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Albena Azmanova & Elena Korosteleva

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The politics of precarization in times of war and crisis: From paralysis to transformative resilience

Albena Azmanova ^a and Elena Korosteleva ^b

^aSchool of Policy & Global Affairs, City St George's University of London, London, UK;

^bDepartment of International Politics, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

The Special Forum addresses the politics of increasing precarization of society, on the one hand, and on the other, the precarization of politics itself with the growth of autocratic rule. Our focus is on the way this affects democracy's prospects, especially in extreme circumstances of war and crisis. We introduce the concept of "transformative resilience" as a potential antidote to precarity. Going beyond an entity's capacity to absorb shocks ("restorative resilience") and maintain continuity ("adaptive resilience"), "transformative resilience" denotes an entity's capability to acquire political agency and deploy it creatively in imagining and enacting alternative futures. Exploring the dynamics of transformative resilience, especially in the context of acute crises, allows us to discern new pathways for reducing precarity in a way that does not replace it with oppressive stability, but instead enables us to creatively engage our agency in navigating the complex uncertainties of modern life.

KEYWORDS War; precarity; transformative resilience; political agency; crisis

The world as we know it has ruptured, leaving us with a deep sense of insecurity. As the 21st century unfolds, our societies are engulfed by a tide of precarity—not the liberating uncertainty of modernity with its limitless horizons, but the oppressive vulnerability and a sense of paralysis that specific policies and politics have incurred. It is this state of anxious fragility that is now fueling a wider reactionary backlash (Apostolidis, 2022; Azmanova, 2020; Graetz & Shapiro, 2020; Margalit, 2019).

This Special Forum addresses the ongoing precarization of contemporary societies: on the one hand, a range of policy choices (from war-making to reducing welfare provision and silencing dissent) are rendering societies acutely vulnerable; on the other hand, the rise of autocratic rule and a drift towards

CONTACT Elena Korosteleva  elena.korosteleva@warwick.ac.uk  Department of International Politics, University of Warwick, Ramphal Building, Coventry, CV4 7AL, UK

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securitized governance are incurring the precarization of politics itself, as normative and institutional safeguards against the abuse of power are being dismantled. We are particularly interested in these dynamics' impact on the prospects of democracy and public accountability, especially in times of war and crisis.¹

Precarity in International Relations as an academic discipline has been discussed in terms of politically generated insecurity, vulnerability and instability (Vij et al., 2021). The theoretical orientation of our analysis is informed by Azmanova's approach to precarity, which foregrounds disempowerment—and thus, reduced agency—as its defining feature, experienced by individuals as incapacity to cope and by societies as inability to govern themselves (Azmanova, 2020, 2022, 2023).

War and conflict generate the most acute form of precarity, making it the most revealing setting for examining how political agency is exercised, constrained, or transformed in adverse conditions. Crisis-ridden contexts can be most instructive about the capacity for, and the nature of, societal response to precarization, and actors' ability to reclaim their agency and political will. Reasserting democratic agency—that is, social actors' capacity to collectively shape their own destiny—can take a variety of forms within the broad spectrum of practices spanning from resistance and demands for political accountability to insurrection and self-rule. We are particularly interested in the conditions that enable what we conceptualize here as “transformative resilience”—actors' capability to not only survive in the face of adversity but significantly transform themselves and/or their environment. Such resilience suggests political agency that goes beyond adjustment, and has the potential to transform society by countering the political sources of precarization.

In this Special Forum, we thus innovatively engage with the nexus between precarity as disempowerment and resilience as agents' capacity to not only resist and survive but also transform themselves and their environment in the face of adversity. We connect precarity, traditionally deployed in the fields of sociology, political theory and political economy, to international politics and international relations to explore the precarity-resilience nexus. Our goal is to understand the implications of rising precarity and its politics, especially in times of crisis, for democratic modes of governance and relations between society and the state, both domestically and internationally, and how these may be countered through resilience and the agency it reclaims. Furthermore, we also innovatively disentangle precarity from (ontological) insecurity and physical vulnerability. These features are often exploited to politically induce precarization, by way of divesting agency and diverting power and resources away from the people. We examine how international organizations (e.g., the EU and NATO) and governments tend to respond to crises, and when unable to stay fit-for-purpose, may quietly slip into self-preservation, failing to attend to the societies they are sworn to serve, making them more precarious instead. We cast a wider view on the way democracies backslide

into autocracies by e.g., securitizing dissent and how autocracies foster precarity to enhance their powers, by triggering new and aggravating old social vulnerabilities in the name of security and stability.

