



Maciej Popowski, Director-General of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection & Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) © EU

## INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

By now, you will no doubt be well aware of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy. Published at the end of March, it immediately attracted wide media attention across Europe; particularly the guidelines for a minimum of 72 hours of self-sustainability for the whole population.

Sadly, the need for a strategy on preparedness has become increasingly evident in recent years. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, rising geopolitical tensions and the effects of climate change which are rocking our planet mean that Europe is facing a new reality, marked by growing risks and deep uncertainty. This is a wake-up call for Europe. We were reactive to disasters; we now need to prepare, systematically, across the board. We need to shift from reaction to proactive readiness.

Of course, for those of you in the civil protection community, the areas of focus of the strategy will be nothing new. Take the example of population preparedness; many of our colleagues across Member States – particularly those in the Nordic countries – have been producing self-sufficiency guidelines for quite some time, and other aspects of citizen preparedness form part of your daily work. What is new – and to me, ground-breaking – is that the EU will address the preparedness challenge as a whole – all hazards, all of society and all of government.

Some may wonder whether this is the role of the European Union. The answer, without a doubt, is 'yes'. Our citizens expect it. Last year's Eurobarometer survey shows that more than 8 out of 10 Europeans believe the EU should be more involved in preparedness efforts for future crises. Our EU role is in supporting the Member States, across the whole spectrum of preparedness actions. It is not about changing legal competences but changing the mindset to foster a culture of preparedness and resilience.

As you will read, the strategy is broad, covering seven thematic areas, from resilience of vital societal functions to crisis response and civil-military cooperation. Yet this strategy is wider than our civil protection or disaster risk management (DRM) communities – it needs to become everyone's concern. And everyone – all relevant stakeholders in all relevant policy areas – need to work together to shape a better prepared Europe at all levels. This is why the concept of preparedness by design is so important. It ensures that preparedness and security considerations are integrated and mainstreamed into legislation, policies and programmes from the outset.

The strategy roadmap sets out an action plan with 30 key actions and 33 accompanying actions, many of which will be directly of interest to our community. An EU stockpiling strategy will help to ensure that critical goods such as food, medicine, and an energy supply are available during all crisis scenarios to protect our societies and citizens. We will promote opportunities for young people to increase their engagement in preparedness via education, vocational training, and volunteering – whether in their own country or abroad. We are looking to attract new talent in preparedness, to help us fill critical gaps in the sector.

Of course, the strategy is just the start of the process. The hard work on making the Preparedness Union Strategy a reality is starting now. We count on the support of all those dedicated colleagues in our community to take this important work forward together.

This is a once-in-a-generation moment for the safety of Europe. Your support will be essential to its success. The Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) will be working with you in this endeavour.

**Maciej Popowski**



Director-General DG ECHO

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## Interview with Member of European Parliament (MEP) Grégory Allione

### Building a Union of Preparedness: a new vision for Europe

Grégory Allione's journey from young volunteer firefighter to MEP is marked by a lifelong commitment to solidarity and public service. Sparked by the devastating Tanneron fires in 1985, he joined the fire brigade at 17 and rose to captain by 1996. He later served as director of the Bouches-du-Rhône Fire and Rescue Service (SDIS) and as President of the French National Federation of Fire Brigades (FNSPF). Known for his leadership in crisis management and climate action, he became director of the French National Fire Officers Academy (ENSOSP) before being elected to the European Parliament in June 2024. At the European Parliament, he is a member of the Environment and Employment Committees and has founded the Intergroup on Resilience, Disaster Management and Civil Protection alongside his colleagues Pascal Arimont, Matej Tonin and Christophe Clergeau.



Grégory Allione, MEP for the  
Renew Europe Group © EU

**The EU Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS) was recently published. What do you think of the strategy? What are the most striking or interesting elements for you?**

With recent geopolitical upheavals, the war in Ukraine, and the climate crisis, Europe needs to shift its mindset from a Union of reaction to a Union of preparedness. We see this with the appointment of Hadja Lahbib as European Commissioner for Preparedness, but also with the creation of the European Parliament Intergroup on Resilience, Disaster Management and Civil Protection, which I co-chair with Pascal Arimont, Matej Tonin, and Christophe Clergeau. In this context, the EU PUS reflects this shift in mindset, drawing on the recommendations from Sauli Niinistö's report 'Safer Together', presented last October.

