

# EU preparedness: From concept to strategy?

## SUMMARY

In an environment of growing and complex threats, preparedness and resilience have assumed significance for the EU from both a military and civilian perspective. In early 2024, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen commissioned a report, under the authorship of former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö in his capacity as her special advisor, on how to enhance Europe's civilian and defence preparedness. The report, unveiled in October 2024, proposes ways in which preparedness can 'become part of the underlying logic of all our actions and address the full spectrum of threats and risks', in the words of von der Leyen. It anticipated the adoption, on 26 March 2025, of a 'Preparedness Union Strategy' aiming to build resilience to new threats and build a 'whole-of-society' approach in EU security.

'Whole-of-society' or 'total defence' approaches are not a new concept and are key to preparedness. They combine a country's armed forces, civilian actors and capabilities, as well as the general population, as a way to defend against a broad spectrum of security threats and to boost resilience. They involve policies that go beyond traditional defence and tend to engage actors beyond the military sphere. They also have important budgetary, institutional and economic dimensions. In this spirit, the Preparedness Union Strategy's 30 actions concern hospitals, schools, transport, telecommunications, climate adaptation and civil-military relations.

The Niinistö report and the Preparedness Union Strategy were presented to the European Parliament in November 2024 and April 2025 respectively. In its 2024 annual report on the implementation of the common security and defence policy, Parliament welcomes efforts to strengthen Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness, and endorses the Commission's whole-of-society approach to resilience, recognising the role of citizens in crisis preparedness and response.



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## Background

Emergency crises and hybrid threats have risen significantly in importance and frequency in today's geopolitical environment – globally and in Europe. They have been compounded by growing reliance on technology, energy security and critical infrastructure and by the scale of health and climate emergencies, among many other variables. In less than half a year since the inauguration of the second von der Leyen Commission, events such as the [power outage](#) at London's Heathrow airport and the destruction of [undersea cables](#) in the Baltic Sea have illustrated this new reality, where unforeseen, natural, hybrid and non-traditional threats co-exist with conventional ones, as the world enters the fourth year of Russia's unjustified war on Ukraine. In this context, civil and military crisis preparedness becomes paramount.

On 26 March, the European Commission and the High Representative/Vice President for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) presented the [European Preparedness Union Strategy](#), envisaged under the 2025 Commission work programme (CWP). The strategy aims to enhance the EU's civilian and military preparedness and readiness for future crises so that all actors are ready and able to respond quickly and effectively if needed. It will help national preparedness efforts by enhancing coordination and efficiency within existing strategies and by fostering a culture of resilience. It builds on the Niinistö report '[Safer Together: Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness](#)', presented in October 2024, and provides an action plan towards a Preparedness Union.

The Political Guidelines 2024–2029 set out by President Ursula von der Leyen, drawing on consultations with the European Parliament and on the European Council's Agenda for 2024–2029, already included 'enhancing the EU's preparedness and readiness for future crises' as one of five key priorities. According to the CWP, the strategy, assigned to the first-ever Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management, Hadja Lahbib, and Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu, responsible for social rights and skills, quality jobs and preparedness, will aim to ensure crisis preparedness by:

- better preparing the whole of society for possible crises, including citizens and the private sector;
- strengthening our foresight and anticipation capabilities;
- addressing new threats, in particular those linked to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) and cybersecurity;
- supporting medical countermeasures against public health threats, including joint procurement and stockpiling.

The strategy acknowledges that the need for preparedness is linked to the recognition of three key shortfalls of the EU. Firstly, EU crisis management is mostly reactive, rather than proactive. Secondly, 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 in the connection between internal and external EU action. Thirdly, existing structures and mechanisms at EU level have limits in terms of scale and resources. There is also a lack of flexibility in Union funding mechanisms and alignment of national budgets.

To remedy these problems, the strategy proposes a move towards a real Preparedness Union based on three 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; and **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. Among other things, the strategy emphasises

solidarity, by committing that the EU will further operationalise the Mutual Assistance (Article 42(7) TEU) and Solidarity (Article 222 TFEU) clauses.