The issue of agency and its activation is central to this collaborative investigation, as the capacity for political engagement is often the first victim of precarization. Times of crises are particularly propitious for discerning the dynamics of agency—i.e., its emergence, enabling conditions, and forms. Beyond the standard use of “resilience” as an entity’s capacity to absorb shocks (the restorative mode of resilience) and maintain continuity (the adaptive mode), we seek to articulate an innovative notion of “transformative resilience” as an antidote to precarity. Drawing on the works of Chandler (2014) and Korosteleva (2025, 2020), we suggest that “resilience is always more” (Bargués-Pedreny, 2020), and thus, through self-organization and creative response to adversity, it enables an entity’s agential properties to embrace change and “thrive beyond the catastrophe of our times” (Evans & Reid, 2014, p. 203). This form of resilience takes advantage of the transformative potential of crises by empowering entities (society, community, individuals) to develop and articulate their agency—i.e., their political will to act, but also a capacity to imagine and pursue alternative futures. Transformative resilience thus may open new pathways for countering precarity in a way that does not replace it with oppressive stability (as aspiring autocrats now vouch) but instead enables us to creatively deploy our agency as we navigate the uncertainties of modern life.

In the next sections, we introduce our conceptual framework first, focusing on the politics of precarization, and on the interplay between insecurity and resilience, followed by a brief discussion of the Forum’s contributions and their main arguments.

The politics of precarization: responsibility-without-power meets power-without-responsibility

“... The best way to get people not to be political is to make them precarious”
(George, 2016, p. 140)

A decade ago, Mathew Burrows and Oliver Gnad (2017) aptly labeled our reality as the “VUCA world”—of growing vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. While this has not happened overnight, it still left us unprepared for what lies ahead, placing our lifeworlds at risk. We cannot help but find ourselves in a state of constant eco- and crisis-anxiety; we are no longer sure who our friends or foes are, nor what rules and norms should guide us. Instead, we witness how one state expunges another from near-existence under the banner of justice; how a once-fraternal nation turns “relations by blood” into a blood-bath; how climate-change deniers increase the risks of planetary collapse, and

how the once-formidable security architecture of Europe—designed to protect and prevent—has fractured, revealing dynamics of domination and profiteering. We appear to have forfeited our familiar normative anchorage—indeed, our moral compass—and replaced it with a principle of the survival of the fittest, or rather the richest, in a world of “deal-making” and “deal-breaking,” stripped of ethics. As Mark Carney, Canadian Prime Minister, observed in his remarks at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026, we are witnessing “the end of a pleasant fiction, and the beginning of a harsh reality,” a world in which “the large main powers are submitted to no limits, and no constraints” (World Economic Forum, 2026).

This is not even the world of hyped-up existential insecurity any more, or escalating vulnerabilities into dangers and threats—conditions that might once have been managed through social contract or resisted through protests. Neither mitigation nor resistance is now deemed “politically deliverable” or effective because:

the legitimacy deal between citizens and public authority has effectively altered in such a way as to absolve the state from its primary social responsibility of maintaining a correlation between risk and opportunity, a key legitimization resource of democratic capitalism (Azmanova, 2020, p. 124).

What we see instead is the spreading epidemic of precarity (Azmanova, 2023) that has replaced the familiar insecurity of modern life with vulnerability that is politically induced and maintained, while the social contract withers further away. We see it everywhere: In the UK, as successive administrations of all political colors incrementally narrow long-established rights and freedoms; in France, in the fighting to keep the broken welfare state alive, or the US’ funneling its greatness into the hands of the few. Precarity, however, hits the fledgling democracies harder: e.g., Slovakia’s democratic backsliding has been overlooked in exchange for its endorsement of the EU’s position on Ukraine. Around the world, nearly three out of four people have lived in autocracies since the early 2020s, subjected to precarious existence; and, for the first time in twenty years, autocratic regimes outnumber democracies, owing to the continuing disempowerment of citizens and deepening polarization (Democracy Without Borders, 2025).