The strategy marks a major and unprecedented step forward in the EU's preparedness policy as it sets out a clear action plan to help Member States face pandemics, climate disasters, and cyberattacks. In my view, the most impactful elements

are the inclusion of society as a whole in crisis management and EU preparedness, as well as the cross-cutting approach adopted in the strategy. All sectors must contribute to Europe's resilience effort – because while we don't choose the crisis, we do choose to be prepared for it. Finally, this idea of a prepared Europe in no way conflicts with the respect or the sovereignty of individual states in matters of civil protection. The preparedness and associated forces of each EU Member State will ensure that our fellow citizens are better prepared, and always better protected.

**I understand you were previously a firefighter and have experience working in civil protection. How do you think the PUS is being received by this community? What are the key areas where you believe preparedness must be improved, based on your previous experience?**

I've been a firefighter for over 30 years and remain proud of this ongoing commitment – both in the field and now also at the European Parliament. As Ursula von der Leyen reminded us last November at the European Firefighters' Summit: they are a symbol of European solidarity, working together, saving lives, and protecting our communities and environment. Firefighters welcome this initiative, which makes preparedness a political priority. However, my fellow firefighters and I regret the lack of more concrete and ambitious measures regarding funding and support for citizen volunteer engagement. Today, this form of commitment is neither protected, recognised, nor upheld. This is a shared concern among the 3.5 million volunteer firefighters in Europe, as well as among millions of other citizens. For example, since the start of 2025, over 12 000 people in France have applied to become reservists, compared to 1 700 the previous year. Firefighters give their time, energy, and sometimes their lives to protect the public. The cornerstone of European solidarity is, above all, the power of the collective. We must build a society where civic and voluntary engagement is recognised as a strategic resource, essential to facing future crises. The firefighting community therefore expects bold measures to support, recognise, and protect the status of engaged citizen volunteers.

**You have advocated for a comprehensive EU-level preparedness guide for all European households – an idea echoed in the strategy through the development of guidelines, in collaboration with Member States, to support communication about various risks and situations before and during a crisis. Why do you believe this is so important?**

Indeed, together with Anna-Maja Henriksson and Nathalie Loiseau, we sent a letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, calling for the publication of a guide for all European households. This guide would inform them of practical steps to prepare for and respond to crises, while also raising awareness of how they can take an active role in their own safety and that of the Union – particularly through civic and voluntary engagement. We need to build a real culture of preparedness across Europe and adopt an approach that includes all citizens, because being ready already means being protected. And protecting oneself means being empowered to save lives – knowing how to react to a wildfire, a cyclone, or a cyberattack. It means having a survival kit to be self-sufficient for 72 hours, or choosing to get involved in civil protection efforts – to help yourself and others, in a spirit of solidarity and unity. This is crucial to ensure no European is left defenceless in an emergency – especially the most vulnerable, who are also the most at risk in crises and disasters.

**The vision of the strategy advocates for a whole-of-society approach to preparedness. What are your thoughts on this?**

Embracing a 'whole-of-society' approach to preparedness allows us to mobilise all citizens in a spirit of unity and solidarity – core values of the European Union. Fires, floods, and pandemics know no borders, and Europe must be ready when disaster strikes. With crises becoming more severe and more frequent, it is more urgent than ever to develop a true culture of preparedness in Europe. We saw this again recently during the blackout in Spain and Portugal – people found themselves helpless. When everything goes dark, only preparedness saves. This mobilisation and citizen engagement equip people with the skills they need to improve their own level of preparedness, while also strengthening social cohesion and trust between the public and authorities. Let us not forget: the safety of all depends on the preparedness of each. Along with my colleagues in the European Parliament, we are working towards this goal with the European Commission, particularly with Commissioner Hadja Lahbib, who said: 'Because we are safer together, solidarity and commitment must guide our actions toward a more secure, cohesive, and resilient Europe.'

## Interview with Adrian Bucałowski, Polish Presidency

### All hands-on deck: Poland's take on implementing the PUS

#### **'It will be all hands on deck': the Polish Presidency's view of the Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS) and its implementation**

Adrian Bucałowski is deputy director of the International Cooperation Department in the National Headquarters of the State Fire Service of Poland. Under the Polish Presidency, he also chairs the Council Working Party on Civil Protection (PROCIV) which has been one of the main fora for discussion of the PUS. Adrian has worked right at the heart of the strategy, facilitating discussions from Poland and other Member States on the PUS.