The accompanying [action plan](#) sets out 30 key actions (with timelines ranging from 2025 up to 2028) addressing objectives in the areas of: foresight and anticipation; resilience of vital societal functions; population preparedness; public-private cooperation; civil-military cooperation; crisis response coordination; and resilience through external partnerships. It is complemented by other key EU initiatives, including 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 and the European Democracy Shield. The Preparedness Union Strategy states that its implementation will be regularly monitored and that updates will be regularly shared with the Council and the Parliament to track progress. The Commission invites the Council and the Parliament to cooperate on the strategy and the actions set out in the action plan and to work together to deliver them.

Table 1 – Indicative actions for preparedness\*

	Niinistö report	Likely to require additional legislation	Likely to require additional funding	Actions in Preparedness Union Strategy/ Action Plan	Relevant existing initiatives/ structures/tools
1	Preparedness Union Strategy	✗	✗	N/A	Strategic Compass
1.1	EU Preparedness Law	✓	✓	✓**	
2	Emergency protocol for EU-NATO enhanced information exchange and dialogue	✗	✗	✗	EU-NATO joint declarations
3	European Civil Defence Mechanism	✓	✓	✓	European Civil Protection Mechanism
4	EU Earth-Observation service	✓	✓	✓	EU Satellite Centre
5	Preparedness-by-design principle for relevant regulations and directives	✓	✗	✓	
6	Broadening the sectoral scope of CER and NIS2 Directives	✓	✗	✗	
7	Financial incentives for stockpiles of spare parts, raw materials or for diversification of suppliers	✓	✓	✗	Critical Raw Materials Act
8	EU governance system for submarine cable infrastructure	✓	✓	✗	
8.1	Common EU fleet for maintenance and repair	✓	✓	✗	rescEU
9	EU Stockpiling Strategy	✗	✗	✓	
9.1	Joint procurement for replenishing strategic reserves	✓	✓	✓ implied ***	
10	Intelligence cooperation service	✓	✓	✗	

11	EU Preparedness Exercise Policy	✗	✗	✓	EU Policy on Training for CSDP
12	Promotion of a 72-hour self-sufficiency target through coordinated information campaigns	✗	✓	✓	National plans and strategies
13	Targeted and temporary flexibility measures in emergencies	✓	✗	✓ implied ****	Ad-hoc derogations during the pandemic
14	Lawful access to encrypted data	✓	✗	✗	
15	EU-level funding for defence cooperation, readiness and preparedness	✓	✓	Makes reference to the White Paper	
17	Defence Projects of Common Interest	✓	✓	✗	Capability Development Plan, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
18	Joint capability investment	✓	✓	Makes reference to the White Paper	European Defence Fund
19	Civil-military options for pooling capabilities	✓	✓	✓*****	rescEU
20	Mutual Resilience Centres	✓	✓	✗	Copernicus centres in Panama and Chile and Copernicus mirror site in the Philippines
21	Investment Guarantee Programme for EDTIB	✓	✓	✗	InvestEU
22	Defending Europe Facility and Securing Europe Facility	✓	✓	✗	

N.B.: \* Similar proposals implicitly or more vaguely present in the documents may not be included in the table.

\*\* 'The Commission will assess the need and feasibility of an EU Preparedness Law'.

\*\*\* '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).'

\*\*\*\* '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.'

\*\*\*\*\* '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.'

The strategy largely bases its objectives on the in-depth analysis and reflections of the Niinistö report (see Table 1). By proposing a whole-of-society approach, both the report and the – more concise – strategy reflect the concept of 'total defence', combining a nation's armed forces, civilian actors and capabilities, as well as the general population, as a way to defend against a broad spectrum of security threats. Whole-of-society approaches thus bring together **military and civil defence** as essential components of security. According to the basic principles of the concept of total defence, the state (and subsequently the government) plays a [crucial](#) role in coordinating and managing the cooperation between the society's civilian and military aspects.

Whole-of-society approaches have [re-emerged](#) as key elements of resilience to both traditional and hybrid threats in and beyond Europe, and a number of countries integrate this type of approach implicitly or explicitly in their strategic guiding documents (Table 1). In 2023, the [Republic of Korea](#) held its first nationwide civil defence drill in six years; in the same year, [Taiwan](#) boosted its annual

drill to strengthen civil defence preparation. The strategies emphasise that preparedness to manage crises is necessary both in times of peace, including in fields such as pandemics, natural disasters and internal security crises, and when there is the possibility of an armed attack.