Precarity is not simply—and not always—about insecurity. The etymological origins of the term “precarity” in the Latin *prex/precis* (a prayer or request) connote something obtained by entreaty, granted through favor or begging, thereby making us dependent on the will of another. This highlights the difference between insecurity (which can be beneficial to agency as it opens up a horizon of possibilities for action) and disempowerment that is antithetical to agency.

Indeed, precarity’s impact on political agency is deeply detrimental, especially when it concerns democracy as a form of governance. As

precarization is experienced by individuals as incapacity to cope due to deficient material or ideational resources to do what lies in one's own responsibility, it thwarts actors' ability to effectively engage in the political process (Azmanova, 2023). This is particularly visible in fledgling democracies hit by a crisis or war. Alas, this entrapment describes the current predicament of many democracies, marked as they are by personalist politics, as well as that of international organizations that are increasingly impotent yet resisting reform.

The consequences of this epidemic of precarity are far-reaching. It is not just about losing control over our lives in the face of danger: after all, "exposure to threats is a constitutive process in the development of living systems" (Evans & Reid, 2014, p. 30). The epidemic of precarity goes far deeper and beyond a sense of "living dangerously" with threats and crises. It targets and amplifies our vulnerabilities so as to deliberately impose society's subjugation to the state, the institutions, unelected elites, and the "greater powers," without questioning their authority or the order they impose. It is about us being politically manipulated into a state of compliance and submission in exchange for protection and security, and about the illusory sense of safety and comfort we are granted in return.

One of the key mechanisms of precarization, widely used by public authorities even in consolidated democracies, is to shift responsibility downward during crises while accumulating decision-making power at the top, invoking security and stability as justification (Azmanova, 2020, p. 115). This drift toward securitized governance—a political reorientation in which the state increasingly frames social and economic issues as security threats, legitimizing law-and-order expansion, intensified policing, and heightened military expenditure—has been the default reaction even in the so-called "mature" democracies. Without public scrutiny or other mechanisms binding central authority to the public interest, the core political institutions can quickly lose the agility to stay fit-for-purpose, thus spiraling into "socially irresponsible rule" (Azmanova, 2013, p. 25; 2016, pp. 158–160) and eventually autocracy. In all cases, we can also see how demagogic rhetoric, despite its overt anti-establishment stance, serves one purpose only—to preserve those in power (including the institutions), while making society as a whole ever more precarious.

The danger lies in the depletion of people's capacity—and political will—to imagine "the good life," let alone to fight for it. Any crisis, which now seems permanent and omnipresent, amplifies that danger manifold, removing checks and balances from the system altogether. Thus begins a vicious spiraling into a new normal—one marked by the negation of public authority's accountability and social responsibility, the further disempowerment of citizens, and eventually hollowing out democracy as a political project of collective self-authorship. Consequently, political institutions meant to serve

the public interest are no longer fit-for-purpose and, to survive, as Nathalie Tocci (2026) and Michelle Pace and Christian Achraimer (2026) highlight in their contributions to this Special Forum, increasingly prioritize self-preservation and, to that purpose, suppress dissent, thereby inducing political precarization at home and abroad.

Precarity fosters preferences for stability, as well as demands for its fast delivery. Thus, precarity becomes a breeding ground for public appetites for an autocratic style of rule—appetites that are on the rise within liberal democracies, and even more acutely in societies affected by conflict and war. Thus, if precarity emerges as *responsibility-without-power*, its corollary is *power-without-responsibility*—i.e., autocracy (Azmanova, 2020, pp. 115–120, 176; 2023). Contemporary capitalism distributes responsibility downwards, generating citizens’ disempowerment, while concentrating power and resources upwards, by oligarchic and autocratic turns in nominally democratic societies. The consequences for political agency are grave: it is either stymied, or “the creative energies of social discontent are trapped by conservative instincts—it is fear that currently directs social unrest into the reactionary path of xenophobia and autocratic calls for law and order” (Azmanova, 2020, p. 176).

