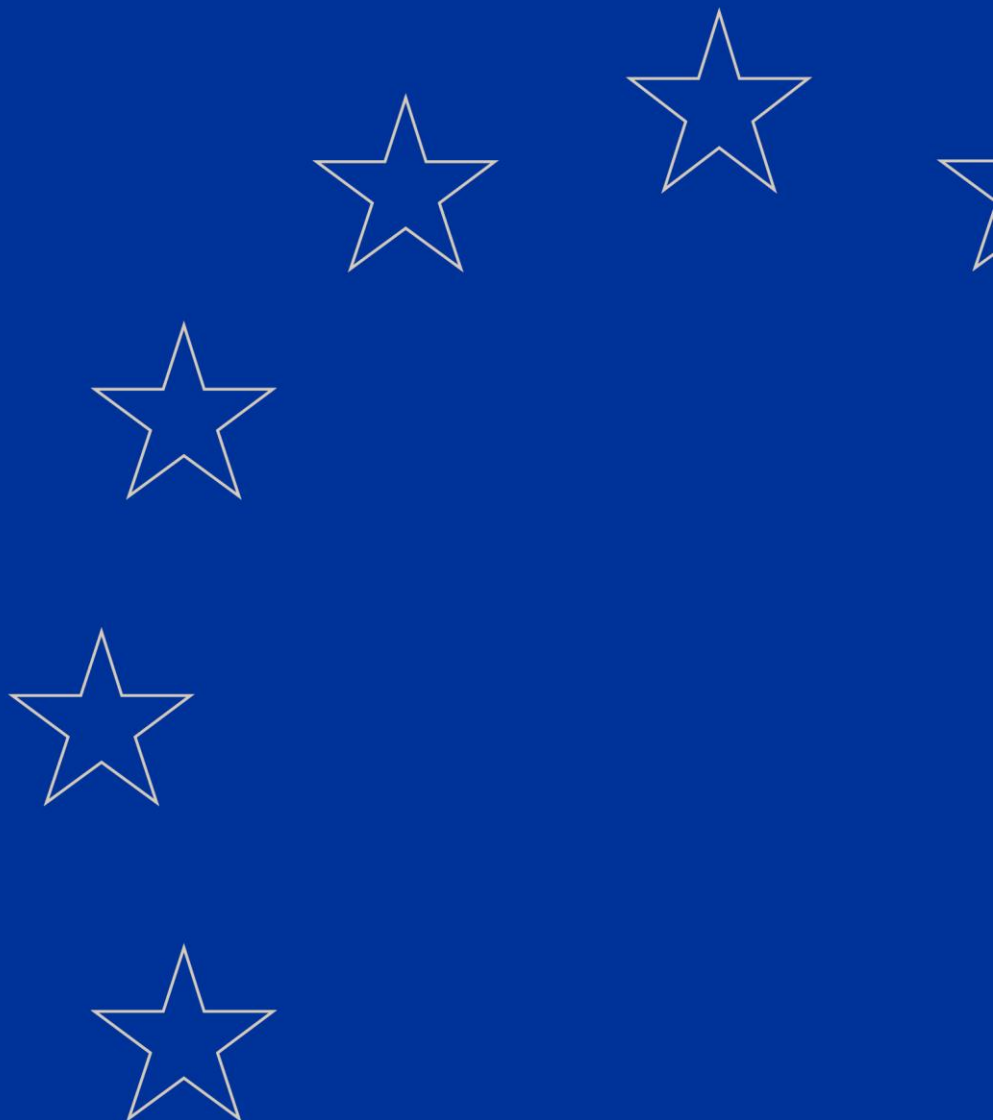


# Event Report – EU Preparedness Conference

**23-24 March 2026**

**Egmont Palace, Brussels**



# EU Preparedness Conference - Event Report

The EU Preparedness Conference took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2026, marking **one year since the adoption of the Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS)**. In the spirit of the **whole-of-society and all-of-government approaches** promoted in the Strategy, the Conference brought together a total of 350 participants from a broad range of backgrounds, including **academia, the private sector, civil protection authorities, the military, international organizations and civil society groups**.

The discussions during the Conference underlined the continued relevance and urgency of further promoting **preparedness across sectors following an all-hazards approach**, preparing for the worst-case scenario of armed conflict, natural disasters and hybrid threats simultaneously.

Opening speeches by Commissioner Lahbib, Executive Vice President Minzatu and Deputy Prime Minister for Restoration of Ukraine Kuleba reflected the need for further action to strengthen preparedness in a more **measurable way** and to guarantee **vital societal functions** during emergencies.