In the NATO context, Allies have underlined that resilience is indispensable for achieving credible deterrence and defence, its core tasks, and have introduced [seven](#) baseline requirements vis-à-vis national resilience, which can be used to measure their level of preparedness. They reflect the three functions of civil preparedness, namely continuity of government, essential services to the population and civil support to the military, even in the most challenging situations.

Table 2 – Selected concepts, papers, reports and strategies with total defence and preparedness elements

Countries	Papers/Documents	Main elements
Finland	<a href="#">2021 Government Defence Report</a>	<p><b>Comprehensive security:</b> cooperation between authorities, businesses, organisations and citizens</p> <p><b>Functions:</b> leadership, international and EU activities, defence capability, internal security, economy, infrastructure and security of supply, functional capacity of the population and services, psychological resilience</p>
	<a href="#">2017 Security Strategy for Society</a>	
Sweden	<a href="#">2025-2030 Total Defence Bill</a>	<p><b>Military defence:</b> NATO capability targets, reinforcements for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, digitalisation and R&amp;D</p> <p><b>Civil defence:</b> priority civil preparedness sectors, coordination and command, economic defence and cooperation with the business sector, psychological defence and will to defend, cybersecurity, NATO deterrence</p>
Norway	<a href="#">2018 Support and Cooperation: A description of the total defence in Norway</a>	<p><b>Critical societal functions:</b> (crisis) management, defence, law and order, health and care services, rescue service, ICT security in the civilian sector, nature and the environment, supply security, water sewerage, financial services, power supply, electronic communication services, transport, satellite-based services</p>
Serbia	<a href="#">2024 Total Defence Concept</a>	<p><b>Military defence:</b> preparation for defence by military means, use of the Serbian Armed Forces and other armed defence forces</p> <p><b>Civil defence:</b> preparation for defence by non-military means, use of other defence forces</p>
Singapore	<a href="#">2024 Total Defence</a>	<p><b>Pillars of total defence:</b> military defence, civil defence, economic defence, social defence, digital defence, psychological defence</p>
Malaysia	<a href="#">2020 Defence White Paper</a> (HANRUH introduced in 1986)	<p><b>Main components:</b> security awareness, civil preparedness, economic integrity, psychological integrity and community cohesion and unity</p>

## Existing EU initiatives and mechanisms

Preparedness requires a multidisciplinary approach and the combination of different initiatives and mechanisms in a wide variety of policy areas. Nevertheless, the EU does not have the same level of competence in all relevant fields. For example, according to Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), civil protection constitutes a supporting competence for the Union. Additionally, the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), which includes the CSDP, is considered a special competence, and the supranational institutions have limited power over it.

Nonetheless, in recent years there have been significant steps towards greater EU-level action in preparedness, resilience and disaster management.<sup>1</sup> For example, the [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) was established in 2001 to enhance cooperation between the EU Member States and participating states in **prevention, preparedness and disaster response**. Apart from the creation of the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), which receives assistance requests and coordinates the deployment of the assistance, the EU established and funds the [rescEU reserve](#), which includes a number of useful tools and assets, such as firefighting aeroplanes and helicopters, field hospitals, transport assets and medical items. Furthermore, the European Civil Protection Pool (ECP) includes a reserve of emergency response teams and assets, which Member States and third countries participating in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism have voluntarily committed; as of January 2025, they had [offered](#) 148 [specialised response capacities](#).

Based on the rescEU reserve model, Niinistö proposed to provide options for **civil-military pooling capabilities** (e.g. remotely piloted aerial vehicles). In the framework of the Civil Protection Mechanism, the [EU Concept](#) on effective civil-military coordination in support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief emphasises the importance of all actors, including humanitarian organisations and military forces.

The Council has also introduced a crisis response mechanism, the [Integrated Political Crisis Response](#) (IPCR), which allows for a coordinated decision-making process at EU level for major crises. The Council presidency is responsible for coordinating the political response, which brings together all relevant actors, including the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Member States. If the solidarity clause (Article 222 TFEU) is invoked, the IPCR is [automatically](#) activated. The Council also organises training activities and exercises to guarantee that the mechanism works properly if activated. So far, the IPCR has been fully activated with regard to the situation in the Middle East, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the migration and refugee crisis.

