



HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
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**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

on the European Preparedness Union Strategy

Introduction

Peace and stability are intrinsic to the European project. Yet, Europe faces a new reality, marked by growing risks and deep uncertainty. Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, rising geopolitical tensions, state-sponsored hybrid and cyberattacks, sabotage targeting critical assets, foreign information manipulation and interference, and electronic warfare, have become a permanent feature of today's reality. This is a wake-up call for Europe.

The COVID -19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and showed that the Union's health services and supply chains, including for energy, medical products, food and critical raw materials, can be profoundly disrupted. In the current context of harsh geopolitical and economic competition, and conflict, they are increasingly vulnerable to economic manipulation and coercion.

Moreover, the EU is more and more exposed to the consequences of climate change, continued environmental degradation and the risk of further pandemics. Europe is the continent that is heating the fastest. It has experienced devastating natural disasters, from floods to droughts and forest fires, coastal erosion, heat and cold waves and storms. If not addressed by improving the structural capacity of our societies to manage risks, the human, economic and social costs of climate change will only increase in the years to come including growing pressure from the negative impact of climate change in other parts of the world, for example disruptions in trade routes and global supply chains. Climate, environment and security are strongly interlinked.

Europe has responded to these crises with unprecedented speed and determination, showing solidarity and resilience. It has rapidly set up a Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, developed a policy to jointly procure vaccines against COVID-19 and created the SURE¹ and NextGenerationEU programmes to address its economic and social impact. The Commission led the way with solutions to alleviate the surge in energy prices and ensure security of supply including with innovative transport solutions. Millions of Ukrainian refugees found shelter and hospitality in the EU. European tools like the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and the EU strategic reserve of European disaster response capabilities and stockpiles (rescEU) have shown their added value.

None of the major crises of the past years were isolated or short-lived. They are part of a broader trend driven by long term political, economic, climatic, environmental and technological changes. Europe cannot afford to remain reactive.

The Niinistö Report on Preparedness and Readiness of the EU² concluded that strengthening Europe's civilian and military preparedness and readiness to address today's growing challenges and future crises is a matter of urgency. The report called for a profound change of mindset and recognised that preparedness is not only a national responsibility but a shared European endeavour requiring a stronger role for the Union in coordinating and supporting Member States.³ This Strategy builds on the Niinistö Report and provides an action plan towards a Preparedness Union.

¹ The temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in and Emergency

² [Safer Together](#) – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness

³ This Strategy also builds on the EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 and the European Council conclusions of June 2023, March 2024, and December 2024, the Commission Political Guidelines 2024-2029.

Why we need a Preparedness Union

Over time, the EU has developed and reinforced its multiple tools to build structural resilience to tackle some types of risks and to respond to crises in a number of sectors. However, experience has highlighted a number of shortcomings in the EU preparedness framework.

First, the EU crisis management is mostly reactive, rather than pro-active. This is also due to an insufficient use of strategic foresight, anticipation, and early warning tools. An integrated assessment of risks, threats and of their cascading effects, including from outside the Union, is missing.

Second, the EU crisis management toolbox is fragmented across different institutions, services and agencies, and suffers from sectoral and cross-border coordination gaps. There is a deficit in civil-military coordination, and the connection between internal and external EU action needs to be strengthened.

Third, existing structures and mechanisms at EU level have limits of scale and resources. Crisis response is driven by a limited whole-of-society engagement, including with the private sector. There is a lack of flexibility in Union funding mechanisms and insufficient strategic alignment of national budgets.

The Preparedness Union will bring added value to Member States actions, namely by complementing national efforts, enhancing coordination and efficiency and fostering a culture of preparedness and resilience while fully respecting subsidiarity, national competences, and the specificities of Member States. It supports Member States' obligation to act in a spirit of solidarity and help each other in all types of crises, in line with Art 222 TFEU⁴.

The overall goal of the Preparedness Union is to create a secure and resilient EU with the capabilities required to anticipate and manage threats and hazards, independently of their nature or origin, to ensure that European citizens have adequate protection and preparedness, and to preserve the vital functions of the society in all circumstances. It requires a new preparedness mindset. Raising awareness and empowering all stakeholders, including citizens, to take care of their individual and collective preparedness is critical.

A better-prepared Europe requires stronger coordination among Member States, as well as other stakeholders and international partners, particularly enlargement and neighbourhood partners, whose preparedness and resilience are critical to our own security. The EU's research and innovation sector has an essential contribution to make, allowing continuously adapted, optimised and state-of-the-art responses to crisis. The research and innovation sector should invest in awareness and resilience against security risks and hybrid threats, also when collaborating internationally.

How we build a Preparedness Union

To address the existing shortcomings in the EU action and moving towards a real Preparedness Union, the Strategy builds on the following principles:

- = An **integrated all-hazards approach**, which covers the full spectrum of natural and human-induced risks and threats and brings together all the available tools.
- = A **whole-of-government approach**, which brings together all relevant actors, across all levels of government (local, regional, national, and EU), promotes collaboration, policy coherence and sharing of resources. It aims to address in a comprehensive

⁴ "The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster (...)"

manner increased risks and threats, their interaction, and their cascading effects. It includes effective cooperation between the civilian and defence authorities, and the coherent integration of internal and external dimensions.