#### **Preparedness, particularly on security, was one of the priorities of the Polish Presidency. Why was it such a key focus for you? What are the areas where you see the greatest need for improved preparedness?**

'Security Europe!' has been the main priority for the Polish Presidency. We have a complex risk landscape. Poland understands this acutely; we have been prone to natural phenomena and stricken by wars throughout history.

Current events require a new level of ambition at EU level. Poland was hit by floods last year. There is war just over our borders. We are also experiencing hybrid events, such as migration pressure on the eastern border, also induced by hostile states. We need a new level of ambition as now we are talking about complex emergencies that require a comprehensive approach.



Adrian Bucałowski, Deputy Director International Cooperation Department © EU

The Polish Presidency aims to strengthen European security in its seven dimensions (external, internal, information, economic, energy, food, and health). It's a comprehensive but integrated approach (as with the PUS) in Europe, but with an understanding of the global context.

I am very impressed with the content but not surprised – there have been many discussions leading up to it. There are new activities proposed, but we have been talking about the core issues for some time.

#### **What for you were the most important elements of the strategy? What stood out for you?**

I am curious as to how some new domains will be activated, for example population preparedness. It is a totally new area for EU-level actions. How will it be put into practice? The level of ambition (particularly on the deadlines and the proposed timing) is very high. It will be 'all hands on deck'. Member States will need to be closely involved.

The only issue I see is that, although we have common risk assessment in the EU, it is also based on the Member States' specific landscapes. We need an all-hazards approach (as already proposed in the PUS), and we don't want to exclude any countries.

I am really interested in the preparedness-by-design concept. Recent experiences, like Covid and the war in Ukraine, show us how many sectors can be impacted by crises and disasters but also how many of them can support our joint actions.

#### **How has the strategy been received by citizens in Poland?**

Previous Eurobarometer surveys indicate major support in Poland for the EU's involvement in civil protection. Polish citizens believe that the EU should be active. When we are overwhelmed by disaster, we expect the EU to support us.



What you could read in some citizens' comments on Polish media (which focused on supporting 72 hours self-sufficiency) was the idea that 'if the EU is presenting us with these guidelines, the EU knows what's going to happen'.

This is why the Polish Presidency has continuously raised the issue of communication in civil protection – how to present information in a way that doesn't cause panic but leads to constructive engagement instead. After all, if we want to avoid a crisis, we must be prepared for it. Whether talking about disaster or war, the best way to prepare is to increase the level of resilience.

**Concerning population preparedness, what can be done, in your view, to ensure the involvement of local communities and civil society organisations in preparedness?**

First of all, we need to understand the power of local communities. They are very actively engaged in Poland. We have 16 000 volunteer fire brigades, for example, made up of around a few hundred thousand people. This would be the largest NGO in Poland if they were all counted as one. It's about creating strong bonds in society. If the country is divided, the country is vulnerable to crises. We need the direct involvement of civil society in managing risks.

From my experience as a youth programme facilitator, I know how important it is to respond at local level. You need to identify people first; look for leaders, support them, let them talk, understand their needs. We often used EU support for such actions, such as the Erasmus Plus programme.

**And to encourage public-private cooperation?**

It is extremely important to understand the role of the private market in managing risks. It is also about making the private sector aware of how they can contribute and how they are impacted.

In Poland, we have many years of experience of working with the operators of critical infrastructure. We don't need to convince them that their role is extremely relevant. It is not just business but also securing continuity of the state. They understand they can be impactful.

We need fora of public and private communities to see how they can support and how they can impact us.

**Do you have initiatives in place/planned to raise public awareness about the importance of preparedness?**

Poland has already implemented a comprehensive act on civil protection and civil defence which was extremely ambitious. We understand the issue of acting to increase public awareness. We are currently finalising the content of a manual to be distributed to every house in Poland later this year based on good practice examples from other Member States.

## Voices from the community: reflections from members of the Knowledge Network

What the Preparedness Union Strategy means to us



### Aikaterini Beli

**Research associate, Lisbon Council, and communication manager, Horizon Europe project Trusted Extremely Precise Mapping and Prediction for Emergency Management (TEMA)**

The strategy marks a shift towards a more anticipatory and coordinated approach to crisis management across the EU. Given today's interconnected risks, it highlights interoperability as a central pillar, intertwined within the three principles of the strategy. Implementing interoperable emergency management solutions means aligning legal frameworks, data systems and digital infrastructure to facilitate seamless cross-border cooperation and ensure proactive planning and readiness at every level.

