions, such as the establishment of "coalitions of the willing" including some member states, were discussed as an option for action that would not necessarily undermine EU solidarity.

Lessons learned from the Iran nuclear negotiations were also brought up. The panellists argued that the Trump administration's decision to pull out of the Iran deal and impose fresh sanctions demonstrated that economic pressure is ineffective if it is not accompanied by other measures. In a similar way, it was argued that the EU has nothing in the way of incentives that would lead to a change in Russia's strategy. Economic pressure alone is ineffective.

Moving on in the conversation, the importance of civil society engagement in the EU's neighbourhoods was highlighted, with the caveat that, in the case of Russia, this might prove insufficient to take on Putin's regime. It was also mentioned that the EU's inability to project military power is an important limitation when it comes to effective foreign policy action.

### 3.3 FOLLOW-UP

Before, during, and after the event, members of the EU-LISTCO consortium made sure that the public virtual event reached a wide audience of international and local policymakers. Information on the public event was shared and publicised through multiple channels, also leveraging Carnegie's and the consortium's international network. As the event was held virtually and on-the-record, a copy of it was retained on Carnegie's YouTube channel and made available to the public. Carnegie live-tweeted the event from the EU-LISTCO project account (@eulistco), selecting and promoting key discussion points from the panel, as well as photos of the event.

The video of the event also remains available for the public on the EU-LISTCO website.

**Figure 2:** Judy Dempsey, Linas Linkevičius, Riccardo Alcaro, and Tanja A. Börzel on the panel at "How the EU Can Deal with Disorder at Its Doorstep", January 21, 2021. Photo shared on the EU-LISTCO Twitter account



Figure 3: Example of project partner GPPI promoting the public event

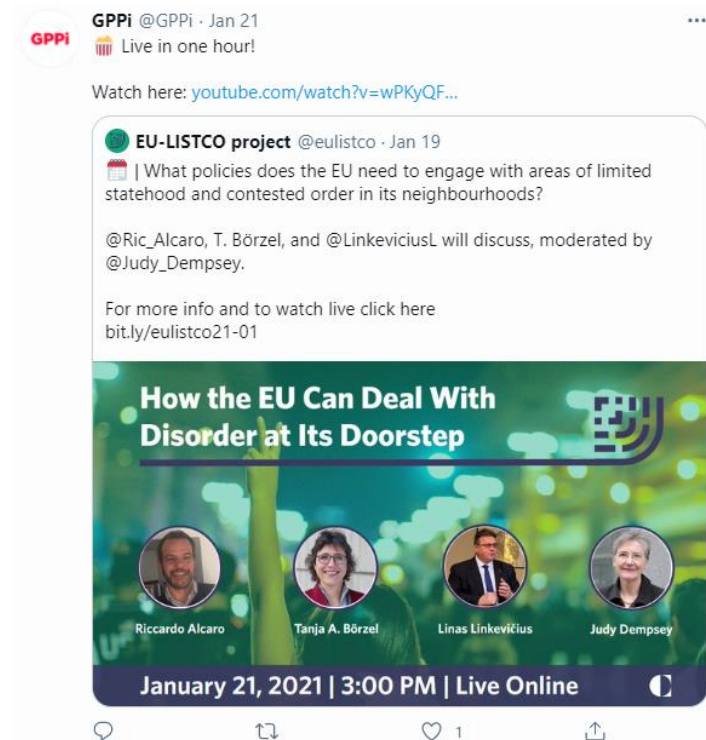


Figure 4: Example of live tweeting from the EU-LISTCO Twitter account



**Figure 5:** Screenshot of the event page on eu-listco.net, including an embedded recording of the virtual event and an event description

### How the EU Should Deal With Disorder at its Borders

Thursday, 21 January 2021  
15:00 – 16:30



WATCH ON YOUTUBE

Over the last three years, the European Union has faced fallout from areas of limited statehood and contested order just beyond its borders. Recent events in Belarus and Lebanon are two examples of how governance breakdowns abroad can threaten the EU's security.

Since 2018, the Horizon2020 EU-LISTCO project has investigated such challenges, making recommendations on how the EU can better foster resilience in its neighbourhood. As the project comes to an end, you are cordially invited to a special discussion about EU-LISTCO's findings.

The event will kick off with a fireside chat between **Judy Dempsey** and **Linas Linkevičius**, former foreign minister of Lithuania and a key voice in shaping the EU's policy toward Belarus.

Judy Dempsey and Linas Linkevičius will then be joined by **Riccardo Alcaro** and **Tanja A. Börzel** for a broader discussion on the challenges in the EU's eastern and southern neighborhoods and the opportunities that a reenergized transatlantic relationship may bring about in the region.

*To submit a question for the event, please use the YouTube chat, email [malte.peters@ceip.org](mailto:malte.peters@ceip.org), or tweet at us @eulistco.*

#### Panelists

- **Riccardo Alcaro** is research coordinator and head of the Global Actors Program at the Italian Institute of International Relations.
- **Tanja A. Börzel** is a professor and the director of the Center for European Integration at the Free University of Berlin.
- **Linas Linkevičius** is a former Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs (2012–2020) and defense (2000–2004 and 1993–1996).

#### Moderated by

- **Judy Dempsey** is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Europe Foundation in Brussels and the editor in chief of *Strategic Europe*.