On **foreign information manipulation**, the [FIMI Toolbox](#) emphasises four priority areas: a) situational awareness; b) resilience building, c) disruption and regulation; and d) the EU's external action. In 2023, a FIMI Information Sharing and Analysis Centre was established to facilitate information-sharing between different actors and encourage the use of standardised frameworks. On cyber threats, the Council adopted the revised implementing guidelines of the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox in June 2023. The Commission has also proposed a regulation for a [Cyber Solidarity Act](#). Furthermore, on media literacy, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive requests Member States to develop media literacy skills, while the relevant [action plan](#) aims to improve users' awareness and critical thinking abilities.

The EU has created a dense legislative framework on **security of supply**. For instance, with respect to [energy](#), the electricity sector is bound by [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/941](#) on risk preparedness, while [Council Directive 2009/119/EC](#) imposes an obligation on Member States to maintain emergency stocks of crude oil and/or petroleum products. Several additional emergency regulations were introduced after the latest energy crisis, such as the [AggregateEU](#) service, which promotes demand aggregation and joint purchasing. With regard to critical raw materials (CRM), the [CRM Act](#) aims to [guarantee](#) the EU's access to a 'secure and sustainable supply'. The 2019 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Screening [Regulation](#) allows the Union [to](#) 'identify, assess and mitigate potential risks certain FDIs pose to the security or public order of the Union or its Member States'.

Adopted in 2022, the [Strategic Compass](#) is a plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030; Chapter 22 ('Secure') contains concrete [deliverables](#) relevant to the Union's efforts to enhance its overall preparedness efforts. For instance, it proposed that Member States develop national strategies to prepare armed forces for climate change. Furthermore, it proposed to create an [EU Hybrid Toolbox](#) to 'detect and respond' to hybrid threats.

#### Undersea cable infrastructure and preparedness

A [series](#) of incidents causing damage to undersea energy and communication infrastructure has raised significant concerns, as undersea physical attacks '[threaten](#) global connectivity, economics and security' and highlight EU vulnerabilities. At the same time, cyber-attacks against cable landing stations or remote network management systems which control submarine cables [constitute](#) an important risk to national security. The Niinistö report underlines that 'more than 95 % of global internet traffic between continents is carried by undersea cables' and recommends establishing an EU governance system for submarine cable infrastructure. This will include the **creation of a common EU fleet for maintenance and repair**. The report also highlights the need to enhance cooperation with NATO and like-minded countries, which 'could provide additional means and help to share the costs of improved subsea preparedness'.

President von der Leyen [welcomed](#) NATO's Baltic Sentry [military activity](#), which was announced on 14 January 2025 to boost the protection of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. In her statement, she focused on four priorities for securing the critical network infrastructure; a) prevention; b) detection; c) fast response and repair; and d) deterrence. The European Parliament has held consecutive [debates](#) on the topic in [plenary](#) and [committee](#) meetings, and in January 2025, Commission Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen made a [statement](#) in plenary highlighting the 'need to detect and to counter sabotage by the Russian shadow fleet, damaging critical undersea infrastructure in the Baltic Sea'.

The resilience of critical infrastructure is a paramount example of preparedness in the interplay between civil and military defence. The Niinistö report proposes to facilitate the use of CSDP instruments in order to protect the EU's critical energy infrastructure at sea or in submarine cables.

## Niinistö report: A precursor of an EU preparedness strategy

The Niinistö [report](#) emphasised the need for 'comprehensive preparedness', to be supported by the upcoming **Preparedness Union Strategy**. According to the report, the strategy could promote the development of Preparedness Baseline Requirements at European level through the integration of a 'Security and Preparedness Check' into the Better Regulation Guidelines. Additionally, the report explored the feasibility of an EU Preparedness Law, which could set joint standards and long-term measurable targets. Concerning decision-making, the report proposed the establishment of a European Civil Defence Mechanism (ECDM) to foster coordination between the military and other civil services while introducing the concept of 'variable geometries', according to which groups of Member States may share information on a need-to-know basis.