- = A **whole-of-society approach**, which fosters an inclusive culture of preparedness and resilience involving citizens, local communities and civil society, businesses and social partners as well as the scientific and academic communities.

Robust preparedness does not come for free. Investments in preparedness imply costs, but these are outweighed by the long-term gains in resilience, reduced disruptions, lower recovery expenditures, and long-term competitiveness. EU-level financing must operate with flexibility, scalability and be targeted to address all hazards, to allow the Union to act timely and in solidarity throughout all phases of a crisis, in full respect of the respective responsibilities of the EU and Member States. In this respect, factoring in preparedness and resilience considerations in the EU budget programmes from the start, may help reduce vulnerabilities and exposure to risks, reducing the cost of remedial action.

To build a Preparedness Union in line with those principles, the Strategy builds on the Disaster Resilience Goals⁵ to anticipate, prepare, alert, respond and secure. It proposes actions around the seven areas:

- Foresight and anticipation
- Resilience of vital societal functions
- Population preparedness
- Public-private cooperation
- Civil-military cooperation
- Crisis response coordination
- Resilience through external partnerships

The Strategy sets out 30 key actions addressing one or more objectives under the above areas and is accompanied by an action plan (see Annex).

This Strategy complements and is complemented by other key EU initiatives, notably the Internal Security Strategy, the White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030, the European Climate Adaptation Plan, the Critical Medicines Act, the Clean Industrial Deal, the European Ocean Pact, the European Democracy Shield, the Union of Skills, and the Union of Equality.

1. FORESIGHT AND ANTICIPATION

Time is of essence in acute crises, but also for their anticipation. Strategic foresight, situational awareness, and early warning are key and must be further strengthened. Early identification of risks and threats can buy precious time and help avert crises or make it easier to manage them and minimise their impact. Cross-sectoral EU-level risk assessments, based on evidence, informed by scientific advice, and accompanied by regular stress tests and threat assessments, are essential.

⁵ European Disaster Resilience Goals - European Commission: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/european-disaster-risk-management/european-disaster-resilience-goals_en

EU capabilities need to include fully interoperable, end-to-end and multi-hazard early-warning systems, fed by timely and reliable data to better inform decision-makers on risks and their potential interrelated effects.

An all-hazards approach for pulling together risk and threat assessments needs to provide actionable insights for decision-making, enabling sustained EU action to deter and respond to threats more effectively. This must align national and EU-level risk assessments, integrating data and expert analysis in a cross-sectoral and cross-border approach.

A framework for systematic evaluation, stress tests and training should be the cornerstone of a culture of continuous improvement. Regular fitness tests of the EU's crisis-management mechanisms, tools and instruments need to: (i) ensure their fitness and coherence; (ii) make it possible to identify best practices as well as gaps and redundancies; and (iii) help maximise synergies and efficiency.

Key actions

1) Develop an EU comprehensive risks and threats assessment

To ensure a fully integrated approach, the Commission and the High Representative, supported by EU Agencies, will develop a comprehensive (cross-sector, all-hazards) EU risk and threat assessment. It will integrate insights from multiple policy areas including internal and external security and will be based on scientific analysis, EU-funded research and innovation, real-time early-warning systems, satellite monitoring and geospatial data, such as Copernicus Emergency Management Service, as well as existing EU-level and national assessments and business insights. The exercise will streamline reporting obligations, avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens while improving efficiency. The 'Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity' (SIAC) role as the single point of entry for Member States' intelligence will be essential. SIAC will be strengthened by the end of 2025 through reinforcements and additional resources, in line with the Joint Paper of the High Representative and Member States.

This assessment will be presented to the European Parliament and the Council when relevant.

2) Set up a 'crisis dashboard' for decision-makers

The Commission and the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States and with the support of relevant EU Agencies, will develop a 'crisis dashboard', bringing together sectoral rapid alert systems and improving coordination for decision-makers.

This comprehensive EU risks and threats assessment and the 'crisis dashboard' will feed into the discussions of the College of Commissioners, in particular in a Security College format, to deepen understanding on Europe's security and strategic environment and to provide political steer to the Commission action on preparedness and resilience.

3) Strengthen the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)

To be more proactive in managing emergencies and crises, the ERCC will be further equipped to: (i) produce regular operational-outlook briefings on cross-sectoral, all-hazard risks; (ii) identify and analyse their cascading effects; and (iii) build scenarios.

4) Develop an EU catalogue for training and a platform for lessons learned

To ensure a coordinated and effective crisis preparedness and response, the Commission and the High Representative will develop a catalogue of methods and guidelines for Member States to enhance preparedness training. They will also design a comprehensive and inclusive EU-wide plan for training and skills development covering security, defence, and crisis management, to equip professionals, volunteers and decision-makers with the necessary

expertise across sectors and Member States. A ‘lessons learned’ exchange platform will be created at EU level, integrating insights from past crises and exercises into future response efforts.