Precarity, not ontological insecurity, as a conceptual compass

Insecurity is the hallmark of modernity; uncertainty is its pulse. Whether it is about what Joseph Schumpeter, following Karl Marx, described as capitalism’s “incessant gale of creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 83) or science’s escaping human control and engendering unfathomable risks—modern life is incorrigibly “liquid,” to invoke Zygmunt Bauman’s depiction of instability as the defining condition of modernity (2000, p. 2). And yet, this endemic instability resulting in uncertainty and the lack of control, has acquired in recent years features that have invited the use of a new term—*precarity*, to describe a condition that can neither be equated with modernity’s pervasive uncertainty nor more broadly with the inherent fragility of human life.

The term “precarity” (rather than precariousness) was introduced some 30 years ago in the field of political theory and political economy to address the politically manufactured destabilization of lives and livelihoods that neoliberal globalization incurred, marked as it is by insecure employment, commons divestment, trade-union erosion, and increased policy commitments to competitiveness in the global economy (Azmanova, 2020; Bourdieu, 1998; Butler, 2004; Kalleberg, 2018; Kasmir, 2018/2023).

Precarity is increasingly recognized as the defining social affliction of our era. The term has come to describe a shared human condition of vulnerability, caused by threats to lives, livelihoods and lifeworlds (Azmanova,

2023; Butler, 2004). Research on precarity began in the 1990s, when the concept mainly referred to the precarious conditions of low-skilled workers on poorly paid, temporary jobs (e.g., Kalleberg, 1999; Standing, 1999). After the 2008 financial crisis, attention shifted to inequality. Recently, precarity has been viewed as a broader phenomenon, impacting people across class, age, gender, professional occupation, and even income levels (Azmanova, 2020; Choonara et al., 2022).

Precarity as a condition of politically generated disempowerment, as discussed above, is distinct not only from the vulnerability that physical dangers inflict, but also from the absence of the certainty that R.D. Laing named “ontological security”—the “basic existential position,” from which a person encounters life with a firm sense of reality and identity (Laing, 1960, p. 39).

Precarity is marked not so much by insecurity (be it physical or ontological) but by individual and societal incapacity to cope with adversity, resulting ultimately in the inability to assume authorship of our personal and collective destiny—in a word, to be agents. What has erased our agency is not the ever-intensifying, maddening complexity of modern life, but specific policies and politics that have systematically deprived us of the resources and creativity we need to be resilient and transformative agents—from reduced employment security and shrinking social safety nets to the demolition of the international liberal order.

By treating insecurity as the essence of precarity, much of the literature collapses the distinction between physical vulnerability, ontological insecurity, and precarity itself. This distinction, however, is critical to discerning a capacity to act and an ability to activate this agency in response to change.

In contrast to vulnerability and insecurity (which are inherent aspects of the human condition), precarity is politically produced by binding, politically sanctioned decisions. Such policies range from military aggression (like Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and Netanyahu’s devastation of Gaza and later Lebanon) to the neoliberal assault on the commons (by way of reducing public spending on essential services such as healthcare), to job insecurity for the sake of increasing companies’ competitiveness in the global market. One of the key mechanisms of precarization in the time of neoliberal capitalism is the growth of responsibilities that are being placed on individuals and societies, and the parallel depletion of resources at their disposal (such as money, time, energy, and skills). It is this discrepancy between responsibility and power that engenders the experience of precarity as incapacity to cope (Azmanova, 2022, 2023). On the level of individual lives, precarity, thus defined, is harmful to both people’s material and psychological wellbeing; on the level of society, it hampers its capacity to manage adversity and govern itself, and on the level of states—it induces crises and adversity significantly inhibiting the capacity of institutions (e.g., NATO) and political

entities to act. Triggers of this dynamic can be threats to lives, livelihoods and lifeworlds—wars, job insecurity, or assaults on one's culture.

