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Report on the consultation on Resilience as a strategic priority of the external action of the European Union.

Accompanying the document

Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council

A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action

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The European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) held an open, operational consultation to help them with the process of drafting their joint communication. This consultation focused on discussions with the following stakeholders: civil society, international partners, university researchers and think tanks, and the Member States.

This report contains a description of the consultation (Part 1), a presentation of the concept of resilience as developed by the various stakeholders together with an account of the reactions elicited by the project for a Joint Communication on Resilience (Part 2), and a summary of the stakeholders' main recommendations (Part 3).

1 THE CONSULTATION

1.1 Drawing on recent research on resilience

Researchers and academics working on resilience were first consulted on what a European approach to resilience should entail.

Researchers working on resilience as an EU priority were invited to discuss their work at a meeting held by the EEAS in Brussels on 6 February 2017. A second meeting was held by the EEAS on 29 March 2017 at which researchers had an opportunity to share their thoughts on what the European approach to resilience should entail.¹

The authors monitored discussions at seminars and meetings organised by the European Union Institute for Security Studies and on the initiative of Member States.

The authors took advantage of the opportunity presented by the seminars organised by or in association with the EUISS on resilience. A seminar on resilience in the wider EU neighbourhood was supplemented by three others exploring the following regions in more depth: the Balkans, the North-East and the Black Sea². These seminars gave researchers and experts a platform and enabled the particular characteristics of various geographical regions to be identified. Several Member States contributed to the consultation through these seminars and smaller meetings.

1.2 Listening to civil society organisations and the EU's partners

Collecting feedback from and listening to the experiences of representatives of civil society and non-governmental organisations was one of the editors' priorities.

Non-governmental organisations and, more broadly, civil society organisations, were consulted at meetings arranged on the initiative of the various NGOs. A major consultation meeting was also held in Brussels on 17 February 2017 in cooperation with VOICE³. Several NGOs, invited to send in comments and views in writing, either directly or via the Commission website, explained their ideas and recommendations⁴.

In order to pinpoint how their approaches to resilience could be combined with a European approach, the EIB and the EU's international partners (UN, OECD, World Bank, EBRD) were consulted.

The various United Nations organisations were hosted at a meeting held in Brussels on 10 March 2017. Agencies, programmes, funds and sister organisations shared their opinions

¹ A list of think tanks represented at the meeting is set out in [Annex 4](#).

² Details of the seminars organised by or in cooperation with the EUISS are set out in [Annex 1](#).

³ A list of the NGOs represented at the meeting on 17 February 2017 is set out in [Annex 2](#).

⁴ A list of contributions received by the authors from NGOs is set out in [Annex 5](#).

and experiences⁵. To discuss their approaches to resilience, a meeting was held with the OECD on 21 March 2017, followed by a videoconference with the World Bank on 22 March 2017. The EBRD was also invited to share the experience it had gained in Eastern Europe at the ‘Balkans’ seminar held in Brussels on 16 February 2017⁶. The EIB, meanwhile, was consulted on 11 April 2017⁷.

Lastly, the authors took part in a debate with NATO on its approach to resilience and possible coordination with the EU.

Emphasis was placed on the value of coordinating the actions of NATO and the EU in order to strengthen Member States’ resilience, particularly in relation to combating hybrid threats. In anticipation of the Communication, the consultations were held as part of the commitments entered into in the NATO-EU joint declaration of 8 July 2016, adopted by the Council on 6 December 2016. Particular attention has been given to interrelationships between the civil, private and military sectors, which were explored in detail during a conference held by NATO with the support of the EEAS on 2-3 May 2017.

1.3 Initiating a dialogue with the European Parliament and Member States on a common approach to resilience

A dialogue with the European Parliament on resilience was initiated via the Committee on Development (DEVE).

A hearing organised on 20 March 2017 by the Committee on Development (DEVE) to assist with the drafting of a resolution on the subject allowed the authors of the Joint Communication to set out their ideas on a European approach to resilience and to take feedback and questions from European parliamentary groups.

The Member States were included in the preparatory discussions on the Joint Communication with a view to fostering future cooperation.

The Member States were consulted in the Political and Security Committee (PSC) on the broad outline of the project. Two meetings followed which were attended by national experts. They shared their experience and points of view, particularly on the geographical scope and risks to be monitored, but also the relationship between internal and external policies and implementation arrangements. Several Member States wanted to share their thoughts and recommendations with the other Member States and the authors in the form of working documents⁸.