5) Establish an EU Earth Observation Governmental Service (EOGS)

The EU will develop an Earth Observation Governmental Service (EOGS) which will notably provide secure, reliable, timely, persistent and targeted satellite sensing, reinforcing existing and planned capabilities and building on the long experience of using Copernicus in support of emergency management and security.

2. RESILIENCE OF VITAL SOCIETAL FUNCTIONS

Vital societal functions are fundamental systems and structures that enable a society to operate, while safeguarding our societies, economies, cultures, and democratic institutions in any circumstances. These functions include first and foremost the safety of the EU’s population, including protection from natural disasters, governmental continuity and decision-making, democratic processes, social cohesion and economic stability and internal and external security. They form the foundation of a stable and secure society.

The existing EU legal framework⁶ covers most of the areas (see graph below) ensuring vital societal functions. This includes cross cutting crisis legislation as well as sectoral contingency plans and legislation that increase resilience of our societies such as food security, drinking water, energy supply, telecommunications and transport, waste management, healthcare systems, building standards, nature protection, plans for floods, financial services, and others.

⁶ Such as the Critical Entities Resilience (CER) Directive and the security of network and information systems (NIS2) Directive, Electricity Regulation, Gas security of supply Regulation, Banking Union, Digital Operational Resilience Act – DORA, Trans-European Transport Network – TEN-T, European Health Union, Internal Market Emergency Resilience Act (IMERA).



To maintain vital societal functions under all circumstances, an appropriate framework must be in place: *First*, the EU must have appropriate tools to protect democratic governance and decision-making processes, ensuring effective risk mitigation and crisis response at the European level. *Second*, the integrity of the Single Market, supported by the free movement of people, goods, capital, and service and by sound social, economic and fiscal policies, are essential for economic and financial stability and resilience. *Third*, the EU must protect the environment, promote nature-based solutions and sustainable management of natural resources. *Fourth*, to strengthen strategic autonomy and reduce vulnerabilities, the EU must enhance circularity, long-term supply chain security, and resilience to external coercion, ensuring access to raw materials, essential goods, and critical supplies, and optimise the use of space assets and services, while investing in research and innovation to sustain industrial competitiveness and technological leadership.

Key actions

6) Embed preparedness by design into EU policies and actions

Preparedness and security considerations will be integrated and mainstreamed across EU legislation, policies and programmes. New policies, legislation and programmes will be prepared or reviewed with a preparedness and security perspective in mind, consistently identifying potential impacts of the preferred policy option on preparedness and security. This will be underpinned with regular training for policy makers in the Commission.

Sound economic and social policies coordinated under the European Semester are critical for resilience and preparedness. When relevant, progress in implementing structural reforms that are also relevant for preparedness will be assessed in the Semester process. Economic and social policies that are instrumental for preparedness may be further reflected in Country

Specific Recommendations, thus incentivising Member States to deliver and implement those reforms.

Reducing the related administrative burden and streamlining procedures will facilitate more agile and effective preparedness actions. The Commission will map out the necessary simplification actions in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

The Commission will assess the need and feasibility of an EU Preparedness Law to strengthen the resilience of the vital societal functions by setting joint standards and measurable long-term targets.

7) Adopt minimum preparedness requirements

The immediate priority is the urgent and full transposition and implementation of the Union legal framework, in particular the CER and NIS2 Directives as it will be explained as well in the upcoming Internal Security Strategy. Based on the implementation of these Directives, the Commission will assess if additional measures may be necessary.

In parallel, the Commission will engage with Member States to identify further sectors and services not covered by the current legislation for which there might be a need to act. Based on this assessment, the Commission will put forward recommendations on minimum preparedness requirements, including a monitoring mechanism. The latter will align with the Disaster Resilience Goals and be complementary with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) resilience baseline requirements⁷.

The EU institutions will take actions to enhance their own internal preparedness, notably by upgrading secure communications between the EU institutions and Member States.

8) Revise the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

The Commission will revise the legislative framework of the UCPM to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency in high impact emergencies and crises requiring a robust response and coordination at European level.

9) Propose an EU Stockpiling Strategy

The Commission will propose an EU-wide stockpiling strategy that will integrate all existing sectorial stockpiling efforts. It will strengthen access to critical resources across the EU, for example for emergency and disaster response, medical countermeasures, critical raw materials, energy equipment, shelter, and potentially agri-food products and water. It intends to combine centralised EU-level reserves with Member States' contributions, supported by public-private partnerships to ensure efficiency, scalability, and cost-effectiveness.

The Commission will also present a Strategy to support medical countermeasures against public health threats to strengthen the EU's health security, reinforce EU competitiveness, and protect the public from cross-border health threats, including chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats. This would be complemented by measures regarding contingency stocks under the recently proposed Critical Medicines Act.

