Joint Communication on "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action"

Brussels, 7 June 2017

Why do we need this new Communication? What is new about it?

While previous work on resilience concentrated on enhancing the collaboration between humanitarian and development actors to strengthen resilience at community and individual levels, this Communication puts an emphasis on enhancing state and societal resilience. Resilience requires a political approach and that governments take primary responsibility for catering for the needs of their populations. It also looks at the security policy dimension of resilience, including the EU's work on conflict prevention, countering hybrid threats, cyber security, critical infrastructure protection and handling of external disinformation campaigns. It proposes further to develop partnership with NATO and the OSCE. The new Joint Communication expands the scope of the 2012 resilience Communication[1]. The aim is to identify how a strategic approach to resilience can increase the impact of EU external action and sustain progress towards EU development, humanitarian, foreign and security policy objectives. It also looks at how EU external policy can contribute to resilience inside the EU, through better anticipation and response to external pressures and threats.

How do you define resilience?

The 2012 Commission Communication defines resilience as *"the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, adapt and quickly recover from stresses and shocks"*. The EU global strategy takes the concept further. It speaks of resilience as *"a broad concept encompassing all individuals and the whole of society"* that features *"democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development, and the capacity to reform"*. Support to resilience at all levels is also an integral part of the new European Consensus on Development. The Joint Communication develops this idea and sets out ten guiding considerations that practitioners can use when translating the concept into concrete action.

How can the EU strengthen state and societal resilience in partner countries?

Identifying and building upon existing positive sources of resilience is as important as tracking and responding to vulnerabilities. Such factors may take the form of institutionalised or informal democratic and good governance or justice systems, non-state institutions and organisations, embedded cultural norms and practices or ad hoc community-driven solutions that complement state capacities or compensate for their absence. Resilience has to be addressed at multiple levels – state, society and community. Local governments and civil society are often the basis on which resilience can take root and grow at community level. Women have a specific and essential role that needs to be recognised and acted upon, while addressing the structural causes of gender inequality.

How exactly will you incorporate this into the EU's external action?

The Joint Communication examines different aspects of state and societal resilience: inclusive and participatory societies, economic resilience, climate and environmental resilience, the prevention of violent conflicts, protracted crises, migration and forced displacement and security. It proposes four building blocks to incorporate resilience into the EU's external action:

- Improving analysis of risks, underlying causes and resilience factors (capacities to cope with risks and shocks, to adapt and to transform)
- A more dynamic monitoring by the EU of external pressures to allow early action
- Integrating the resilience approach into EU programming and financing of external assistance
- EU cooperation with multilateral and bilateral institutional partners

The Joint Communication argues that a coherent mobilisation of political dialogue, the diplomatic resources of the Union and its Member States, EU assistance, sectoral policy dialogue and bilateral initiatives is required to effectively strengthen resilience in partner countries.

What does this mean in practice? Can you give an example?

1. Building resilience in a post-conflict situation in the case of Nigeria: The EU response to the crisis in Northern Nigeria is an example of a joined-up resilience approach, based on joint analysis (conducted together with the World Bank and United Nations) and joint strategic planning. A substantial package of assistance will aim to enhance resilience of conflict-affected people and begin reconstruction in North Eastern Nigeria. It builds on the existing emergency response, to gradually move into recovery and rehabilitation, utilising both humanitarian and development funds. Addressing vulnerability and fragility in Africa is a global priority, demanding collective action from all stakeholders to address the interlinked challenges of poverty, inequality, conflict, violent extremism and climate threats. Protracted crisis in the region also has significant spill-over effects for the EU.

2. **Resilience and support to our partners in the EU's five guiding principles towards Russia:** The internal resilience of the Union is an integral consideration of our external policy towards Russia. The five guiding principles agreed by the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2016 recognise the need to strengthen our engagement with a neighbourhood that extends as far as Central Asia. They also identify the need to strengthen the resilience of the EU, in particular on energy security, hybrid threats and strategic communication. They aim to ensure that both the Union and its neighbouring partner countries remain free to make their own political, diplomatic and economic choices, by reducing the scope for external leverage or coercion.

