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Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on enhancing preparedness, response capability and resilience to future crises, adopted at the 3829th meeting of the Council (General Affairs) on 23 November 2021.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON ENHANCING PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE
CAPABILITY AND RESILIENCE TO FUTURE CRISES**

1. The European Council in June 2021 invited the Presidency to take work forward in the Council to enhance our collective preparedness, response capability and resilience to future crises and to protect the functioning of the internal market. The Ministers of European Affairs, at their informal meeting in July 2021 in Brdo subsequently supported the efforts of the Presidency towards a more comprehensive response to crises.
2. The European Union has faced numerous crises throughout its history and has gradually implemented policy and institutional changes designed to enhance its ability to deal with future crises. Crises are becoming increasingly complex, cross-border and multi-faceted and can therefore have an increasingly adverse effect on the EU, its Member States and their citizens.
3. The creation of the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements in 2013, under the oversight of COREPER, was already an important step towards supporting comprehensive situational awareness and contributing to cohesive decision-making at the EU political level in response to major, cross-sectoral crisis events, for the benefit of the EU and its Member States. The response to crises nonetheless needs to evolve, not least through learning the lessons from successes and shortcomings identified in their aftermath, in particular from the IPCR activations for the ongoing migration and COVID-19 crises. Enhanced cross-sectoral and cross-border coordination and cooperation between Member States and support at EU level are essential to respond effectively to crises in the interest of European citizens and in full respect of national and EU competences. The EU's response to future crises should also build on and strengthen as appropriate existing cross-border cooperation mechanisms on all levels and be in full respect of the principles of the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights.

4. Many recent lessons learned derive from the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite shortcomings, the EU has coped well, thanks to coordination and solidarity. While exposing gaps in terms of preparedness and response to cross-sectoral crises, our response to the pandemic has proven the necessity and added value of working together. The use of EU consular cooperation and coordination for the successful repatriation by Member States with support from the EEAS and Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) of EU nationals stranded abroad because of emergency travel restrictions, the successful adoption and roll-out of the EU Digital COVID Certificate, as well as the largely positive results regarding the production, procurement and the sharing of vaccines, are particularly visible examples of the value of EU cooperation. Temporary measures at EU level in the areas of economic governance and the management and flexible use of European funding were decisive in preserving the resilience and facilitating the recovery of Member States' economies.
5. In the future, the EU must also be ready to face acute crises of a different nature, which could be multi-faceted, of a hybrid nature, have cascading effects or occur simultaneously. This will require improved cross-sectoral and cross-border crisis management, including risk analysis and strategic foresight for better anticipatory action, prevention, preparedness and response, in an all-hazards approach, in order to inform longer-term action to build resilience to challenges. Available EU mechanisms, including their interaction with global mechanisms, should be regularly reviewed by the Council in order to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Strengthening cross-sectoral crisis response and preparedness

6. In times of crisis, the continued operation of the EU, its institutions and decision-making bodies has to be guaranteed. In this respect, the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the central role of the Council, supported by COREPER, in close cooperation with the Commission and the European External Action Service, in particular in ensuring an effective, coherent and horizontal political and strategic coordination between Member States. In this respect, the IPCR arrangements made an important contribution to timely coordination and response under the authority of COREPER.

7. In the future, cross-sectoral and cross-border crisis response coordination and political steering will gain further in importance. COREPER will continue to have a key role to play in preparing for and responding to such crises. In particular, lessons should be drawn from past crises on how the Council's work could be further improved and made more effective, including on the need to establish a blueprint with flexible and adaptable guidelines and procedural rules to inform the reaction of the EU and its Member States in case of a crisis, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and avoiding unnecessary administrative burden. Importantly, in addition to the implementation of EU instruments, Member States should commit to implement the national actions agreed in the Council and coordinated at EU level, taking account of Member States' competences as appropriate.
8. Inter-institutional cooperation and transparency should help to avoid a multiplication of fora and overlapping activity. In that respect, structured information sharing and common situational awareness at Council level through the IPCR arrangements are critical, in close cooperation with the Commission and the European External Action Service. Effective crisis response will also require further developing secure and digital means of communication.
9. Furthermore, enhanced strategic and crisis communication and fighting disinformation, information manipulation and interference are of crucial importance to support actions and responses to crises and to ensure public confidence.

10. Proactive crisis-preparedness requires foresight, regular review and anticipation of risks, identifying the impacts that these risks may have across different sectors, in individual Member States and in the neighbourhood, and how these impacts can best be mitigated and addressed. Important steps to enhance foresight and risk anticipation capacities at EU level have already been taken, in particular through the EU-wide Foresight Network, the latest revisions of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) legislation, and the strengthening of rescEU and the EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC). The Migration and Preparedness Blueprint is intended to improve situational awareness and early warning in the area of migration, including regarding the instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes. Capacities at the EU level supporting and complementing prevention and preparedness efforts of Member States to address any type of crisis should focus on areas where a joint European approach is more effective than separate national actions. It is also in this light that the Council welcomes the recently established Network of Directors-General of Member States' Crisis Centres that provides a tool for information and expertise sharing among them.