10) Propose a Climate Adaptation Plan

The Commission will present a European Climate Adaptation Plan to support Member States in preparing for climate risks and strengthening the resilience of the Union. Building on the European Climate Risk Assessment, the Plan will embed 'preparedness by design' across relevant EU sector policies and investments and strengthen proactive climate, environment and

⁷ [NATO - Topic: Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3](#)

water risk management across the EU. It will support people, business and policymakers through the use of common climate reference scenarios.

11) Ensure supply of water and other critical natural resources

Water, soil and other natural resources are crucial not only for food supply, but also for the well-functioning of our economy. According to the European Central Bank, almost 75% of bank loans to companies in the euro area are granted to companies that are highly dependent on at least one ecosystem services, notably on water. The Commission will propose a European Water Resilience Strategy that will set out a path towards water security and resilience by ensuring the availability of clean water and better protecting the EU against water-related risks. It will also promote nature-based solutions to enhance preparedness and resilience including against natural disasters. As part of an EU bioeconomy strategy and a Circular Economy Act, the Commission will act to increase circular and biobased materials in our value chains in order to enhance our independence from imports of critical raw materials.

3. POPULATION PREPAREDNESS

Preparedness is a collective responsibility. Public authorities, media, education, training and cultural institutions, youth and civil society organisations, social partners, businesses, local networks and communities, and citizens, from an early age, all play a vital role. Recent Eurobarometer surveys⁸ show that in 2024, almost half of Europeans (49%) did not feel well informed about disaster risks that could affect them and 65% of them need more information to be able to prepare for disasters or emergencies.

Awareness of risks and threats is essential to ensuring that EU citizens and communities become active participants in crisis preparedness and response efforts. Inequality is a risk factor for preparedness. Women and groups in situations of vulnerability, such as children, older people and persons with disabilities, those facing discrimination, poverty and/or social exclusion, are disproportionately affected by crises, often exacerbating pre-existing disadvantages and inequalities. Therefore, equality considerations need to be mainstreamed throughout preparedness, in line with the Union of Equality framework and in particular the Roadmap for Women's Rights. Disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) are particularly harmful as they undermine public confidence and can exacerbate the impact of crises. Similarly, the lack of accessible information erodes societal preparedness.

A paradigm shift is needed to create a mindset that fosters a culture of preparedness and resilience.

Foster a culture of inclusive preparedness and intergenerational societal resilience

Preparedness must reach all parts of society. Community building and volunteering should be supported. Social services and adequate social protection should ensure that no one is left behind in the preparedness endeavour. Drawing on best practices, including from the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, the Commission and Member States should encourage self-reliance, psychological resilience, and ensure an increased individual, intergenerational and household preparedness.

⁸ Perceptions of EU crisis management - June 2024

The Commission will work towards a European Civil Defence Mechanism⁹ looking at all facets of crisis and disaster management to support the further development of societal awareness and invest in citizens' risk education.

Empower more resilient citizens

Citizens and communities across the EU must be empowered to access quality and reliable information, to have the necessary skills to evaluate it, to engage actively to prevent crises, and to be sufficiently prepared to respond to them. Schools, teachers, youth workers and trainers play a key role in fostering digital and media literacy and critical thinking, promoting civic engagement, and teaching democratic citizenship, as underlined in the Union of Skills. Social partners can contribute decisively to these preparedness efforts, among others by informing and training workers. To counter foreign information manipulation and disinformation more systematically, full use should be made of the EU's FIMI toolbox, the Digital Services Act and the upcoming European Democracy Shield.

Enhance public warning and crisis communication

EU-wide public-warning, as well as accessible and inclusive crisis communication systems, both before (risk communication) and during crises (crisis communication), need to be improved to reach all people under all circumstances regardless of age, language, disability, legal status, etc. Recent crisis experiences demonstrate the need to target particularly vulnerable populations, those experiencing discrimination, poverty and social exclusion, and individuals from other countries (from travellers to seasonal workers and migrants) and the need to prevent disinformation. Public warning functionality could be developed within the EU Digital Identity Wallet¹⁰ for emergency notifications. This would allow for simple and authenticated way for governments to communicate directly with citizens, providing warnings and alerts.

Make available key skills and ensure labour mobility during crises

Effective policies in education and training included for critical functions, as underlined in the Union of Skills, are essential to ensure that workers have the right competences and can be mobilised across the EU during emergencies.

The Commission will work with Member States and in cooperation with social partners to: (i) ensure the availability and mobility of skilled personnel during emergencies, by drawing up frameworks for the rapid deployment of workers and volunteers across the EU; and (ii) increase the appeal of career paths in the areas of civil protection, emergency services, including healthcare, and security.

Key actions

12) Improve early warning systems

The Commission will develop guidelines together with Member States to support their communication on various risks and situations before and during a crisis, as part of the PreparEU initiative. The Copernicus Emergency Management Service and the upcoming

⁹ The notion of a Civil Defence Mechanism is without prejudice to the terminology used by the Member States for instruments or mechanisms that have comparable content to what is referred to in this Strategy as Civil Defence Mechanism.