When it comes to strengthening the EU's **deterrence** vis-à-vis malicious acts, the report advocated establishing a fully-fledged EU **intelligence cooperation service** and a robust framework for lawful access to encrypted data to counter organised crime, terrorism and other threats to national security. Regarding **citizens' empowerment**, it supported the establishment of a **72-hour self-sufficiency target** for all households to sustain any emergency and promoted the idea of providing (financial) incentives to boost the attractiveness of careers in preparedness. On **public-private cooperation**, the report suggested establishing an **EU governance system for submarine cable infrastructure** (potentially including the introduction of a common EU fleet for maintenance and repair) and developing an **EU Stockpiling Strategy** to incentivise emergency reserves and stocks (also through joint procurement).

On **defence**, Niinistö is in favour of establishing a support instrument which would include only the willing and capable Member States that wish to **provide material support to Ukraine**, developing options for dual-use and civil-military pooling capabilities and introducing a structured civilian security capability programme to identify gaps and foster capabilities. Concerning the EU's **global**

**partnerships**, these must entail the principles of mutual resilience and preparedness-by-design, the implementation of which would be based on external financing instruments and dedicated tools for promoting strategic investments. Finally, **two new facilities** (the Defending Europe Facility and Security Europe Facility) could be established to streamline all defence/defence industrial-related initiatives and civil security instruments, respectively.

As illustrated in Table 1, total defence concepts in Europe and beyond include a strong element of military capabilities and readiness, coupled with civilian (e.g. emergency response teams) and social (e.g. building understanding and trust between different societal groups) preparedness aspects. In most national strategies, civil defence and preparedness authorities are mandated to support the armed forces when needed, while the resilience of national infrastructures and economic mechanisms ensures the proper functioning of society, including guaranteeing the supply of resources necessary in case of emergency. In addition, the approach emphasises societal (including psychological) resilience as being vital for jointly overcoming crises and maintaining a spirit of unity against potential aggressors and threats.

## Preparedness exercises

The Niinistö report adopts the spirit of this approach, explicitly making reference to the 'Swedish total defence concept' and the Finnish emergency stockpiling initiatives that promote a 'whole-of-society' approach, suggesting that a Preparedness Union Strategy should identify the most critical sectors that are indispensable for adequately responding to crises. As outlined in the table, Norway has presented a relevant list, which is rather extensive and spans from transport to crisis management and defence. Additionally, the report proposes conducting **preparedness exercises** and reinforcing them through a common EU exercise policy, acting as a joint framework. Such exercises may entail a number of government structures. For example, a total defence exercise which was [held](#) in Singapore from 15 to 29 February 2024 brought together educational, community, commercial and government organisations, which, based on the scenario, faced either power, water, food supply or digital connectivity disruptions for a minimum of one hour, or a civil emergency related to cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns or drone attacks.

Lessons learned from the example of Singapore could be useful for the Union, as the report envisages that an EU-wide exercise could be built on this scenario and may also be expanded in order to assess the ability of European households to be self-sufficient for 72 hours, as envisaged in the report. In the same vein, Niinistö promotes the idea of developing a comprehensive EU Stockpiling Strategy in order to guarantee the availability of necessary reserves and stocks in times of crisis. On this, per the report, the EU could draw upon the Finnish [operating models](#), which consider emergency and obligatory (often decentralised) stockpiling as a priority for areas such as preparedness for biological threats, fuel, electricity and food supply, pharmaceuticals and vaccines, CRM<sup>2</sup> and other essential production inputs and components.

## Careers and skills in security, defence and emergency response

The report makes special reference to the need to tackle the **skills gap in critical sectors** and reduce the risk of labour shortages during emergency situations. One of its proposals is the development of EU-funded programmes aiming to raise awareness, boost interest in careers and education relevant to the security, defence and emergency response fields and make them more attractive to younger generations. Past experience from the Nordic countries point to practices which have integrated the total defence duty into their peoples' mentality and way of thinking. In particular, in Sweden the [total defence duty](#) includes, apart from conscription (i.e. military service), civilian service and general national service. **Civilian service** ensures that society's critical parts continue to function in times of crisis (e.g. serving as a nurse or a firefighter), while general national service is preferably based on each person's job and may include cooking or looking after children in times of crisis or war. Prior training on transferable skills and knowledge is required.

