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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB for the meeting of EPSCO (Health) of 3 December 2024: Health sector as a key part of the future Preparedness Union Strategy: - Information from Finland on behalf of Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Spain

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**Health sector as a key part of future Preparedness Union Strategy**

**Information note from Finland on behalf of Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany,  
Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Spain**

The covid-19 pandemic and Russia's illegal war of aggression in Ukraine have increased the need for crisis resilience and preparedness for complex cross-border threats in the European Union. The political guidelines of the European Commission for the upcoming five years outline a commitment to developing a **Preparedness Union Strategy**.

In mandate letters to Commissioner-designates, President Von der Leyen has outlined areas of work that aim at or contribute to strengthening the Preparedness Union, such as a Critical Medicines Act, a stockpiling strategy, and assessment on the need for a preparedness law.

Special Adviser Niinistö in his report *Safer together: Strengthening Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness further* underlines the importance of comprehensive preparedness – an all hazards, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach – with a set of recommendations for operationalization at the EU level. Health is one of the core areas of preparedness and contingency planning.

Through the Health Union legislation, a lot has already been achieved in the health sector. Given the centrality of health to crisis preparedness in the current evolving threat landscape, Finland has decided to raise **an AOB point at EPSCO on how the health sector can contribute to and should be taken into account in the future European Preparedness Union.**

Preparedness is primarily a national competence and a shared responsibility. The future Preparedness Union Strategy provides an opportunity to clarify the division of tasks between the Member States and the European Union in order to ensure effective preparedness with clear division of responsibilities and seamless cooperation between key actors.

Clear division of labour and more flexible cooperation is also important between the central health security institutions (European Center for Disease Prevention and Control ECDC, European Medicines Agency EMA, Health Emergency Preparedness Authority HERA). The EU could benefit from cross-administrative coordination (EU's crisis coordination hub) that brings together the different actors of comprehensive preparedness, including the health sector.

Recent crises have underlined the importance of the entire cycle of preparedness, including crisis prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, as well as societal resilience. Policies on people's health, wellbeing and security contribute to societal stability and resilience in crises. Health threats can be increasingly complex, cross-border and occur simultaneously. Continuous monitoring of health threats and their risk analysis as well as simulation exercises is therefore critical. At the same time, there are requirements in terms of confidential information and data exchange for preparedness and security of supply that need to be taken into account in the cooperation.

The threat of armed conflict is also a health threat and health sector can be targeted in order to undermine societal resilience. This underlines the importance of military and civilian cooperation on preparedness for health threats. In this context, HERA's role in preparedness related to medical countermeasures for military crises as well as concrete steps on civil-military cooperation could be explored.

Across the preparedness continuum, inter alia the following elements could be considered in order to strengthen health security in Europe.

- Prevention of pandemic threats and antimicrobial resistance, among others, through a One Health approach.
- Whole-of-society cooperation, essential public health functions, and strong health systems, including cyber threat detection, preparedness and response to protect health systems.
- Proceeding with the pharmaceutical legislation and the Critical Medicines Act in order to ensure availability of critical medicines.
- Increasing Member States' national and EU level preparedness for chemical, biological, radiation and nuclear threat situations (CBRN) and armed conflicts, including through rescEU storages and the future EU stockpiling strategy.
- Taking into account climate change as part of health security, with a view to preparation for extreme weather conditions as well as direct and indirect effects of climate change.
- Global cooperation, including through strengthening strategic partnerships and the global health security architecture, and considering EU's role in global health crises.

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