2 FEEDBACK

2.1 A plural concept now used by many stakeholders, resilience is seen as a way of achieving greater efficiency

Resilience is a potentially useful concept thanks to the pragmatic approach it inspires and its multiple possible interpretations.

Resilience is defined less as a set of circumstances than as a way of thinking about those circumstances and how to improve them. Any action must be conceived by analysing the

⁵ The list of attendees at the meeting held on 10 March is set out in [Annex 3](#).

⁶ EBRD: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

⁷ EIB: European Investment Bank.

⁸ The list of working documents shared by Member States is provided in [Annex 5](#).

ability of individuals, families, communities, societies and states to deal with shock, pressure, uncertainty and causes of vulnerability. Strengthening resilience means strengthening the ability of local stakeholders to show resistance, but also to anticipate, absorb and adapt. Resilience is not a conservative concept. On the contrary: strengthening resilience means building transformation capacities.

This kind of pragmatic approach is well-suited to the complex and uncertain modern world. The multiple meaning of resilience serves a practical purpose: it acknowledges the uncertainty of the world, while at the same time encouraging us not to feel disheartened and instead to seek and strengthen the capacities of stakeholders and the effective solutions they devise.

Used by many stakeholders, resilience offers a common language on which to build cooperation.

Resilience provides a common language between the European Union and the international and non-governmental organisations that have also adopted the concept. Although it could be criticised for being too vague, resilience can pave the way to cooperation, especially between the EU, its Member States, international partners and civil society.

Resilience is an ambitious concept that calls for an integrated approach allowing those involved to work in a more consistent, coordinated and effective manner.

The value of resilience has often been emphasised. It enhances the link between the short and long-term, in order to better safeguard the results of development and reduce humanitarian needs. In addition, because it involves monitoring risks of all kinds, resilience encourages different departments to work together closely so as to avoid duplication and address shortcomings. The ambition of a resilience-based approach has been emphasised. It involves reviewing working methods and developing new analytical capacities as well as the capacity to help local populations take ownership of actions through good networks and solid partnerships at all levels.

2.2 Moving beyond the interest generated by the concept, a resilience-based approach must overcome the criticisms and fears the prospect of its realisation can provoke

Adopting resilience as a key concept of external action may be seen as an attempt to conceal a desire on the part of the EU to disengage.

A resilience-based approach incorporates the ambition of greater financial efficiency in external policies, which could imply that resilience is merely a way of concealing a desire to cut costs. In addition, the pragmatic approach advocated by the concept of resilience could be interpreted as a form of fatalism. In other words, resilience could detract from resolute action against the root causes of the identified threats. Adopting a resilience-based approach could therefore be seen as signalling a desire for disengagement.

Some fear that resilience, held up as a new objective and extended to states, could signify a collapse of European ambition.

Concerns have been raised that resilience will be promoted as a new objective of the EU's external policies to the detriment of its current aims, namely the protection of life, human rights, democracy, sustainable development, etc. Some have stressed that a resilience-based approach could involve creating a collective agenda, but that it should not mean eliminating separate goals altogether.

NGOs have expressed suspicion about the proposal to strengthen the resilience of states too. They have also emphasised the danger of placing the stability of states above all other

concerns. Strengthening states' resilience must not mean accepting harmful practices, but must include the promotion of inclusive governance.

The intended focus on a wider EU neighbourhood leads to fears that aims will be scaled down to security and migration issues alone.

The EU's Global Strategy involves applying the concept of resilience to the countries in the wider EU neighbourhood as a priority. This focus has been supported by several Member States. It would address the need to safeguard the security of European citizens. Conversely, other states and several NGOs have emphasised the risk of giving the impression that resilience is essentially about security and combating migration.

3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Proposing a common interpretation of resilience as a process and a way of thinking about the EU's external action more effectively.

In view of the concern sometimes expressed that resilience is essentially meaningless, it is necessary to put forward a common interpretation of the concept. This shared interpretation would allow European stakeholders to work on a common basis, in line with the approaches to resilience developed by international partners and NGOs. The consultation concluded that the Communication should:

- Put forward a *common interpretation* of resilience.
- Emphasise that *resilience is not a new objective* of external action.
- Explain that resilience should be understood as a *way of devising and implementing the EU's external policies more effectively*.
- Stress that resilience requires a *new way of working together*, with better coordination of existing tools and resources.
- Suggest how adopting a European approach to resilience would facilitate *cooperation with the EU's international partners*, especially the United Nations and NATO.
- Explain how resilience would help to improve the link between *internal policies and external actions*.

3.2 Setting out the overall principles of a European approach to resilience

The consultation produced a set of principles which, in the opinions of those consulted, should provide the framework for a European approach to resilience.