The reinforcement of reserve systems is also shown to be a way to foster younger generations' interest in defence professions and in security skills. For example, Denmark's voluntary Home Guard forces ('Hjemmeværnet') provide daily [assistance](#) to the police and enjoy high confidence rates from the general population. Finland also aims to [promote](#) operational cooperation between the National Defence Training Association and its Defence Forces in order to achieve an effective and harmonised refresher and volunteer training exercise scheme. All these examples feed into the report's proposal to develop incentives to increase the appeal of careers in defence, security and emergency response among younger generations. The report specifically suggests that actions could be introduced as part of the **Quality Jobs Roadmap** announced in the Political Guidelines, and that **structured exchanges** among Member States could help to identify best practices in relation to national service and conscription models, reservists and education programmes.

## Civil-military coordination

The report places emphasis on developing **effective civil-military coordination mechanisms**, which may include the establishment of an ECDM to ensure smooth collaboration and interaction between the armed forces, civil protection mechanisms and emergency services. This presupposes the existence of a well-defined set of rules on the responsibilities of each EU body and the Member States. Norway, for example, has published [instructions](#) for each Ministry to ensure coordinated work related to civil protection and emergency preparedness, and has mandated the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to take over the general coordinating role. Relevant guidelines could also complement the envisaged ECDM to ensure smooth collaboration between EU bodies and national authorities.

## Budgetary aspects of preparedness

Preparedness and resilience come with related costs, but as Commissioner for Defence and Space Andrius Kubilius stated in his [hearing](#) before the European Parliament, '**preparedness costs a lot, but no preparedness costs much more**'. This is also confirmed by a 2024 [study](#) by Allstate, the US Chamber of Commerce and the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, which – for the climate security domain – underlines that 'every [US]\$1 spent on climate resilience and preparedness saves communities \$13 in damages, cleanup costs, and economic impact', while [highlighting](#) that \$7 of the \$13 'represents preserved jobs, income and economic output'.

The Niinistö report provides recommendations on where the **necessary financing** for proposed initiatives could come from. It suggests investment in preparedness and crisis resilience in the next MFF through the development of a **European Investment Preparedness and Readiness Investment Framework** (at least 20 % of the EU budget must contribute to EU security and crisis preparedness, according to the report) and further support from the European Investment Bank (EIB) for the defence sector. It suggests that this may be achieved through ensuring that at least 15 % of the European Solidarity Fund budget is invested in preparedness measures and establishing new long-term financing options. Private capital could also be leveraged by issuing a European Preparedness Bond Standard, establishing (thematic) Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) and thematic stock indices (e.g. an EU Defence and Security Index). [Additionally](#), the Defending Europe Facility and the Securing Europe Facility could streamline all relevant funding.

The report proposes that the EU could, in addition, leverage private capital through the establishment of preparedness-focused ETFs and thematic stock indices. The EIB is also pivotal in stimulating private investment. For instance, it [recently](#) approved €15.6 billion of new financing for a number of crisis preparedness fields and has provided loans to Member States to strengthen civil protection and disaster preparedness. Examples include a €220 million loan to [Greece](#) to purchase 'fire engines, firefighting planes and helicopters, drones, rescue vehicles and control centres' and a loan for the expansion of Esbjerg port in Denmark, [including](#) coastal protection measures to prevent flooding.

## The governance of preparedness

Civil and military preparedness requires profound adjustments to governance structures at national and EU level. The approach [assumes](#) that the state plays a central role in coordinating the military and civil protection of the population and of critical infrastructure; this has often translated into the need for a coordinating national body/structure to ensure a cohesive and efficient deterrence and response policy and to streamline the civil and military approaches towards a specific crisis. It also requires new structures inside the armed forces, whose different branches must coordinate their efforts in case of natural disasters and other non-war-related scenarios. For instance, in mid-January 2024, the Government Council for Foreign and Defence Affairs (KYSEA) of Greece [decided](#) to appoint a Lieutenant-General responsible for establishing a Construction and Disaster Management Military Command to support the Secretariat-General for Civil Protection. Other examples are the World Health Organization's [discussions](#) about bolstering civil-military cooperation in health emergency preparedness, which emerged after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the [mobilisation](#) of EU armed forces in support of civilian authorities (e.g. distributing food, building hospitals, transporting medical supplies) during the pandemic.