3. **Incorporating of the Gender dimension the EU's conflict and disaster policy**: Case studies show that climate change, disasters and violent conflict can affect gender groups in different ways. These factors need to be properly understood and addressed in any resilience analysis. In some cases disasters and conflicts can underscore patriarchal social norms that disproportionately restrict women and girls' equal access to rights and resources, and they can also create a shift in gender roles and norms. Women and girls can also play an active and important role in contributing to societal resilience that can underpin peace. Ensuring that women and girls are well informed and actively participate in peace building and recovery efforts not only ensures that their specific needs and capacities are taken into consideration, but can also create a window of opportunity for social change, by challenging traditional gender roles and gender-based discrimination. This is a further factor of societal resilience, and can ensure more suitable and sustainable outcomes for EU-supported work. The specific contribution of women to strengthening resilience to violent conflict within societies also needs to be fully recognised, as well as their role when engaging communities in the prevention and resolution of conflict and countering violent extremism.

4. **Understanding the drivers and the interlinkages between pressures – example of migration, environment and climate change:** Migration to the EU is thought to be heavily influenced by environmental and climate changes, though this driver is difficult to disentangle from economic, demographic and other drivers and often goes unreported. Many migrants from Western Africa or Eastern Africa have first been driven away from their homes as a result of desertification and soil degradation, contributing to a pattern of rural exodus in Africa, largely driven by environmental disruptions on agricultural systems. The effects of natural disasters are compounded by economic and demographic trends and rapid urbanisation. As a result, African cities are often overwhelmed by a large expansion of population, and unable to meet the needs of their inhabitants for jobs, housing or basic services. Recent studies have shown how migrants largely congregate in informal settlements in the outskirts of large African cities, as for instance in the case of Accra, where more than 90% of migrant households live in one severely deprived area with no access to running water.

5. **Linking the EU's internal and external policy work (examples)**:

The concept of resilience has been embedded in the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection since 2013. This has resulted in the development of risk assessment methodologies and research that already informs cooperation with a number of non-EU countries, including Ukraine. The concept has been further developed in the proposed Regulation on Security of Gas Supply, which includes provisions relating to risks stemming from non-EU countries and including effective cross-border measures in national emergency and preventive action plans. A similar approach is taken in the electricity sector.

The EU civil protection mechanism further contributes to resilience by improving the effectiveness of prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disaster in the EU, neighbouring countries and beyond. It promotes the development of risk assessments and the financing of prevention and preparedness, training and exercises.

What is the role of the EU Member States?

Enhanced collaboration with EU Member States to enhance resilience in our partner countries and to prevent and end conflicts are at the centre of the resilience approach. Together, the EU and its Member States can be much more effective than individually in identifying and addressing risks, vulnerabilities and resilience factors. The Joint Communication suggests more joined-up action between the EU and its Member States, in particular in crisis situations.

Who will fund the implementation of the strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action?

It is less costly to focus on pre-emptive risk reduction and early action that minimises damage, loss and deterioration, instead of response after the fact. Strengthening resilience is intended to make EU external action more coherent, more responsive and more flexible, and therefore, more efficient. It is a means not an end. The early assessment of risks, vulnerabilities, and corresponding local resilience factors will inform all EU external action instruments. It is intended to make EU external action more coherent, more responsive and more flexible, and therefore, more efficient. Actions to enhance resilience will be funded under the existing financial envelopes.

What does this change for humanitarian principles?

EU humanitarian aid is and will always be allocated strictly according to needs. It aims at saving and preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering and safeguarding the integrity and human dignity of populations affected by natural or man-made disasters. It is channelled to people affected, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation. This is reflected in the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence enshrined in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

See the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action" here.

[1] "The EU Approach to Resilience – learning from Food Security Crises" COM(2012) 586 final, 3 October 2012

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Press contacts:

Catherine RAY (+32 2 296 99 21)
Christina WUNDER (+32 2 299 22 56)
Daniel PUGLISI (+32 2 296 91 40)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email