Ensure speed of action with structures and procedures that are fit for purpose

Safer Together

Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness **by Sauli Niinistö**

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Building block #3

What is the challenge?

• Swift action can be instrumental in stemming the unfolding crisis from escalating or cascading further. Rapid decision-making can already be a challenge in a national setting. At the EU level, there are additional interinstitutional complexities.

"In a deeply uncertain and volatile world, the EU institutions must be able to take decisions quickly. This also strengthens the credibility of the Union in the eyes of its citizens."

- We can no longer expect to deal with one crisis at a time, but need to manage and respond to various crises simultaneously. This leads to new coordination challenges.
- In some domains that are critical for preparedness, governmental or private sector actors remain reluctant to share relevant information, such as production rates and/or shortages, disruptions

in external supply chains, the state of strategic stockpiles, available ammunition stocks, etc.

- Recent crises have demonstrated that they can create a situation in which
- √ there is a relative scarcity of certain products required to address the crisis, whether vaccines, ammunition stocks or emergency equipment; and
- ✓ an urgent need for new budgetary and economic investments to stem the financial-economic turmoil or other impacts – which can lead to competing priorities and fiscal challenges.
- Building in buffers, resilient supply chains, stocks and redundancies is one step, but it is not be possible to be fully self-sufficient. This points to the need for a strong governance mechanism at the national and EU level to ensure that efficient and well-coordinated solutions can be found.
- The ongoing discussions among Member States to reform the Union in view of its enlargement should also be used to address the ways in which decision-making can be accelerated and streamlined.
- The Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) offers flexible formats to share information and support the decision-making of the Council.

• The EU Treaties contain profound pledges of mutual support in case another Member State falls victim of armed aggression (Art. 42.7 TEU), or to act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster (Art. 222 TFEU). However, preparatory work for the possible activation of these provisions has, for different reasons, remained sub-optimal, creating a political, strategic and operational risk in case they would be invoked in a sudden and severe crisis situation.

What is the objective?

- While respecting all relevant competences, the EU should strengthen the EU's capacity for timely and well-informed decision-making – both at the political and the technical-operational level – as well as for agile follow-through and implementation.
- The EU and Member States need to further develop an effective and efficient division of roles and responsibilities, a coherent and resilient

coordination set-up, and reflexive information sharing for major crisis situations.

- The overall aim should be to further consolidate the EU's crisis management and preparedness architecture, coalescing where possible different sectoral mechanisms and coordinating entities, and removing unnecessary institutional or bureaucratic obstacles to cross-sectoral coordination.
- In a major crisis situation, different crisis response actors will need to be able to operate seamlessly together. Moreover, robust emergency procedures and provisions should be in place internally within Commission services and the EEAS, with crosslinks to the various sectoral crisis emergency provisions of relevant policy instruments.
- Improved short-to-medium-term analysis and foresight can enable decision-makers to shape policies and to prepare for emerging risk scenarios. This also needs to better cover the use of intelligence analysis to support informed and timely decision-making in the EU (see chapter 6).

What actions does the Report recommend?

Reinforce cross-sectoral operational coordination:

- ✓ Develop a central operational crisis 'hub' within the Commission to facilitate cross-sectoral coordination and situational awareness. The hub should firmly build on the existing Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), acting as a platform to connect to relevant sectoral arrangements. The ERCC should continue to serve routine civil protection, disaster relief, and humanitarian coordination functions, but could be redesigned as a body that provides a single cross-sectoral entry point for major cross-border and cascading crises to ensure the optimal use of resources and infrastructure.
- √ Further optimise the use of the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements to enhance EU-level coordination and reinforce links between political leadership and the technical level.
- Strengthen civil-military coordination frameworks and joint planning to ensure an effective civil-military response to a range of intentional threats both within and beyond the EU. This could include potentially moving towards a European Civil Defence Mechanism, as envisaged in the Political Guidelines, reflecting relevant developments in Member States. The ERCC and its further evolution into a central crisis hub should further strengthen its links with the civilian and military crisis management structures in the EEAS.
- √ Further operationalise Articles 42.7 TEU and 222 TFEU to strengthen their credibility and operational value as expressions of a European spirit of mutual assistance and solidarity. To this end, the EU and Member States

should better define potential cases for the use of the Solidarity Clause (e.g. hybrid attacks or pandemics), adjust the activation thresholds of the Solidarity Clause to cover earlier stages of a crisis, and consider coordination needs in the event of parallel activation.