### Federica Genna

**Senior associate, Fondazione Safe**

I welcome the new strategy as a long-overdue and essential step towards strengthening the Union's resilience architecture. It rightly shifts focus towards proactive crisis management and embedding preparedness in policy design rather than just execution, acknowledging that anticipating risks is more effective than reacting to them. I particularly commend its whole-of-society approach and the emphasis on the critical role of public-private partnerships and civil-military cooperation in ensuring comprehensive preparedness.



### Christian Resch

**Managing director, Disaster Competence Network Austria (DCNA)**

The strategy represents a transformative approach to managing crises in Europe. It shifts our focus from reacting to disasters to proactively anticipating risks and minimising their impacts. This framework aligns with the DCNA Science Plan 2030+, our strategic research and policy tool. Combining proactive research with innovative policy bridges theory and practice, enabling us to build a future defined by preparedness and coordination. Through collaboration and evidence-based strategies, we can reduce future crisis impacts.

### Joel Kauppinen

**Senior specialist, the Finnish Association of Fire Officers**

It is great to see the EU strengthening preparedness for safety and security matters. Rapid societal and environmental changes create complex problems and risks that do not respect administrative boundaries, making EU-level adaptation essential.

Currently, I am working on an Arctic Fire and Rescue Network of Knowledge (ArcResc) Network project to enhance Arctic climate change adaptation from the rescue services' perspective. Societies must adapt to climate change impacts so our rescue services can cope with increasingly frequent and extreme phenomena.





**Maria Vittoria Gargiulo PhD**  
University of Salerno

As a researcher working at the intersection of disaster risk reduction, science policy, and community resilience, I see the PUS as a vital framework for fostering proactive, coordinated crisis responses in Europe. It reinforces anticipatory action, cross-sectoral collaboration, and knowledge integration – all central to my work. The strategy's emphasis on resilience, solidarity, and systemic preparedness aligns closely with my commitment to connecting research with practice, ensuring science effectively supports communities throughout emergencies.

### **Juan Caamaño**

**Forest fire operations manager, Pau Costa Foundation**

From my experience in wildland fire management, the strategy's emphasis on anticipation, proactivity, and interoperability truly resonates. Anticipation allows us to act before disaster strikes and I've long advocated for stronger forecasting tools. Interoperability remains a key challenge in European wildfire operations. To truly enable cross-border cooperation, we need a common framework for training, terminology, and competencies tailored to wildland fire scenarios. The PUS offers a real opportunity to bring these priorities into the EU's broader preparedness agenda.



**Nadia Haddad**  
Executive Committee of European Disability Forum (EDF)

The PUS has a crucial role in making crisis response more inclusive of persons with disabilities. The core principle 'whole of society' should ensure that disability inclusion is one of the basic requirements across all activities. Specifically, the strategy promotes accessible public warning and crisis communication, reaching all people with disabilities. Perhaps most concretely, the action plan for the strategy calls for development of emergency guidelines 'adapted to all types of disability', and specific training of first responders on this topic. EDF calls for these commitments to be respected and for the disability community to be fully involved from the beginning, with financial support where required. There is much work to be done but this would help to reduce the increased risk currently faced by people with disabilities (16% of the global population) in crisis situations.

### **Simone Sbarsi**

**PROCULTHER-NET Project C&V expert**

The new PUS is ambitious, and I will closely follow its implementation with great interest.

Cultural heritage protection is an emerging sector within civil protection, evolving rapidly with international changes. Aligned with the PUS vision, PROCULTHER-NET intends to leverage this platform to:

- foster deeper civil-military dialogue;
- harness the full potential of public-private partnerships;
- promote knowledge transfer actions among experts in this field, including academics and researchers.



## Youth perspective: voices from the next generation on the PUS

The Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS) encourages young people to develop practical skills and awareness from an early age: Luna and Michel share their insights

### Interview with Luna Wilska from Finland



Luna Wilska, economics student,  
University of Turku © EU

Luna Wilska is a 23-year-old student from Finland, studying economics and mathematics. She also works in the asset management industry in Helsinki. Luna took part in the 2024 preparedness seminar organised by the Finnish National Rescue Association (SPEK) and represented Finland in the European Commission's Youth Policy Dialogue on preparedness in February 2025.

#### What are your views on the PUS?

I consider it to be a highly important initiative. As a young person, I sometimes find the current level of societal preparedness concerning, so it is encouraging to see that systematic development is being undertaken at the EU level. I especially appreciate the inclusion of concrete, individual-level actions, as these provide accessible ways for each of us to contribute to overall preparedness.