The use of the concept of precarity in international relations is recent. Adverse conditions have typically been discussed through the conceptual centrality of insecurity, and more recently of "ontological insecurity." The latter term was first developed within sociology, psychology and existential philosophy to designate a failed sense of continuity, coherence, and stability in one's identity and lived experience—the lack of a stable sense of self grounded in predictable routines, coherent narratives and trust in one's own and others' reality (Giddens, 1991; Laing, 1960). Debates on ontological insecurity branched out into two strands (Gellwitzki, 2025): some viewing ontological security as an unattainable state, as it is impossible to reconcile the subject's multiple identifications (Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi, 2020); and others (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020) arguing that there are ways to achieve coherence as the subjects use their capacity to adapt and transform. All schools of thought converge on the idea that (ontological) insecurity is to be countered/mitigated via mechanisms of anxiety management, identity stabilization, or re-embedding actors in predictable social routines—i.e., maximizing security. As Jennifer Mitzen observes, under conditions of acute ontological insecurity when actors experience deep uncertainty or anxiety about who they are, they tend to retreat into rigid forms of basic trust, which makes securitization a predictable identity-stabilizing response (Mitzen, 2006, 2013, 2018). Such identity-stabilizing responses can emerge along the horizontal trajectory of exclusionary and militant collective identity and/or the vertical trajectory of law-and-order policies delivered by an autocratic incumbent.

These accounts have an ingrained conservative bias: the subject's capacity to act (which is presupposed) is to be actualized through several stabilizing strategies. Azmanova's understanding of precarity, which we deploy here, opens a different perspective: even as precarity might be caused by insecurity-inducing practices and events, its essence is disempowerment, experienced as incapacity to cope. If precarity is marked by the evisceration of agency and political will, it therefore cannot be countered/mitigated by the usual mechanisms of enhancing ontological security. In other words, ontological and physical insecurity are not constitutive features of precarity. They might be causal factors of, and/or triggers for precarity, but not necessarily its components, because physical threats and anxiety are *not* detrimental to agency. That is why insecurity itself does not constitute precarity; disempowerment does. Such disempowerment occurs when one lacks the resources to meet one's responsibilities. In conditions of radical uncertainty, we might still have the resources to cope, especially as communities: to manage the challenges we face and even transform and improve the conditions of life. We undertake here an examination of this capacity of

communities (from international organizations like the EU and NATO to states like Uzbekistan and civil society groups/actors across Europe and Central Asia) to build their own agency, or capacity to act and shape their own destiny, in adverse circumstances—or what we call “transformative resilience” as an antidote to precarity.

Transformative resilience as becoming political, again

If precarity is politically generated, can it be undone by political means? As we have argued elsewhere (Korosteleva, 2025), the VUCA world has been constructed by neoliberal modernity as a separation of the human subject from the world, with the latter seen as full of exogenous dangers, risks, and uncertainty; and the former requiring protection and resources to ensure the greatest possible readiness for facing adversity. This framing renders insecurities and vulnerabilities as natural, rather than induced, and the human as always “vulnerable,” threatened and circumscribed, in search of protection. In this neoliberal VUCA world, the only way to survive is to restore, adapt and maintain continuity—this appears to be achieved by delegating decisional power to the authorities on how best to handle crises, while enjoying a semblance of autonomy in the (personal) duty to make oneself fit for handling adversity—the normative fantasy of a self-sufficient, ever-coping, “so-called perfectly resilient subject” living in dangerous times (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Evans & Reid, 2014)—befitting the precarious world. This resilient subject would always struggle for survival, exposed to actual or anticipated hardship, seeking the protection of powerful patrons while invariably prioritizing the self over others. This so-called resilient subject “has accepted the imperative not to resist or secure themselves from the difficulties they are faced with, but instead adapt to their enabling conditions” (Evans & Reid, 2014, p. 72). In this world of politically induced precarity, a sense of social responsibility thus becomes replaced by “care for oneself,” which naturalizes vulnerability and insecurity as an incurable condition of loneliness, powerlessness and futility: one can never be in full possession of the resources needed to carry out arduous (social) responsibilities. This is how the resilient subject is condemned to be a precarious one—as they find themselves perpetually in a condition of responsibility-without-power (Azmanova, 2023; Korosteleva, 2025).