On the EU level, according to [some](#) experts, crisis management policy 'is still carried out in silos' and 'focuses on specific sectors and areas', which span a number of services (Figure 1), at times undermining the efficiency of the coordination efforts and the exchange of information. On information exchanges, the Niinistö report highlights the need for strengthened EU intelligence structures and proposes that discussions start on how to set up an **intelligence cooperation service**, which could support the policy planning process. The Strategic Compass also entailed provisions on enhanced 'intelligence-based situational awareness and relevant EU capacities', with references to the EU Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) and the EU's Satellite Centre (SATCEN). The EU's civilian Intelligence Centre (INTCEN) has been integrated into the EEAS and [aims](#) to 'provide intelligence analyses, early warning and situational awareness to the HR/VP and the Political and Security Committee'. The EU Military Staff (EUMS) also performs early warning and situation assessment from the military perspective. The INTCEN and the Intelligence Directorate of the EUMS formulate the SIAC, [which](#) provides intelligence analyses to the HR/VP and the EEAS, while offering its services to relevant EU decision-making bodies as well as to the Member States.

## Preparedness and the economy

Preparedness can constitute an opportunity to strengthen industry and empower and provide state-of-the-art education and skills to the workforce, creating opportunities and optimising circumstances for a number of economic sectors. By establishing effective preparedness and resilience mechanisms, (the impact of) potential disruptions [could](#) be minimised, since public structures and (critical) infrastructures, as well as [private businesses](#), will have developed emergency protocols and resilient networks of supply chains. At the same time, as the Niinistö report underlines, preparedness touches upon a wide variety of scientific fields and sectors, and creates incentives for more cross-border scientific collaboration and additional investment in the research and development of dual-use goods. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of preparedness, expertise and financial resources from both the public and the private sector will be required to build and maintain concrete preparedness initiatives in the form of public-private partnerships.

[Conscription](#) and reserve systems [may](#) also build into youth and employment policies. For instance, during military service, conscripts can be invited to participate in training programmes and courses to learn new skills. As an example, [Finland](#) allows all of its conscripts to receive military training and learn leadership and everyday skills. Cyber conscription in Denmark [enables](#) young citizens to gain 'a basic knowledge of IT and cyber security and end up with some highly sought-after skills'. Conscripts assigned to military engineering units or financial offices also apply their knowledge and gain hands-on experience while contributing to security. Thus, the armed forces have the

opportunity to (temporarily) hire [highly educated people](#) who can provide added value to their ranks, while citizens can [acquire](#) valuable and transferrable skills for their professional future.

## Expert views

In an initial [reaction](#) to the Preparedness Union strategy, SMEUnited, the association of crafts and SMEs in Europe, stresses that SMEs must be fully integrated into the EU's crisis response framework, since, as economic actors, they are essential for ensuring supply chain resilience, maintaining critical services and supporting local communities in times of crisis. Apart from SME involvement, the association asks for tailored support to allow SMEs to mitigate cyber threats, navigate disruptions, and adapt to climate risks.

[EurEau](#), the European Federation of National Associations of Water Services, welcomed the strategy and particularly its basis, namely that the societal benefits of robust preparedness outweigh their costs and that preparedness and resilience considerations should be included in EU programmes from the start. It also considers that the EU Stockpiling Strategy should guarantee access for water operators to critical resources across the EU.

At the same time, a paper by the [European Policy Centre](#) highlights a clear contradiction between the Preparedness Union Strategy, which emphasises the crucial role of local and regional authorities, and the recent Communication on the future EU budget, which represents a shift toward centralisation that risks sidelining regions. Additionally, it believes there is a lack of 'unanimous appetite and commitment' among Member States, as well as an absence of 'political leadership.'