- *People should always be at the heart* of all policies, even where the aim is to strengthen the resilience of states.
- The European approach to resilience should be based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
- *Development goals*, such as those set out in the UN 2030 Agenda, must be included, with a particular focus on SDG 16.
- *Minorities* and the *most vulnerable groups* (children, women, elderly people and the disabled) and gender issues must be given special attention.

Moreover, the principles identified by the consultation set out the *essential characteristics of an ambitious approach to resilience*.

- The approach should be *adapted to each context*, which implies in-depth knowledge of the context and considerable flexibility in terms of the policies and instruments deployed.
- Resilience must be strengthened *taking all sectors into account*.
- Resilience must be developed *at all levels*, from the individual to the family, the community, society, the country and beyond.
- The approach must always be ‘*bottom up*’, based on an analysis of local communities, their strengths and weaknesses.
- All policies must be based on *local ownership* of the actions taken.
- *Partnerships* must always be sought, especially with the Member States, international partners and regional organisations.
- *Civil society organisations must be involved* at all levels, when both analysing and devising policies.

3.3 Striking a balance between a universal approach to resilience and a particular focus on the wider EU neighbourhood

The stakeholders consulted shared their concerns about the focus being placed exclusively or excessively on the European neighbourhood, albeit in a wider sense, although in most cases they did not refute the rationale and value of this focus, which is also championed by several Member States. The Communication could:

- Suggest placing a special focus on the neighbourhood with the aim of safeguarding the security of European citizens by strengthening the resilience of neighbouring states and societies.
- Suggest that this focus should be extended to the ACP countries.
- Specify that the European approach should remain universal in its ambition.

3.4 Indicating priority courses of action for implementing the concept

Several stakeholders stressed the need to include practical steps in the Communication. Some recommended publishing an Action Plan on resilience in the wake of the Joint Communication. Drawing on their experience and the needs assessment, the stakeholders consulted made proposals for implementation. As a result of these proposals, the Communication could recommend priority courses of action:

- **Working towards the creation of a *more integrated, open, flexible and responsive analysis and warning system*.**

The analysis system should be integrated and holistic, comprising — but not limited to — conflict and policy analyses. It should identify not just the weaknesses but also the strengths of each country or region. It should make it possible to pinpoint the emergence or reduction of factors that cause vulnerabilities. For example, the system should be sensitive to the issues of infrastructure, energy, hybrid threats, cybersecurity and migration.

The analysis system should draw on the expertise of various stakeholders operating in the country (such as local authorities, EU delegations, NGOs, international partners, the Member States and the private sector). The analysis system must be flexible. This would allow ongoing supervision to be combined with the ability to conduct more in-depth analysis according to the situation that arises.

- **Proposing solutions to *improve the operational link between the early warning system and rapid action capabilities.***

Several stakeholders emphasised the need to strengthen the EU's ability to react quickly. Although a better analysis and early warning system is required, its link with the rapid action system must be developed to enhance the effectiveness of the EU's actions. Closer coordination with the various stakeholders should be sought, especially international partners, the Member States and NGOs.

- **Promoting the *adaptation of financing and planning tools to the new resilience-based approach.***

The adaptation of financing tools and planning procedures was raised on several occasions by stakeholders. Some of them recommended reforming the existing tools to make them more flexible, adaptable, stable and predictable. The Communication should also address the issue of incorporating resilience into planning.

- **Suggesting setting up a task force *responsible for coordinating resilience actions and evaluating their impact.***

Several stakeholders recommended setting up a task force on resilience within the European institutions capable of coordinating actions and evaluating their impact. The need to give the EU the means with which to measure the results of the action it takes to strengthen resilience was also highlighted. The Communication could suggest working on developing new indicators or ways of using those that are already employed by the EU or its international partners.

ANNEXES

1. List of regional seminars on the theme of resilience organised by the European Union Institute for Security Studies.

1. [*'Building Resilience in the Western Balkans'*](#) (16 February 2017, Brussels). Workshop organised by the European Union Institute for Security Studies.
2. [*'In from the Cold: Europe Confronting Hybrid Threats and Building Resilience'*](#) (7-8 March 2017, Helsinki). Seminar organised by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) and the Finnish Foreign Ministry in association with the European Union Institute for Security Studies.
3. [*'Building resilience in the EU's neighbouring and surrounding regions'*](#) (9 March 2017, Brussels). Seminar organised by the European Commission's DG NEAR (enlargement and neighbourhood) in association with the European Union Institute for Security Studies.
4. [*'Building Resilience in the Black Sea Region. Supporting the implementation of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy \(EUGS\)'*](#) (28-29 March 2017, Bucharest). Seminar organised by the European Union Institute for Security Studies in association with the Romanian Foreign Ministry, the Romanian Diplomatic Institute (IDR) and the New Strategy Center.