This is not how we articulate the resilient subject in this volume and elsewhere, following Korosteleva’s work (2019, 2025). The term “resilience” entered mainstream usage several decades ago (Bourbeau, 2018), and was commonly understood as a capacity to absorb disruption and to recover, adapt, or regain form after difficulty. While conceptually diverse, resilience presents a critical framework for managing uncertainty and helping us understand how social actors (individual or collective) can navigate adversity

and crisis while maintaining their integrity and vision. In this volume, we innovatively focus on “transformative resilience” as the capacity of social actors to develop agency and exercise it in an emancipatory, transformative manner. In line with Braun et al. (2019), we hold that agency in IR is not an inherent property of actors but a situational, performative, and materially mediated accomplishment that emerges through concrete practices and networks.

We know that precarity is politically debilitating as it leaves “neither space nor energy for engagement in larger battles about the kind of lives we want to live” (Azmanova, 2020, pp. 165–166). However, research on the impact of precarity on agency is in its infancy, and systematic case-studies are still lacking. Some recent developments belie the diagnosis of “agency paralysis.” Thus, in July 2025, Ukraine witnessed its first nationwide anti-government protests since the start of Russia’s invasion—an extraordinary civic mobilization under martial law, sparked by President Zelenskyy’s controversial move to dismantle key anti-corruption institutions (Gozzi, 2025). This is a surprising instance of democratic agency, which goes against the expectations that under conditions of “just war” citizens would suspend dissent in favor of national unity, subordinating demands for accountability to the imperatives of survival and resistance. Instead, the protests revealed a resilient civic ethos—one that insists that democratic vigilance must persist even in wartime, and that the legitimacy of the state depends not only on its capacity to defend territory, but on its fidelity to justice. This was an exemplary instance of what we call here “transformative resilience”—democratic actors fighting not just to recover state sovereignty but going beyond restorative resilience as they aspire for a better Ukraine.

Conditions of hardship that exacerbate precarity are a perfect test-case for the impact of precarity on democratic agency. This is what this Forum aims to deliver. We therefore ask: what enables conflict-ridden or deeply deprived communities to not only resist and survive but also remain so affirmative about their futures in the face of adversity and ensuing precarity? Discerning the enabling conditions of transformative resilience in the contexts of war and other crises would supply invaluable lessons for other societies afflicted by politically induced precarity.

The emancipatory agency that is implied by the notion of “transformative resilience” we advance here would require a capacity to comprehend autonomously and assess critically one’s circumstances, including an ability to attribute responsibility for the adversity actors face; to perceive options for action, make choices, and acquire the resources necessary to pursue the chosen course of action in solidarity with others. We refer to this capacity as “transformative” in the sense that it implies both the ability to discern forward-looking alternatives as well as a will to act on them—in contrast to the *adaptive* and *restorative* modes of resilience, in which actors either

adjust themselves to adverse circumstances or strive to recover a lost status quo.

Does transformative resilience eliminate precarity? No. Transformative resilience actualizes political agency that goes beyond adjustment and has the *potential* to transform the system of precarity. It is where the struggle against precarity begins.

In view of the “democratic agency” perspective, central to our inquiry, we are particularly interested in the resilient subject’s capacity to engage in solidaristic action with others around shared grievances and emancipatory projects. What are the enabling conditions for such a mode of thinking and acting? For instance, is a commitment to a shared identity or vision of “the good life” a necessary condition for transforming the adaptive and restorative modes of resilience into a transformative one? For example, the protests of Belarus-2020 favor this argument, but not those of Belarus-2016 or 2010. Why did Belarus-2020 become the watershed, and what prerequisites could necessitate the tipping point(s) for “precarity” by means of “transformative resilience”?