¹⁰ The EU Digital Identity Wallets will provide a safe, reliable, and private means of digital identification for everyone in Europe. Every Member State will provide at least one wallet to all citizens, residents, and businesses allowing them to prove who they are, and safely store, share and sign important digital documents. The EU digital wallets will be available on mobile phone apps and other devices as of end of 2026.

Galileo Emergency Warning Satellite Service (EWSS) will enable national civil protection authorities to have timely access to space-based early warning information to disseminate directly alert messages to the population.

13) Increase awareness about risks and threats

The Commission will propose an annual EU Preparedness Day to recognise efforts of national, regional and local authorities and communities to enhance preparedness and to raise awareness for preparedness needs in the population. This will be complemented with other communication actions such as guidelines on how to communicate on the various risks and situations, including the needs of vulnerable populations, that will be developed together with Member States. Awareness-raising programmes, such as citizens panels, the EUvsDisinfo portal, online campaigns, and toolkits for strategic communication and countering information manipulation will also be instrumental.

14) Develop guidelines to reach a population self-sufficiency of minimum 72 hours

In case of extreme disruptions, the initial period is the most critical. The Commission will propose guidelines for Member States to reach population self-sufficiency of at least 72 hours. As part of the PreparEU initiative, these guidelines will cover the storage of essential supplies, crisis planning, shelter availability, measures to ensure availability of critical ground and space and other measures for protecting people, animals, and property in the event of a crisis and will be accompanied by targeted campaigns and activities. A new EU online platform will provide citizens and travellers with tailored, accessible information on the risks they may face and practical steps to mitigate these risks.

15) Include preparedness in school education curricula and training of educational staff

In line with the Union of Skills, the Commission will develop guidelines for curriculum development, starting by early childhood education, to support the acquisition of basic skills on preparedness, including media literacy, as a key for active and informed citizenship and fighting disinformation and information manipulation. Teachers will have access to resources and professional development opportunities on the European School Education Platform.

16) Promote preparedness in youth programmes

A new preparedness priority will be created in EU youth programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+, to promote preparedness, resilience, participation in democratic life and civic engagement. This will be based on a bottom-up approach, encouraging organisations and institutions (universities, schools, vocational education and training organisations, adult education centres, youth and sport organisations, etc) to apply for funding.

17) Attract talent to reinforce the EU's preparedness

Attracting top research talent to Europe is not only an opportunity but a necessity for ensuring the EU's long-term resilience and preparedness. In this context, the EU will explore urgently concrete measures to attract researchers.

The EU Talent Pool will facilitate the recruitment of jobseekers from outside the EU, which could make it easier for skilled workers in critical sectors related to preparedness, where there are shortages, to apply for jobs in the EU. Talent Partnerships could also be used to target skilled workers in critical sectors related to preparedness, also investing in related skills in the partner countries.

4. PUBLIC-PRIVATE COOPERATION

Public-private cooperation is a critical pillar of the EU's preparedness, ensuring that resources, expertise, and innovation from all sectors are used effectively and efficiently. Farming and fishing, industry and business have a pivotal role to play in maintaining vital societal functions and essential services. At the same time, the private sector is increasingly exposed to climate and environmental risks and their growing costs (e.g., insurance costs, losses of assets and economic damage due to extreme weather events) and to security threats such as disruption of supply chains and cyber-attacks. By fostering public-private collaboration, the EU can better anticipate risks, secure essential supplies and protect its strategic autonomy.

Step up a structured public-private engagement on preparedness

The EU, public authorities and industry should reinforce mechanisms for: (i) targeted, two-way information sharing; (ii) participation in strategic foresight or anticipatory initiatives; (iii) joint training; and (iv) coordinated response to crises. Building upon existing arrangements, the EU should reinforce public-private partnerships, to secure critical supplies and services through strategic stockpiles, joint procurement, framework contracts, diversification of sources and circular solutions, reducing risks from global market disruptions and shocks. In addition, public and private solutions need to be created to cope with the growing challenge of insuring natural catastrophes in the EU. The insurance protection gap is expected to widen further due to the increasing risk posed by climate change. The Commission will explore possible solutions to reduce such insurance protection gap, if necessary by following up on the proposals by the European Central Bank and European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority.

The EU's existing investment and capacity building programmes should embed preparedness considerations in their support to businesses and Member States, complementing policy measures to root preparedness by design in economic decisions

In line with the Union of Skills, the EU needs to promote cooperation between public and private organisations in strategic sectors such as cybersecurity, ensuring the workforce needs and educational offer are aligned.