2. List of civil society organisations represented at the consultation meeting held on 17 February 2017.

1. ACTED
2. ACT Alliance EU
3. ACT Alliance
4. Alliance 2015
5. CARE
6. CARITAS
7. CEVSI
8. Concern Worldwide
9. CONCORD
10. CORAID
11. DCA
12. DRC
13. EPD
14. EPLO
15. EU Cord
16. French Red Cross
17. GFDRR
18. Handicap International
19. Interpeace
20. Mercy Corps
21. MSF
22. Oxfam
23. Save the children
24. VOICE
25. Welthungerhilfe
26. World Vision

3. List of agencies, programmes, funds and sister organisations of the United Nations represented at the consultation meeting held on 10 March 2017.

1. FAO – UN Food and Agriculture Organisation
2. HCR – High Commissioner for Refugees
3. IOM – International Organization for Migration
4. WHO – World Health Organisation
5. UNIDO – United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
6. UN Environment
7. UN Women
8. WFP – World Food Programme
9. UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
10. UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
11. UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
12. UNISDR – United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
13. UNOPS – United Nations Office for Project Services
14. UNRWA – United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

4. List of think tanks represented at the consultation meeting held on 29 March 2017

1. Adelphi
2. Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)
3. Bertelsmann Stiftung
4. Carnegie Europe
5. Centre for European Reform (CER)
6. Clingendael Institute
7. Egmont Institute
8. European Policy Centre (EPC)
9. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)
10. Friends of Europe
11. German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut Für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)
12. German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)
13. German Marshall Fund (GMF)
14. Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI)
15. International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS)
16. International Crisis Group (ICG)
17. Leiden University
18. The One Campaign (One)
19. The School of International Futures (SOIF)
20. Stockholm University
21. Swedish Institute of International Affairs
22. The Hague Institute for Global Justice
23. WISS Brussels

5. List of written contributions received

Written contributions from non-governmental organisations:

1. Online comment by the NGO Baha’i International community, originating in Belgium, dated 30 March 2017, reference F1490.

2. Contribution from the Budapest Center for Mass Atrocities Prevention, received in March 2017.
3. Contribution from CARE, received in March 2017.
4. Contribution from the Red Cross (EU Office), *Contribution and recommendations to the EU Civil Society Consultation on Resilience*, dated 17 February 2017.
5. Contribution from the European Partnership for Democracy, *What is Resilience*, received in March 2017.
6. Contribution de Human Rights and Democracy Network, *A Rights-based Approach to Resilience: HRDN's input to the EEAS and Commission Joint Communication on Resilience*, dated April 2017.
7. Contribution from ONE, *Making the Private Sector work on fragile states*, received in March 2017.
8. Joint online common by Pax Christi International, COMECE and Justice & Peace Europe, originating in Belgium, dated 23 March 2017, reference F1412.
9. Online comment written by the NGO UNOY Peacebuilders, originating in the Netherlands, dated 31 March 2017, reference F1495.
10. Contribution from VOICE, dated 28 February 2017.
11. Online comment, written by the NGO VOICE, originating in Belgium, dated 23 March 2017, reference F1413.
12. Online comment, written by the NGO World Vision, originating in Belgium, dated 31 March 2017, reference F1494.

Written contributions from EU Member States:

1. France – *Rethinking the security-development continuum: For an overall approach to crisis management*, working document shared by France in March 2017.
2. Ireland – *Resilience and the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy*, working document shared by Ireland in March 2017.
3. Italy – *Resilience and the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy*, working document shared by Italy in April 2017.
4. Lithuania – *Lithuanian input paper for the Joint Communication on Resilience*, working document shared by Lithuania in April 2017.
5. Netherlands – *Building State and Societal Resilience*, working document shared by the Netherlands, dated 24 March 2017.

Online comments (on the European Commission website):

1. Anonymous online comment, written by a researcher or a research institute, originating in Italy, dated 7 March 2017, reference F1378.
2. Anonymous online comment, written by a public body, originating in France, dated 29 March 2017, reference F1481.
3. Anonymous online comment, written by an EU citizen, originating in Belgium, dated 31 March 2017, reference F1493.
4. Online comment by Ingrid Nyborg, originating in Norway, dated 3 April 2017, reference F1497.