Jennifer Mitzen (2006) has argued that under conditions of ontological insecurity, the “search for stability” hardens into defensive identity-protection, which then manifests as securitization, which induces precarity. Are struggles against precarity doomed to fall into this nefarious dynamic that in fact deepens precarity while promising to alleviate it? We do not claim that transformative resilience guarantees a progressive trajectory of social change. Our claim is more modest: namely, that transformative resilience can be the antidote to precarity because it engenders agency and with this, it enables change. This process can range from the rise of fascism as a new dynamic of oppression to the emancipatory popular uprisings against authoritarianism now symbolized worldwide by the names of two public squares: “Maidan” and “Tiananmen.”

The examples of the emancipatory mode of transformative resilience are numerous. It is showcased in Veronika Pfeilschifter and Bidzina Lebnidze’s account (2026) of Georgians’ resisting the state’s penetration of social space to control dissent, and in Katsiaryna Lozka’s analysis (2026) of the popular resistance to Lukashenka’s regime in and beyond Belarus. Time and again, even in the harshest conditions of precarization (e.g., solitary confinement or severe beating) people demonstrate their tenacity, creativity and resourcefulness through solidarity, support infrastructures and collective action. The intense, egalitarian mode of togetherness, the feeling of shared humanity that emerges in such liminal situations—what Victor Turner (1969) has called “*communitas*” to distinguish it from “community”—is a dynamic of empowerment that is constituted by the shared experience, and not by predetermined notions of exclusionary belonging.

These Georgians, Belarusians, as well as Palestinians and displaced Russians, objected to their countries' repression and increasing precarization by fleeing their land, and rising up in protest. As showcased by Michelle Pace and Christian Achraimer (2026), and Chiara von Hollen-Pierobon (2026), respectively, these actions demonstrate their political agency and political will, taken elsewhere to change their countries' future. For many of them, precarity is not just endogenous and context-laden; it also comes in the form of international institutions and powers' failure to support their struggle effectively, instead procrastinating in their decision-making and resource allocation. Countering this oppressive precarity begins with building transformative resilience—that is, protecting and nurturing political agency, by the people, and for the people.

As we noted, transformative resilience is not about survival or adaptation, about restoring the initial condition and maintaining stability, for precarity will still be part of such a process. Because transformative resilience is agential and creative, it has the power to significantly disturb and even reduce a system's precarity, understood as disempowerment. This process of generating agency draws on dynamics of collaboration that activate the social memory of struggle and resistance; it is energized by communities' philosophies of living, self-organization, and social dreaming, thereby making it possible to reject their precarious living and embrace more affirmative futures. In this volume, and other work, we show how communities draw on support infrastructures of communal ties, innate meanings of land, cultural artifacts and religion, but also civic action and solidarity. All these components of transformative resilience, when triggered by adversity, empower communities rather than isolate the individual, thus contributing to their sense of agency, solidarity and belonging, and diminishing a sense of precarity. We see it in so many stoic examples of resistance and change, as in the case of refugee communities mentioned above, and in the collective agency of people in Uzbekistan to resist Russia's pressure as showcased by Timur Dadabaev and Akram Umarov (2026) in this volume.

Most importantly, we see how transformative resilience can grow into a political force, usually from below, in the process of agents' charting alternative futures in rejection of their precarious past. We see how this sense of community raises political awareness and mobilizes storytelling that becomes a catalyst for action, especially in times of war and crisis. The exploration of the enabling conditions for fighting precarity through building transformative resilience is only preliminary, and we hope it will lead to further, more in-depth examinations of the specific conditions and "tipping points" for the creative agency to transform the systemic conditions of "precarity," and our acting on it. This is, however, not the immediate task of this volume.

Forum's structure and contributions

This Forum explores a range of issues associated with the increasing precarization of politics and its enabling conditions, affecting or incapacitating public political response, especially in times of war and crisis. The latter normally exposes hidden cracks and ruptures in governance and state-society relations, including moral and ethical dilemmas that arise from e.g., the need to protect one's own citizenry or maintain order by eliminating "alien life" and public dissent. War and crisis also show how the public and communities of relations can stand up and reclaim their transformative capacity, even in times of martial law, for the sake of democracy.