Two panel discussions and four thematic breakout sessions (civil-military cooperation, population preparedness, preparedness-by-design and public-private preparedness) identified the **need to enhance collaboration and communication across sectors**, stressed the imperative of **including people, especially vulnerable groups, in preparedness activities** and delivered a clear call to action: the EU must develop **robust resilience plans** drawing directly from Ukraine's experience.

## Key Recommendations

### 1. OPENING PANEL – EUROPE'S PREPAREDNESS CHALLENGE: FROM CLIMATE EXTREMES TO GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT

- Implement a **whole-of-society and all-hazards approach** to the evolving and ever-more complex risk and threat landscape. Pursue **risk assessments, adaptive planning, clear and reliable communication and cross-sectoral coordination through established networks**.
- Encourage **active citizen engagement** in preparedness and emergency measures following Ukraine's example.
- **Embed preparedness in Europe's cultural fabric** and **collaborate effectively** across actors and borders.

### 2. THEMATIC BREAKOUT SESSIONS

#### 2.1. Civil-Military Cooperation: What Role for The EU?

- **Protect critical societal functions** ranging from transport, energy, telecoms and food to capabilities like space, civil protection, stockpiles, digital infrastructure and defence.
- Establish better coordination mechanisms, structures and funding to address the **unclear dividing line between the civil and the military realm**. Develop secure information exchange channels, and better institutional understanding of the civil and the military dimensions.
- **Establish a coherent policy framework with common principles, definitions and coordination mechanisms**, put into practice through joint trainings and exercises.

## 2.2. Population Preparedness: Lessons From Across Europe

- Addressing **misinformation and polarisation**, measuring **behavioural change**, sustaining and coordinating (spontaneous) **volunteers**, and ensuring **continuity of effective programmes** and practices within often short political cycles.
- **Trust between citizens and authorities** is a cornerstone of effective preparedness
- Leveraging “**multipliers**” such as schools, volunteers and local organisations to engage communities.
- **Psychological resilience** as an integral yet often underappreciated dimension of preparedness.

## 2.3. Preparedness-by-Design: Engagement Across Sectors

- Enhance the **operationalisation and financing of cross-sectoral preparedness**.
- Strengthen multilevel governance and robust coordination mechanisms, including a clear **allocation of responsibilities** across stakeholders and governance levels.
- Comprehensive **evidence- and needs-based assessments** to identify gaps, support investment prioritisation and improve **strategic, yet flexible financial planning**.

## 2.4. Public-Private Preparedness: Strengthening Cooperation For Crisis Readiness

- Address the **lack of a shared threat perception** and distrust between public and private actors, but also within the private sector due to hesitations about sharing commercially sensitive information.
- Build on national coordination efforts, setting standards and further deepening the single market to increase incentives.
- Need for **innovative financing mechanisms**, arrangements for handling sensitive information and **inclusive governance architectures accessible to private sector actors**.
- Encourage the **bridging of sectoral gaps and incentivizing cross-sectoral stress-testing** and exercising.

## 3. CLOSING PANEL – FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION: ONE YEAR OF PREPAREDNESS UNION

- Advancing preparedness demands **urgent coordination across sectors, stakeholders, and borders**. Evolving risks require a unified, whole-of-society response.
- Break silos, define roles, and establish strong networks for collaboration ahead of crises, for instance between civilian and military structures.
- Reinforce **shared situational awareness**, through better anticipation, foresight and early warning systems to balance expectations with **financial realities**.
- Translate ambition into action through **measurable targets** and by **embedding preparedness into policies, culture and funding at all levels**.

# Annex: Outcomes of Breakout Sessions

## 1. Civil-Military Cooperation: What Role For The EU?

### Objectives

- Learn from the experience of Russia's war on Ukraine, to identify best practices, gaps and needs for civil-military cooperation at national, cross-border and EU level for preparing for large-scale cross-border incidents.
- Reflect on the development of EU civil-military preparedness arrangements, as well as coordination mechanisms necessary to ensure complementarity with NATO.

### Main outcomes of the interactive discussion session and panel discussion

- **Whole of government approach**

Civil-military cooperation comes into play in many different areas, e.g. protecting critical infrastructure, responding to hybrid and sabotage attacks, exercising arrangements to make sure we can be ready when conflict breaks out. It is important to learn from Ukraine and identify best practices, gaps and needs for civil-military cooperation at national, cross-border and EU level for preparing for large-scale cross-border incidents. All levels of government must be involved, across all different communities, regional, national, EU. At local/ regional level we need to identify key sectors necessary for society and the military to function, such as communication and health, transport and energy solutions, food supplies, ensuring society keeps on functioning while military and emergency responders can continue to operate.

