Resilience as a strategic priority of the external action of the EU

Background paper on a future Joint Communication on Resilience

Background

1. The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy identifies state and societal resilience as one of the five priorities of the Union's external action. It describes resilience as "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises" and states "a resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state".

2. The Foreign Affairs Council of 17 October 2016 called for the five priorities of the Global Strategy to be to be swiftly translated into concrete policy initiatives and action.

Policy context

3. The humanitarian and development policy dimension of resilience has been extensively explored by the Commission since its 2012 Communication on "The EU approach to resilience: learning from Food Security Crises", and the Council conclusions in the following year. The 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy proposed measures to address sources of instability comprehensively across sectors and to strengthen the resilience of the EU's partners in the face of them.

4. Resilience is prominent in the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The Commission's proposal for a new European Consensus on Development echoes the broad treatment of resilience in the Sustainable Development Goals and identifies resilience-building as "indispensable for lasting solutions to complex global challenges".

5. Since 2012, both within the Commission and in international discourse, the concept of resilience has evolved, and today it appears in contexts as varied as energy and climate change and environment, economic policy, disaster management, the response to hybrid threats and the prevention of violent conflict. The Political Guidelines for the current Commission, for instance, identify resilience with the need to address political and economic vulnerabilities resulting from over-dependence on external sources of energy supply.

6. A number of the EU's key institutional partners — including the OECD, NATO, the UN and the World Bank — have developed their own concepts and policy frameworks on resilience. Resilience as a measure of adaptability to societal change, political, economic, environmental and demographic pressures is understood to be an important dimension of inclusive sustainable growth, and the prevention and mitigation of violent conflict. Resilience as the capacity to maintain the core functions of a state, social and political cohesion in a global environment of increased risks is now widely recognised as an important factor of peace and security.

What we aim to achieve

7. This initiative recognises the utility of the concept of resilience for work in a more complex, connected and contested world. It aims to ensure that the EU contributes to the evolving policy agenda on resilience in a coherent and effective manner, and reflects this in its external action.

8. The initiative aims to establish a coherent policy framework on resilience across the EU's external action, and to identify key issues at the juncture between internal and external policy. It will address the linked questions of how the EU can contribute to the resilience of its partner countries, and how external policy can contribute to the resilience of the Union, including in the context of the European Agenda on Security. It will build upon and strengthen joint work with the Union's key multilateral partners. It will draw upon the Global Strategy, the proposed European Consensus for Development and other existing EU policy thinking, the scientific literature, the work of major multilateral partners and the operational experience of non-state actors. A common narrative will be important in order to ensure that resilience is properly reflected in all relevant EU policies.

9. The Joint Communication will provide guidance on addressing resilience at community, state and at societal level, building on progress made in implementing the existing resilience policy framework. It will emphasise tailor-made policies in support of inclusive and accountable governance, institutions and the judiciary. It will promote a joined-up approach, where appropriate, to its humanitarian, development, conflict prevention, security and defence, and other EU policies with an external dimension. It will place an emphasis on empowering societies and communities to address key drivers of fragility and vulnerability, including their economic, climate, environmental and societal factors.

10. The Communication will also address the broad security dimension of resilience along three main axes: human security and Sustainable Development Goal 16 ("Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all stages"), the possible contribution to the European Agenda on Security, and the EU partnership with NATO.

11. The concept of resilience developed in this Communication is intended to be reflected in EU foreign policy and EU development policy, and where appropriate in EU humanitarian action. The Communication will have a global geographic scope, while including specific proposals relating to the EU's surrounding regions, in line with the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the geographic priorities of the European Agenda on Security. It will consider how its external policy instruments can best contribute to these objectives. It will examine how better to anticipate external pressures that affect the resilience of the Union.

Process and timelines

12. Work will be taken forward by the EEAS and the Commission, under the authority of HRVP, in view of adoption by the College in May 2017.

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