Key actions

18) Establish a public-private Preparedness Task Force

The Commission will create a Preparedness Task Force drawing on the Industrial Forum, the Enterprise Europe Network, the European clusters network and other existing structures.¹¹ It will gather key stakeholders from public authorities, industry, business, financial services, the scientific community, social partners and civil society. The aim of the Task Force is to (i) cooperate on strengthening the continuity management of vital functions and essential services; (ii) exchange information on supply-chain vulnerabilities and disruptions; (iii) provide guidance, frameworks and incentives to help private entities to ensure minimum preparedness requirements; (iv) coordinate mitigation actions across the critical sectors providing essential services that ensure the vital societal functions, and (v) support crisis communication efforts.

19) Develop public-private emergency protocols

The Commission, together with Member States, will revise the relevant legislative and operational frameworks to enable targeted emergency flexibility, both legal and financial,

¹¹ The European Clusters Network is a collaboration of industry clusters across the EU that fosters innovation, competitiveness, and resilience by connecting businesses, research institutions, and public authorities. It supports cross-sectoral cooperation, facilitates knowledge exchange, and enhances supply chain security, particularly in strategic industries.

including public-procurement rules where necessary. This will include justified and time-bound exceptions to ensure the rapid availability of critical materials, goods and services and secure critical production lines. Through emergency protocols and as part of the Public-Private Preparedness Task Force, the Commission and Member States will develop a coordinated preparedness engagement framework of critical private sector actors.

20) Revise the public procurement framework

The Commission will make a proposal to revise the Public Procurement Framework building on the current framework and lessons learned during past crises, including the COVID-19 experience. The revision will aim to strengthen preparedness, namely by reinforcing security of supply along key value chains, particularly in times of crises. Already now, specific provisions for emergency situation are in place; for example, contracting authorities can reduce deadlines to accelerate procedures.

21) Establish a European Centre of Expertise on Research Security

Research and Innovation (R&I) is particularly vulnerable to foreign interference, security risks and hybrid threats. In line with the Council recommendation on enhancing research security¹², the Commission will establish a European Centre of Expertise on Research Security that collects evidence and provides support to Member States and R&I actors.

5. CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION

We must prepare for large-scale, cross-sectoral incidents and crises, including the possibility of armed aggression, affecting one or more Member States. In most crisis scenarios, national civilian authorities bear primary responsibility. In an increasing number of scenarios (e.g. health emergencies, extreme weather events, hybrid and cyberattacks), civilian authorities need military support. In case of armed aggression, armed forces would require civilian support to ensure the continuous operation of the state and society. Therefore, we need to improve the interaction between civilian and military actors, without calling into question their respective competences and in full cooperation with Member States. Furthermore, large-scale exercises are often fragmented and underutilised, and do not consistently involve all relevant civilian and military stakeholders.

Develop strategic and sustained deterrence

In order to prevent, deter and respond more effectively to security incidents and crises, and deter malicious actors, the EU needs to use its full spectrum of tools, including: (i) cyber diplomacy; (ii) FIMI toolbox; (iii) hybrid toolboxes and (iv) space threat response mechanism architecture; as well as (v) defensive capabilities available to the civilian and military communities, including when appropriate, proactive defensive measures, in accordance with the international law.

The High Representative and the Commission will develop strategies to prevent, deter and respond to specific threat actors targeting the EU through hybrid, cyber and FIMI activities. Close coordination with NATO¹³ and other like-minded partners is necessary to increase the impact and dissuade threat actors.

¹² Council Recommendation on enhancing research security: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C_202403510.

¹³ In full respect of the agreed guiding principles of transparency, reciprocity and inclusiveness as well as the decision-making autonomy and procedures of both organisations.

Ensure a closer civil-military interoperability

The EU will further operationalise the Mutual Assistance (Article 42(7) TEU) and Solidarity (Article 222 TFEU) clauses and strengthen cooperation between the EU and NATO, including in the event that Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is activated. Furthermore, in order to act jointly in the spirit of solidarity, as provided for in Art. 222 TFEU, the EU must become able to deploy all available means and assets in support of Member States. This could include military resources commonly made available by Member States.

Promote dual-use by design

The EU must integrate dual-use considerations into all of its infrastructure investments and capability planning (where ‘dual use’ means capable of being used by both military and civilian bodies), such as military mobility, mass evacuations, secure communications and connectivity, maritime security, cyber capabilities, and space assets and services. Building on the existing efforts by the Commission and the European Defence Agency (EDA), the EU should continue to promote dual-use infrastructure, communication systems, transport assets, equipment, stockpiles, medical countermeasures, energy supply, and technologies that support both civilian and military needs.

Key actions

22) Establish comprehensive civil-military preparedness arrangements

The Commission and the High Representative will develop arrangements for civil-military preparedness, which will clarify roles, responsibilities, and priorities of EU institutions, bodies and agencies as well as Member States for preparing for and responding to incidents and crises. This will be complemented by standard operating procedures to reinforce coordination between EU entities and Member States. It will build on the projects under the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030, and existing analysis on resilience and response-capacity gaps under the UCPM and the military Headline Goal Progress Catalogue. The Commission’s work towards a European Civil Defence Mechanism will also contribute to those arrangements.