In particular, I value the strategy's emphasis on foresight and coordination, such as the development of a comprehensive EU-level risk assessment and the creation of a crisis dashboard for decision-makers. These tools signal a shift from reactive to proactive crisis management. Furthermore, the proposed minimum preparedness

requirements and efforts to strengthen civil-military and public-private cooperation show a commitment to building resilience across all sectors of society.

#### What elements stood out for you, as a young person?

The concrete measures mentioned earlier – such as the 72-hour preparedness recommendation and the integration of preparedness into school curricula and the training of educational staff – stood out to me in particular.

We already have a similar 72-hour preparedness recommendation in Finland, and it is commendable that this concept is being extended across the EU in an adapted form. From a young person's perspective, this is especially beneficial, as it fosters a sense of agency and empowerment. It encourages young people to develop practical skills and awareness from an early age, which I think can have long-term positive effects on individual and collective resilience.

#### How important is preparedness for you personally?

Preparedness is personally important to me. I have taken into account Finland's 72-hour recommendation and believe I would know how to act in a situation where such guidelines and supplies are needed.

As a Finnish citizen, I also recognise that our geographical position adds to the importance of readiness, especially in light of the current geopolitical context. Therefore, I see personal and national preparedness as both a civic responsibility and a practical necessity.

I also have a personal connection to the topic through my participation in the 2024 preparedness seminar organised by the SPEK and the Youth Policy Dialogue on preparedness in February.



## Interview with Michel Lajic from France

Michel Lajic is a law student at the University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas and a reserve officer in the French Army. He has experience in readiness exercises and crisis response through roles in public institutions. He is also involved in youth engagement through Les Jeunes IHEDN and took part in the European Commission's Youth Policy Dialogue on preparedness in February 2025.

### What are your views on the Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS)?

The PUS enhances the Union's ability to address growing complex threats. I appreciate the strategy's emphasis on strengthening interoperability and cross-sector cooperation for effective collective response.



Michel Lajic, law student at the University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas © EU

Beyond technical improvements, its success also relies on developing a shared strategic culture among Member States prioritising solidarity, autonomy, and strategic foresight. A 'European preference' in defence, supply chains, and technological innovation is vital. Investing in European capabilities enhances preparedness while contributing to the Union's strategic sovereignty and competitiveness – key priorities in the Draghi and Niinistö reports.

This strategy provides a critical foundation for EU renewal, complementing Readiness 2030 and the European Defence Industrial Strategy.

### What elements stood out for you, as a young person?

I was pleased by the EU's commitment to developing learning platforms based on a whole-of-society approach that actively involves youth. Measures such as creating an EU training catalogue and a platform for lessons learnt, developing guidelines for 72 hours of self-sufficiency, integrating preparedness into school curricula and teacher training, and promoting preparedness through youth programmes, resonate deeply with me.

### How important is preparedness for you personally?

Preparedness holds significant importance for me, both academically and professionally. Through my military reserve service and brief public service, I have seen how careful planning and anticipation are essential. Whether managing crises or preparing analytical notes, being well-prepared has always helped me.

I see preparedness not as an innate skill but as a discipline developed over time. It provides structure and composure when facing responsibilities and helps me respond confidently to the unexpected. It is a habit I continuously cultivate in all areas of my work.

### Anything else you would like to add?

Alongside this new strategy's implementation, a more unified and assertive EU strategic culture must emerge to strengthen Europe's ability to anticipate, prevent, and respond to threats. In this regard, a two-pillar approach is essential.

1. We must foster 'European preference' in economy and defence, rather than relying on external partners. Each EU Member State should prioritise procurement, development, and investment in European goods (including defence systems) and services.
2. As EU Commission President von der Leyen stated in 2019, the EU must become more 'geopolitical'. This requires clearer assessment of competitors' and partners' intentions. More importantly, the EU must more readily use power and coercive tools – particularly economic and legal – to counter hostile actions targeting Member States.

## Senior perspective: interview with Ricardo Oliveira Neves, Catalyst Now

Wisdom in action: mobilising seniors for resilience

### Senior view of the Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS): 'We have a window of opportunity now'

Ricardo Oliveira Neves is the chapter coordinator of 50plus and the co-chair of its Europe chapter, Catalyst Now, an international movement of social innovators, as well as author of *Living Longer, Thinking Differently* (with Sonia Gil). 50plus advocates for recognition that the traditional retirement model must be reimagined, as more of us are living longer, and healthier. He was formerly a consultant (including for the UN). We spoke to Ricardo about why the PUS resonated with him and what it means to the senior community.