Boost and better coordinate situational awareness, anticipation, and foresight:

- Link situational analysis and intelligence assessments more closely with EU-level preparedness and decisionmaking processes. Strengthen the pooling of information gathered by different sectoral situational awareness capabilities.
- ✓ Set up an EU Earth-Observation governmental service for enhanced situational awareness in support of preparedness, decision-making and the action of the EU and Member States in the fields of security and defence. This would complement and build on existing capabilities provided through the EU Satellite Centre.
- $\sqrt{}$ Develop tools and frameworks to make EU strategic foresight more actionable and solution oriented. Strengthen the connection between the EC's foresight toolbox and preparedness work .

Strengthen information sharing and communication.

- √ Accelerate the roll-out of secure, autonomous, and interoperable information exchange and communication systems (both terrestrial and space-based) to connect EU institutions, bodies and agencies, Member States authorities, and key partners, ensuring the rapid, continuous, and trust-based exchange of critical information.
- ✓ Complete the European Critical Communication System (EUCCS) by 2030 to securely connect all EU civil security and public safety authorities across borders. To enhance civil-military cooperation and facilitate a genuinely 'whole-of-government' response, the EU and Member States should also allow for its interoperability with systems used in the defence domain.
- √ Enhance the trust-based sharing of sensitive information between willing Member States for specific purposes, for example in the cyber domain.
- ✓ Embed communication more closely in horizontal and vertical crisis management, including through the development of EU frameworks and modules, as well as training for local, regional, and national contact points.

Enhance the EU's exercise and training culture.

- The EU should further develop a comprehensive exercise culture to make sure coordination and information sharing frameworks and relevant instruments, work in practice – even in the most disruptive crisis conditions. To this end, the EU could adopt an EU-wide Exercise Policy to promote shared approaches across different sectors and institutions, and bring together resources and expertise in a centrally accessible Exercise Knowledge Hub.
- √ Set up regular cross-sectoral EU training courses on security, defence, and crisis management to further reinforce mutual trust and promote a common European security, safety and preparedness culture.

The ERCC is a 24/7 structure within the Commission that supports a coordinated operational response to different crises by deploying civil protection and humanitarian assistance worldwide. While it primarily supports the functioning of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), it also serves as a 24/7 point of contact for the Commission's internal crisis coordination process, Argus, and for the Council's Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism (IPCR), supporting it with information products.

The ERCC has also developed strong capabilities to anticipate emerging trends and risks, providing early warning and situational awareness. Notably, the ERCC:

Coordinates the EU's response to climatechange induced and nature-related crises (wildfires, floods, and earthquakes) through operational deployments and the delivery of assistance under the UCPM including from the strategic rescEU reserve. Supports emergency response in complement with EU humanitarian funding (the UCPM, the Emergency Toolbox, the European Humanitarian Response Capacity), and in line with humanitarian principles. Plays a central role in responding to long, complex, and simultaneous cross-sectoral crises (e.g. COVID-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine), coordinating the delivery of inkind assistance and support services, and contributing to a coherent, systematic and cross-sectoral approach. Coordinates with the EEAS's Crisis Response Centre (CRC) regarding the consular protection of EU citizens from third countries, with the CRC focusing on consular cooperation and coordination together with the EU Delegation, and the ERCC providing the logistical support for evacuation under the UCPM.

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