The EU will further strengthen the operational cooperation at staff level with NATO in all crisis contexts, from hybrid campaigns to armed aggression.

23) Develop standards for civilian-military dual use planning and investment

The Commission and the High Representative in cooperation with the Member States will identify dual-use infrastructure and assets across Member States to ensure that investments support civilian resilience, societal security, and military needs in a mutually reinforcing manner building on military requirements. Additionally, the Commission will define standards for dual-use actions that are taking into account both civilian and military requirements at their design and planning phase. The Commission and the High Representative will facilitate that Member States, when constructing or upgrading infrastructure on the trans-European transport network, consider the need, relevance and feasibility of going beyond the civilian transport standards for the purpose of accommodating the weight, size or scale of military transport of troops and material in accordance with NATO military requirements. Attention will be paid to the specific requirements and implications under international law, including international humanitarian law.

The EU will seek to develop and promote technical standards, taking into account existing NATO standards where applicable, for the design of infrastructure, assets and products with dual-use potential.

24) Organise regular EU exercises to promote comprehensive preparedness

The Commission and the High Representative will organise regular EU-wide comprehensive and cross-sectoral preparedness exercises. The purpose of these exercises will be to test decision-making, coordination, and operational responses within the EU and across sectors, including in the remit of Article 42(7) TEU and Article 222 TFEU. The exercises will also offer Member States to plug in their national exercises, fostering cross-border collaboration and aligning efforts. Specific scenario-based exchanges will be organised in the Commission and the Council, to test and improve the decision-making procedures for complex and major crises, and to identify structural vulnerabilities. Where relevant, the exercises will include the private sector and the EU's international partners.

6. CRISIS RESPONSE

Effective crisis response coordination is vital during emergencies. Over the past decade, a growing number of EU structures and instruments were established to support Member States before, during, and after a crisis.

In the Commission, the ERCC already has a central role during crises, natural and human-induced disasters. In these situations, it supports both the EU institutions and the EU Member States. The ERCC ensures the 24/7 operational capacity of the UCPM, both in preparedness and response, and serves the Member States and the EU when Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements are activated, or the Solidarity Clause is invoked.

In the EEAS, various mechanisms ensure a coordinated and timely EU response to external crises and emergencies with an impact on EU security interests. Among these mechanisms, the Crisis Response Centre (CRC) provides the duty of care for the security of EU staff, business continuity of Delegations in a crisis, and support to Member States in case of a consular crisis. It ensures coherence and coordination in information gathering for situational awareness in a crisis by bringing together all relevant services under the High Representative.

In the Council, IPCR arrangements support coordinated decision-making for major and complex crises. They facilitate shared situational awareness among Member States and EU institutions and have shown flexibility and scalability over recent years.

Most of these mechanisms remain rooted in a single policy area whereas crises have become increasingly intertwined. As a result, there is a need to ensure greater coordination of existing mechanisms and instruments.

Improve central and cross-sectoral crisis response coordination and capability

The EU needs to reinforce its crisis coordination, building on existing structures. Coordination mechanisms, such as the IPCR, the Commission's internal crisis coordination mechanism ARGUS, its ERCC and the EEAS CRC must be upgraded to face the challenges lying ahead. Optimising the IPCR arrangements would improve the capacity of the EU and its Member States to operationalise the Solidarity Clause (Article 222 TFEU), but also simplify its activation.

The EU must continue to strengthen its response capabilities and strategic crisis reserves, including stockpiles and deployable assets, to address critical shortages and ensure rapid response, including to hybrid attacks. This includes secure communication channels, and the establishment of the European Critical Communication System.

Work towards a European Civil Defence Mechanism should further support the strengthening of cross-sectoral response capabilities. The EU's external action needs to be linked more effectively with internal crisis response capabilities.

Key actions

25) Set up an EU crisis coordination hub

The Commission will create an EU crisis coordination hub, building on the structures and the expertise of the ERCC. The ERCC will continue to carry out its civil protection functions, which will remain crucial in responding to crises. Its objective is to continue and further upscale support to Member States in managing the cross-sectoral consequences of crises, based on reinforced planning and more comprehensive analysis and situational awareness.

The EU crisis coordination hub within the ERCC will have a role both within the Commission and in supporting interlocutors in Member States, with a focus on anticipating and managing the consequences of crises across sectors. In order to link external action with internal crisis response more effectively, the EU crisis coordination hub will closely coordinate with the EEAS, and in particular with the CRC. Without prejudice to the role of the EEAS, the crisis-coordination hub will: (i) work towards a common understanding at all levels of crises and their implications for various sectors and the entire population; (ii) facilitate work across the sectors by providing crisis-management support to the lead services without taking over sectoral responsibilities; and (iii) monitor the overall response to crises while ensuring constant feedback to the Council including through the IPCR.