The Forum opens with Nathalie Tocci's contribution (2026) examining the European quest for strategic autonomy to be capable of confronting external and internal security threats, especially in the increasing precarization of Euro-Atlantic relations and Putin's continuing war. Tocci highlights the paradox of precarity for Europe: while NATO and EU institutions are set to protect and ensure peace, prosperity and security for their peoples, their inertia and risk-aversion inadvertently induce not just the public's but also their own precarity, diminishing their responsiveness and political will to act. While wrangling about their resources and dependencies, their political agency becomes depleted, switching on a "self-preservation" mode instead. Whether Europe will find a way out of this precarity paradox remains unclear, although a sense of crisis and public pressure, as Tocci observes, may act as a catalyst to the EU's transformative resilience as a will to act.

Michelle Pace and Christian Achraimer (2026) draw similar parallels in the EU response to the case of Palestine. They claim that the EU, through the lack of political will and proactive response, has instead induced a deep state of political precarization in Palestine, which now legitimizes occupation and erodes the democratic foundations and the political agency of the Palestinian people. The Palestine case stands as both a warning and a challenge, prompting reflection on how to resist the normalization of political precarity and rekindle transformative resilience drained by inaction and fractured political agency.

The next four articles contextualize political precarization and its enabling conditions with a focus on wider geographies of the EU, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Notably, Chiara von Hollen-Pierobon (2026) focuses on self-organization and resistance of Russian refugees settled in Europe after fleeing the war against Ukraine. While experiencing difficulties of integration and securing livelihoods, many emigrants nevertheless demonstrate a strong sense of political agency and commitment to find their political "voice after exit," even without having been politically active before. Their precarization makes their neutrality impossible, thus engendering their will to resist no matter what. In turn, Katsiaryna Lozka (2026) explores a near-existential

precarity and political repression of the Lukashenka regime in Belarus. She unpacks the nature of precarity and its enabling conditions in e.g., political prisons as a dehumanizing space for embedded precarity as absolute disempowerment. She adds to this a dimension of transnational repression as a tool of physical precarity, aiming to disable political agency by means of fear and continued transborder repression. Yet, these ubiquitous tools of disempowerment at the disposal of Lukashenka's regime, paradoxically, lead, if anything, to the consolidation and endurance of the political will and agency of the Belarusians to act, through transformative resilience, to reclaim their sovereignty and land. A similar narrative is offered by Veronika Pfeilschifter and Bidzina Lebanidze (2026), who unpack the increasing precarization of politics, under the ruling party of Georgia, "Georgian Dream," in the South Caucasus. They explain how the state uses precarity by imposing legal-institutional constraints, and raising the costs for political resistance, including serious economic consequences for people's livelihoods, to silence protests and undermine the resilience of Georgian civil society. This is further exacerbated by the EU's limited leverage to support civic resilience, undermined and circumvented by the state's legal framework.

Finally, in another geography, Timur Dadabaev and Akram Umarov (2026) examine Central Asia, with a particular focus on Uzbekistan, under the political pressure of Russia to comply with and endorse the latter's course of war, by leveraging various tools of economic and political dependencies to induce precarity. While skilfully navigating this landscape of coercion, Uzbekistan demonstrates a remarkable degree of political agency and a will to keep the reform momentum going while building a collective regional resistance to this pressure. The authors contend that through ostensible compliance with Russia's demands, Uzbekistan has developed a layered strategy to fend off externally imposed precarization—by way of enhancing regional consolidation, sovereign identity, and political actorness to withstand oppressive precarity from Russia.

In conclusion, this Special Forum innovatively connects deepening precarity as a political malaise of our times, to transformative resilience, to argue that precarity, as a state of politically induced disempowerment of individuals and societies, cannot be effectively countered by policies of stabilization and securitization—these only aggravate precarity as they eviscerate democratic agency. To regain that creative agency, we need to nurture transformative resilience—the capacity and political will of actors to improve their social and natural environments, as well as themselves.

Note

1. This Special Forum draws its conclusions from the contributions confined in their geographic coverage to the European Union, its neighborhoods

(Palestine in the south, and Belarus and Georgia in the east), and Central Asia (with Uzbekistan as the case-study). To this effect, the study remains limited in its generalizations.

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ORCID

Albena Azmanova  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2471-2016>

Elena Korosteleva  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2807-738X>

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