Experts increasingly point to the need to strengthen preparedness and build crisis-resilient (societal) structures. Daniel Fiott of the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy underlines the importance of [security of supply](#) for defence preparedness and supports the development of a [military logistics plan](#), which will contribute to the EU's military preparedness. On societal resilience to disasters, some [experts](#) highlight the need for a closer relationship between authorities and citizens to 'exchange, access, understand, and react to information about hazards'. Speaking from the British point of view and presenting the Swedish and Finnish total defence concepts, another [expert](#) points out that the necessity for increased defence spending and for 'a more logical and integrated approach to how national defence is maintained' continues to be a distant goal.

Some [experts](#) recognise that preparedness is closely linked to national sovereignty and requires the political will of the Member States, while stressing that the report does not specify where the necessary budgetary resources will come from. They [underline](#) that the EU needs to proceed to the implementation phase and transform ideas into concrete actions, as is the case in the Annex to the new strategy. Shortly before the publication of the Niinistö report, the Finnish Institute for International Affairs [emphasised](#) the need to include 'a genuine civilian component' in the building of comprehensive deterrence and defence capabilities.

A 2024 [article](#) for Encompass argued that the EU needs to overcome silos in its crisis management approach, and work on increasing coordination and exchange of information between instruments. It proposes that the EU can draw on the Finnish and Swedish examples, which bring different sectors together horizontally, and work on activating several EU structures quickly. It specifically refers to the IPCR and mechanisms run by the European Commission such as the Civil Protection Mechanism and its coordinating hub, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre, the Civil Protection Pool, and rescEU. It proposes private sector involvement and increased EU-NATO cooperation.

## European Parliament position

On 1 April 2025, the Preparedness Union Strategy was [presented](#) in plenary by Commissioner Hadja Lahbib. In her speech, the Commissioner highlighted six key actions in the strategy: strengthening crisis management; building critical infrastructure resilience; developing crisis resilient communities; enhancing digital resilience; increasing cooperation on hybrid threats; and promoting a culture of

preparedness. She emphasised that Parliament is an essential part of the whole-of-government and all-citizens approach. In the ensuing debate, Members of Parliament highlighted issues such as the need for clarity for the population and the need to raise consciousness without alarming citizens, as well as the importance of solidarity, of joint risk assessments and of including Parliament at all stages. The Niinistö report was [presented](#) to Parliament on 14 November 2024.

The 2024 annual [report](#) on the implementation of the CSDP welcomes efforts to strengthen Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness, and endorses the Commission's whole-of-society approach to resilience, advocating for the active engagement of EU institutions, Member States, civil society and individual citizens in reinforcing the EU security framework. The report recognises the role of citizens in crisis preparedness and response, emphasises the role of CSDP decision-making bodies in planning, resources and logistics, calls for a broader understanding of security threats and risks among EU citizens and supports joint training and exercises.

The [2024 annual report](#) on the implementation of the CFSP additionally calls on the HR/VP to promote **cooperation with like-minded countries** to enhance common preparedness and access to crisis response tools. In September 2024, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) following the devastating floods in central and eastern Europe, which promotes the idea of providing the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism 'with sufficient and upgraded resources in order to increase preparedness and improve capacity building'.

## MAIN REFERENCES

Lazarou, E., [EU civilian and defence preparedness](#), EPRS, European Parliament, November 2024.

Angstrom, J. and Ljungkvist, K., [Unpacking the varying strategic logics of total defence](#), Journal of Strategic Studies, September 2023.

Wither, J., [Back to the future? Nordic total defence concepts](#), Defence Studies, 2020.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the pooling mechanisms which have been developed, the European Commission has established common goals to foster disaster resilience in civil protection. They are usually called the 'European Disaster Resilience Goals' and [set](#) five key disaster risk management goals: a) anticipate, b) prepare, c) alert, d) respond and e) secure.

<sup>2</sup> In 2024, NATO [published](#) a list of 12 **defence-critical raw materials essential to the (European) defence** technological and industrial base (DTIB), underscoring its commitment to assisting Allies in securing key resources necessary for the development and deployment of defence capabilities. Some [experts](#) have identified that aluminium and graphite, essential for most defence applications, are 'the most likely to suffer from geopolitical and supply chain disruptions'.

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