26) Boost rescEU – EU-level reserve of response capacities

Building on the success of the development of aerial firefighting and other rescEU capacities, the Commission will secure the maintenance and possible scaling up of its existing capacities (aerial firefighting, medical, CBRN, shelters, transport, energy). It will also finalise setting up a European field hospital. Together with Member States, the Commission will assess the expansion of these strategic reserves to other types of capacities for which gaps are identified (e.g. critical infrastructure repair, telecommunications, etc.).

7. RESILIENCE THROUGH EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

The security and resilience of the EU and Member States are increasingly intertwined with those of our partners, in particular our enlargement and neighbourhood partners, who face a similar range of global crises and challenges. They are often the target of hybrid and other hostile activities, including economic coercion from foreign malicious actors, seeking to weaponise their vulnerabilities and dependencies. Working with our partners to anticipate, prepare for, prevent and respond to crises is mutually beneficial, an expression of EU solidarity and fundamental to lower the risk of cascading or spill-over effects for the EU of crises originating elsewhere.

In an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment, and to tackle global challenges such as climate change and global health, the EU and Member States should continue to develop and deepen tailored and mutually beneficial bilateral and plurilateral partnerships including in particular by strengthening cooperation and supporting EU candidate and neighbouring countries. The EU should also step up efforts to strengthen effective multilateralism, in particular in NATO and the United Nations.

Embed resilience and preparedness in the EU's external action

The EU should build mutual resilience with partners in particular to counter increasing hybrid, foreign information manipulation and interference and cyber threats and in areas such as: (i) economic security, trade, and investment; (ii) the resilience of societies, the rule of law and institutions; (iii) cultural heritage; (iv) health security and pandemic preparedness; (v) climate change and environmental degradation; (vi) energy; (vii) transport and secure supply routes; (viii) development aid and humanitarian assistance¹⁴; and (ix) disaster-risk reduction, disaster preparedness and anticipatory action. In order to strengthen resilience globally, EU actions should be aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and support the United Nations (UN) Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Key actions

27) Advance mutual resilience with candidate countries

The EU will advance mutual resilience with candidate countries, including by associating them in relevant EU preparedness initiatives and crisis management framework, through the enlargement policy and in line with the process of their gradual integration. The EU will reinforce work with these countries in the areas of preparedness, resilience and crisis management, security and defence, in particular to counter hybrid, FIMI and cyber threats

28) Integrate preparedness and resilience into bilateral partnerships and multilateral institutions

The EU will use instruments such as Security and Defence Partnerships and Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations and to enhance cooperation on preparedness and resilience with key partner countries and societies. The EU needs to review and reinforce its crisis communication networks with these partners across the globe to support them in response to complex crises and emergencies.

Multilateral engagement will be stepped up with international organisations and regional partners, notably with the UN and its agencies. Cooperation with the UN will include support for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, stabilisation and post-conflict recovery as a means to build resilience in line with the EU-UN Joint Priorities for 2025-2027. Moreover, the EU will continue to strengthen preparedness through development aid and humanitarian assistance as a key element to increase resilience of the most vulnerable population and to address root causes of fragility.

29) Integrate preparedness and resilience into the cooperation with NATO

Preparedness and resilience will be integrated into EU-NATO Structured Dialogues, reciprocal cross-briefings, and training. Particular attention will be paid to military mobility, climate and security, emerging disruptive technologies, cyber, space and the defence industry. Staff exchanges on hybrid and foreign information manipulation and interference, maritime security, operational cooperation, and capacity building for partners will be used for addressing preparedness and resilience.

30) Develop mutual resilience through external economic and development policies

The EU will develop mutual resilience with partners and reduce over-dependencies through its external economic and development policies. This will be supported through key initiatives such as the Global Gateway, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI - Global Europe), Instrument for Pre-Accession III, and the forthcoming New Pact for the Mediterranean. Diversifying and strengthening the integration of supply and

¹⁴ In full respect of its specific mandate, in particular international humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

value chains in partner countries through Free Trade Agreements, Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships, Strategic Partnerships on raw materials, and Digital Partnerships, will also contribute to this effort.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

In a context of increasing human-induced and natural risks and worsening security outlook for Europe, it is a matter of urgency for the EU and its Member States to strengthen preparedness. While Member States remain the primary actors in civil protection, preparedness and crisis response, the Strategy sets out the vision of a Preparedness Union, where EU support will complement national efforts. Jointly, we will be more effective, more agile, with clear responsibilities, stronger in anticipation and response across all relevant sectors. Flexible tools will help Member States respond to unexpected emergencies. The work towards a Preparedness Union will also contribute to make the EU more inclusive, competitive and prosperous. In this way, Europe could tap all the benefits of scale and efficiency coming from acting together at Union level.

The implementation of the Strategy will be regularly monitored. Updates will be regularly shared with the Council and the European Parliament to track implementation progress.

At the same time, the Commission invites the Council and the European Parliament to work together with the Commission and the High Representative on the Strategy, and the actions set out in the Action Plan and to work together to deliver them.

Together we can build a safer, more resilient and secure Europe.