- **Normalising civil-military interactions**

Civil-military relations should be normalized and built into the way we work, through exercising, information sharing, with clear roles for all actors: civilian and military to be coordinated at respective levels. There is a need to lower administrative burden that can slow down the speed of coordination, information sharing, planning and decision-making (between local, national, EU and NATO levels). The Preparedness Union Strategy calls for the development of non-binding civil-military preparedness arrangements, to facilitate these interactions.

- **Cooperation with NATO is key**

NATO is already actively involved in formulating the needs from Allies in terms of national resilience. We need to define scenarios to work together with NATO and complement each other on military and civilian needs when they require support from each other and to share information and prepare for critical sectors, including education. NATO and recognizes the need for joint exercising and information sharing to prepare for worst case scenarios, including calling on the EU to support sectoral preparedness, e.g. by legislation, funding frameworks for cross-border responses, including trainings and exercises, interoperability systems, dual use infrastructure and equipment and simplification of procedures.

- **Avoid competition**

The military largely relies on civilian infrastructure, it is therefore important to ensure resilience of critical infrastructure that is dual use, and understand both the civilian and military priorities and needs. There is a need to review the definitions of civilian and military infrastructure so they can serve both a civilian and military purpose based on a clear prioritization by the state.

- **Neutrality of humanitarian aid**

The context of providing aid for a country's own citizens differs from the usual context applied in conflicts in external settings, therefore the role of the military in coordinating humanitarian aid and the concept of neutrality need to be reviewed. There is also a need to build trust and partnership between military and civilian population to manage e.g. mass population movements.

## 2. Population Preparedness: Lessons From Across Europe

### Objectives

- Explore best practices on population preparedness across hazards and national contexts, focusing on transferable lessons that can inform efforts elsewhere.
- Reflect on how to operationalise a whole-of-society approach, involving public authorities, citizens, and societal actors working at the interface with communities.
- Identify existing gaps and actions needed from the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders to further develop enhance population preparedness across Europe.

### Main outcomes of the interactive discussion session and panel discussion

- **Building trust as a cornerstone of preparedness**

Mis- and disinformation as well as increasing polarisation were identified as key challenges to building trust between communities and authorities before disasters strike. To address this, citizens should be treated as partners rather than passive recipients of risk communication during crises.

- **From awareness to action: engaging people effectively**

Another key challenge is the translation of risk awareness into tangible and measurable behavioural change. Participants highlighted the importance of working with ‘multipliers’, such as volunteers, influencers, schools, civil society and businesses, to communicate risks and promote action.

- **“Know your neighbour”: understanding and addressing vulnerabilities**

Projects such as the Portuguese [Safe Village, Safe People Programme](#) demonstrate that empowering communities enhances early identification and more inclusive preparedness and response capacities.

- **Education is a long-term investment in a culture of preparedness**

Education and basic life skills such as swimming and first aid were identified as central to building a culture of preparedness. Experiences from Italy demonstrated how preparedness can be integrated across subjects, using approaches such as [games](#), [comic books](#) and other formats.

- **Volunteers are a key asset, requiring structured support**

Lessons from the Ukrainian Red Cross highlighted the important role of volunteers in preparedness, though challenges in sustaining long-term engagement and mobilising volunteers during crises were noted. Clear coordination mechanisms, roles and responsibilities are thus essential to ensure their effective and safe contribution.

- **Psychological resilience and preparedness**

Another main outcome concerns the importance of risk awareness, training, practical tools and community support in significantly reducing fear and improving the psychological resilience of citizens, thus contributing to population preparedness efforts.

- **Multi-level governance and continuity are critical for long-term impact**

Both panellists and participants agreed on the importance of coherent, multi-level governance frameworks linking national strategies to local implementation. However, sustaining such frameworks in a coherent manner remains a challenge, particularly with short political cycles.

### 3. Preparedness-by-Design: Engagement Across Sectors

#### Objectives

The EU Preparedness Union Strategy presents *preparedness by design* as a guiding principle to systematically integrate preparedness considerations across EU policies, legislation, and funding instruments. In line with an all-hazards approach, discussions covered both natural and human-induced risks. Structural reforms and investment strategies were highlighted as key enablers of preparedness by design.

- Assess current practices.
- Identify key challenges.
- Explore opportunities to operationalise and finance cross-sectoral preparedness.