Ricardo Oliveira Neves, chapter coordinator of 50plus and co-chair of its Europe chapter © EU

### Why did you find the PUS particularly of interest?

What stood out most when I read it was the action 'attract new talent in preparedness, to help us fill critical gaps in the sector'. One third of the EU population is over 55 years old. One in four of those born now in the UK will reach 100. Many elderly people are fit and healthy (both physically and cognitively). They represent huge social capital and value for society. How can we motivate these people to be part of civil society and engaged with preparedness work?

### In what areas of preparedness do you think older people can become involved?

Our community can help in areas like AI, technology, strategic communications, and leading NGOs. We have academics and social entrepreneurs in our chapter. The retired represent a big pool of professional talent.

### How do you think that we can get those over 60 engaged with preparedness?

We need to create a new mindset in mobilising seniors. The first step in engendering mutual trust is getting people engaged with society, including defence and government. The PUS stood out to me as something that we could help to support. This work is very exciting for senior people.

### Did you see the need for a PUS?

Sadly, we're starting to realise that the peace that we have known in Europe for the last 50 years may not last. What are we going to do? I'm pragmatic in terms of the future, but I feel that we need even more multilateral collaboration to promote the global systemic transformations that are necessary.

Most people are not aware of the geopolitical risks we're facing. We have a window of opportunity now, and it's a very good time to raise awareness of the current risks and hazards. We need to move towards a defence mindset.

### How do we need to raise awareness amongst senior citizens on the need for preparedness?

Personally speaking, I understand the importance of the 72-hour self-sufficiency guidelines, but it's important to build trust between citizens and governments first. We need to take time to lay the groundwork with citizens and engage people on the importance of this work, before setting the agenda. We're at a good point now to raise awareness of the risks and hazards we're facing.

We are available and enthusiastic to support this inspiring work.

## Behind the scenes: interview with Maarten Vergauwen, DG ECHO

### Inside the process: crafting the Preparedness Union Strategy

#### Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS): a look behind the scenes

Behind the publication of every EU strategy sits a group of people who have worked tirelessly on the drafting and coordination. Maarten Vergauwen was the lead for the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO). Here, he takes us behind the scenes, giving insight into how the strategy came together.



Maarten Vergauwen, team leader EU preparedness and civil protection policy, DG ECHO © EU

#### How did you get involved in writing the PUS?

The initial seeds were planted with the publication of the Niinistö Report in autumn last year. It was a busy period – European elections had just taken place, and the new Commission was being formed. In the President of the European Commission's mission letter to Commissioner-designate Hadja Lahbib: 'the development and implementation of an EU Preparedness Union Strategy' was flagged as a top priority.

The strategy development became a trio drafting process between DG ECHO, the Commission's Secretariat-General and the European External Action Service, in addition to the coordination of over 25 other Commission services, which made things challenging. The time pressure ultimately helped us stay goal-focused.

#### What has it meant to you to be involved in such far-reaching and impactful work?

It has been quite a journey! Content wise, it was a challenge to keep things on track. There was the continuous interaction between technical level work and political considerations that went up to the highest level of the President's Cabinet, and the drafting team became the crossroads of this process. I think we managed quite well actually. Some humour and late-night pizza delivery dragged us through the most challenging moments of this process.

#### That sounds like a lot of long meetings!

I counted over 60 meetings with the drafting team – with one of 13 hours in a row as the champion, we left the Berlaymont after 1 a.m.!

The gap between the first drafts – which you think are great – and the end result is substantial, but in the end, the text is balanced and has all of the important elements covered.

#### Which element of the strategy was the most important to you personally?

All chapters are important, but one of the emblematic actions is the one on population preparedness (and the 72 hours of self-sufficiency). The chapter on population preparedness as a whole gives a concrete opportunity to reach out to citizens and involve them more concretely in preparedness work.

Another one is the chapter on our vital societal functions, which represents for me the soul of this strategy as it brings many key elements together. The first part of the process is now finalised with the adoption of the strategy, but the journey is only just beginning. First reactions – even from usually critical voices – have been very positive. There are of course questions and demands for clarification, but this is normal and also allows us to enter into dialogue.

The vision is out now. Let's implement it together. Good luck to us!



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