Building and monitoring resilience and reducing dependencies

11. The EU and the Single Market were severely tested by supply and demand restrictions, as well as by border controls introduced in order to contain the spread of the virus following the COVID-19 outbreak. The outbreak highlighted the need to work together to strengthen the resilience of the Single Market to disruptions, including to key EU supply chains and economic sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices and semiconductors, also taking into account the situation of cross-border communities and vital transit regions. Given the indispensable role of the Single Market for the EU, the Council emphasises that crisis-related measures should be temporary, proportionate and fully coordinated, with the objective of resuming as soon as possible the normal functioning of the Single Market, including the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital as foreseen in the Treaties.

12. In order to ensure a strong, resilient and fully functioning Single Market, appropriate actions need to be taken to strengthen the competitiveness and resilience of the European Union's industry, as well as to address strategic dependencies. In addition, the update of the industrial strategy for Europe takes into account lessons learned so far from the COVID-19 crisis. The Commission's 2021 Strategic Foresight Report also constitutes a contribution in this regard. Accelerating the recovery will require sustained and targeted public and private investment, whilst maintaining fiscal sustainability.

Next steps

13. The General Affairs Council will revert to the issue of enhancing our collective preparedness, response capability and resilience to future crises on a regular basis.
14. It encourages the Commission and the EEAS to come forward with further input on additional lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to respond to non-health related crises.
15. The IPCR arrangements have proven to be a flexible and useful instrument for addressing immediate challenges in times of crisis. With a view to ensuring that the Council's crisis response mechanism remains fit for purpose, the Council will review by June 2022 whether the IPCR arrangements need improvement or strengthening, in particular in the areas of anticipation and preparedness, taking on the lessons identified from the IPCR activations for the migration crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as past crisis management exercises and relevant experiences at Member State level to be taken into account in the discussions in the Council. This includes considering how to better involve the national crisis management structures, in accordance with Council rules and procedures.

16. In order to enhance crisis resilience, preparedness and response, the Council *inter alia*:

On resilience:

- recognises the importance of an evidence-based approach to the development of Union disaster resilience goals by the end of 2022, while taking into account best practices and lessons learned from existing national and international resilience frameworks;
- welcomes the resilience dashboards developed by the Commission, which should be further refined together with Member States, as a new and complementary tool to monitor resilience;
- welcomes the intention to launch the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network in December 2021 and invites the Commission, working closely with Member States, to involve the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network in the Union-wide disaster resilience goals, review of risk and scenario building;
- recalls the need to advance work in the area of enhancing resilience of critical entities and the security of network and information systems;
- underlines the importance to ensure the follow-up of the Commission’s communication on industrial strategy, in particular by strengthening the Single Market resilience and dealing with dependencies;
- welcomes the ongoing efforts towards an ambitious and actionable Strategic Compass on Security and Defence.

On preparedness:

- looks forward to the Commission’s annual State of Preparedness Report, which should take into account national competences and include information on available capacities, tools, skills and scenario-building, and feed into policy discussions at strategic level, including on cross-border aspects;

- calls for more consistent implementation of the various EU preparedness and exercise policies, including those under the IPCR arrangements;
- welcomes the efforts undertaken to establish a European Health Union and the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), and calls for a strengthened role of the Member States in the governance of HERA, as well as for cooperation between the Union and WHO;
- looks forward to receiving from the Commission the contingency plan for transport requested by the Council on 23 October 2020;
- welcomes the contingency plan presented by the Commission on food supply and food security in times of crisis;
- underlines the importance of further developing the EU cybersecurity crisis management framework and an efficient EU-level response to large-scale cybersecurity incidents and crises.

On the response to crises:

- recommends to further work on improving the Council’s arrangements for crisis response and overall political steering and coordination;
- welcomes the role of the Commission’s Emergency Response and Coordination Centre (ERCC) including in supporting effective crisis anticipation and cross-sectoral operational coordination in response to a broad range of crises, coordinating with other EU crises response instruments and assisting the IPCR;

- takes note of the work of the Commission on a proposal for a Single Market Emergency Instrument (SMEI) aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of crises on the Single Market, as well as work on a possible revision of the Schengen Borders Code;
 - underlines where relevant the importance of consular coordination and cooperation during crises and the need to draw lessons from the response to the COVID-19 outbreak and other crises, and awaits the presentation of a Commission proposal in 2022 on a revision of the EU consular protection directive.
17. The Council underlines the importance of strengthening cooperation with third countries in accordance with EU values and principles, in particular in the EU neighbourhood, as well as other international organisations and partners with regard to future crises.
18. The Council looks forward to the European Council taking stock of the work on crisis management and resilience at its December meeting.
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