#### Key challenges

The discussions revealed structural and operational bottlenecks that continue to hinder effective preparedness. A central challenge relates to the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, which is further compounded by insufficient linkages between risk evidence and investment decisions, thus limiting the effectiveness and strategic targeting of available resources. In addition, the local level is oftentimes faced with limited resources and integration within larger preparedness frameworks all the while being charged with significant responsibilities.

#### Main outcomes of the interactive discussion session and panel discussion

- **Governance and coordination.** Participants emphasised the importance of clearly defining roles and responsibilities across all relevant stakeholders, including EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, as well as private sector and civil society actors. Effective coordination mechanisms including strong political ownership are thus required. Therein, fostering trust among stakeholders was identified as an essential.
- **Financing and investments.** The discussions underlined the importance of adopting more strategic and evidence-based approaches to financing preparedness. This includes the development of comprehensive risk assessments and specific needs analyses to better inform investment prioritisation. In this regard, full-scale exercises were identified as a useful tool to reveal both investment gaps and shortcomings in existing legal and regulatory frameworks.
- **Flexibility in funding mechanisms.** The discussions stressed that funding frameworks should support an all-hazards approach while allowing sufficient adaptability to address specific risks and local conditions. This requires the promotion of flexible and trust-based funding arrangements, including shared management models.
- **Building a preparedness community.** This entails strengthening cooperation between ministries of finance, disaster risk management authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. It also requires the promotion of strategic financial planning processes that ensure alignment between identified needs and available funding instruments. Developing a shared understanding of preparedness priorities across sectors was seen as critical to improving the overall effectiveness and coherence of preparedness efforts.

#### Conclusion

The sessions underscored that preparedness by design requires a comprehensive approach, combining strengthened governance structures, improved investment strategies, flexible funding mechanisms, and enhanced stakeholder coordination. Embedding these elements across policy and practice will be essential to reinforcing resilience and ensuring effective preparedness.

#### 4. Public-Private Preparedness: Strengthening Cooperation For Crisis Readiness

##### Objectives

- Highlight the central role of the private sector in ensuring the continuity of vital societal functions during crises, given their ownership and operation of large parts of Europe's critical infrastructure, supply chains and production capacities.
- Identify priority areas where public authorities must act to enable private sector preparedness.
- Identify practical approaches to strengthen strategic supply chain resilience

##### Main outcomes of the interactive discussion session and panel discussion

- **Trust as the foundation of effective public–private cooperation.** Participants stressed that trust must be built well in advance of crises through structured dialogue platforms, long-term partnerships and clear expectations between authorities and companies. Examples such as the Finnish preparedness system demonstrated how cooperation frameworks and governance structures can facilitate collaboration across sectors.
- **Information sharing and situational awareness.** Companies operating complex supply chains are often among the first to detect disruptions or vulnerabilities affecting logistics, production or critical services. However, sharing such information can be difficult in practice due to concerns related to confidentiality, liability and competitive advantage. Participants therefore highlighted the need for trusted forums and mechanisms that allow sensitive information to be shared safely between private actors and public authorities, enabling earlier detection of disruptions and more timely action.
- **Supply chain resilience.** Participants stressed the need to move from reactive responses towards anticipatory approaches, including improved mapping of multi-tier supply chains, stress-testing value chains and identifying critical chokepoints. The example of the COVID-19 crisis illustrated both the vulnerabilities of global supply chains and the importance of coordinated action, including joint procurement mechanisms, stockpiling strategies and cooperation with industry.
- **The role of the European Union in supporting public-private preparedness.** Participants identified several areas where EU-level action could provide added value, including facilitating exchanges of best practices between Member States, promoting preparedness requirements and coordination mechanisms, strengthening cross-border cooperation and supporting common approaches to supply chain resilience. The EU was also seen as a platform to bring together public authorities, industry and other stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of risks and preparedness priorities.
- **Economic incentives and financing mechanisms** to support preparedness. Preparedness actions often require investments from companies and public authorities alike, and participants stressed the need to demonstrate the economic value of preparedness by factoring in the cost of inaction during crises. Financial instruments, certification schemes and regulatory frameworks that reduce complexity or provide incentives for preparedness investments were mentioned as possible enablers.
- **The importance of operational cooperation and practical preparedness measures,** including exercises, joint planning and early-warning systems. Participants underlined that preparedness should increasingly move from ad hoc cooperation during crises towards more predictable and structured partnerships, including the identification of strategic companies and the establishment of frameworks that can be activated rapidly during emergencies.