

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & TRADE - INSTITUTIONAL LAW

OCTOBER 9, 2025

Op-Ed: “Civil and Military Preparedness in the EU in the Wake of the Niinistö Report”

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This Op-Ed is part of the EU Law Live symposium on the EU’s Defence Union, which has featured Op-Eds by [Ramses Wessel](#), [Ulla Neergaard](#), [Steven Blockmans](#), [Stefania Rutigliano](#), and [Sara Notario](#). More Op-Eds on this topic will follow soon on EU Law Live.

In October 2024, a report by former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö outlined the need for greater EU coordination on preparedness and resilience. Titled ‘Safer Together: Strengthening Europe’s Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness’, this [report](#) was one of three special studies requested by the European Commission and EU Member States and was published alongside reports by Enrico Letta on [the single market](#) and Mario Draghi on [competitiveness](#). The report was prepared in response to the increasing number and complex nature of threats in Europe, in particular the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the increasing number and scope of hybrid threats, and natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. In part, this report sought to apply the [Finnish model of preparedness](#) across the EU’s 27 Member States.

Although non-binding and released ahead of the formation of the current Commission in December 2024, the report proposed to strengthen procedures and mechanisms within the EU so that it can function effectively in the event of a major crisis. Its proposals have, at least in part, been implemented into actions by the new Commission and influenced myriad strategic documents. Its impact is most visible as the EU negotiates its [forthcoming](#) seven-year budget (the

Multiannual Financial Framework), which hints at a dramatic surge in funding for preparedness and defense. In the year since the report's release, this is an overview of what was implemented and what challenges still persist for the EU as it seeks to strengthen its ability to react to crises.

From Recommendation to Action

The approximately 80 detailed recommendations in the Niinistö report sought to improve coordination on civil and military preparedness between EU institutions and the member states, which have previously been sporadic and disjointed. As the report highlights, the extent to which EU Member States have integrated or cooperated on preparedness has been minimal. Even arriving at the same baseline threat assessment remained elusive, owing to differing perceptions, history, and geography. This hampered EU coordination, ultimately leaving member states to define their own investments in civil and military preparedness.

In 2025, that trend began to change – it was a landmark year for EU efforts to enhance preparedness. Building on the Niinistö report recommendations, a number of major strategies and proposals have moved forward. The European Commission released the [EU Preparedness Union Strategy](#) on March 26, highlighting 30 key actions to enhance the EU's readiness for and response to increasingly complex threats, including geopolitical tensions, cybersecurity threats, climate change, and natural disasters. Outlining seven areas of focus, the Preparedness Union Strategy notably [calls](#) for the establishment of an EU Crisis Hub to improve integration across the EU's various crisis structures. It has a direct impact on public awareness of resilience by integrating preparedness lessons into school curricula, introducing an EU Preparedness Day, and regular EU-wide preparedness exercises. Additionally, this strategy calls for the formation of a public-private Preparedness Taskforce and working with strategic partners such as NATO. The strategy also calls for the first comprehensive EU risk and threat assessment by the end of 2026. This assessment will be based on a newly developed framework for coordinated risk and threat evaluations across various policy areas.

The aforementioned Preparedness Union Strategy also called for the launch of the [EU Stockpiling Strategy](#) in March 2025, creating an EU-wide network for securing essential goods such as food, water, medicines, and energy supplies during crises. Specifically, the strategy emphasizes that member states must maintain essential supplies for 72 hours in the event of an emergency. The subsequent [Medical Countermeasures Strategy](#) in July 2025 focused on the stockpiling of vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and personal protective equipment (PPE). These strategies represent a quantum leap in the EU’s civil preparedness toolkit and include measures to strengthen existing mechanisms and initiatives.

An additional area of action highlighted by the Preparedness Union Strategy calls for [enhancing](#) the capabilities of existing initiatives: the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and rescEU. Since its [launch](#) in 2001, the UCPM has responded to more than 650 worldwide requests for assistance, with 58 activations in 2024. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) in Brussels offers 24/7 logistics support and deployment of resources in the event of a crisis, making it the operational hub of the EU’s civil defense. [rescEU](#) was established in 2019 as an upgrade to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, designed to create a strategic, fully EU-funded reserve of disaster response capabilities, including firefighting planes, medical evacuation assets, and crucial stockpiles to respond to disasters that overwhelm national capacities. Stemming from the uptick in natural disasters facing the bloc in the last decade, rescEU is an additional layer of protection beyond the resources committed by EU member states to the [European Civil Protection Pool](#). These resources and capabilities are housed within the European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). By enhancing existing capabilities, civil preparedness is better able to respond to the increasingly contested threat environment, as Russian sabotage attacks on Europe were found to have [quadrupled](#) between 2023 and 2024.

In terms of military preparedness, the EU has also taken more concrete steps in 2025, in part thanks to the new defence commissioner, Andrius Kubilius. In this role —the first time a dedicated commissioner has been explicitly assigned to defence— Kubilius has presented efforts to

bolster defense production through the [European Defence Industrial Strategy \(EDIS\)](#) and the [European Defence Industry Programme \(EDIP\)](#), facilitating the allocation of €300 million in funding for joint procurement projects under the [EDIRPA](#) scheme, and proposing the [ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030](#), which aims to significantly boost European defense investments through a new €150 billion financial instrument (known as [Security Action for Europe \(SAFE\)](#)) and other measures to increase flexibility in defense spending. The [White Paper](#) on the future of European defence, published in March within the first 100 days of the new Commission, included recommendations on how to strengthen the EU’s defence capabilities. This was further codified via the [Defence Readiness Omnibus](#) in June 2025. Although military preparedness was not a primary focus of the White Paper—with much of the effort focused on strengthening and enhancing the [European Defence Technological and Industrial Base \(EDTIB\)](#)—it lays the groundwork for which future preparedness projects and policy can be implemented. Although much of the activity around the EU as a military actor was spurred on by the continued Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Niinistö report contributes to the momentum of these activities, with an aim to improve the conversation around resilience as a core tenet of this military build-up.

After a Promising Start, a Long Road is Ahead

Despite progress in 2025 on civil and military preparedness, sustaining this effort over the coming years must remain a priority. The upcoming budget for the EU, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028–2034, is expected to be the largest in history and [features](#) preparedness and resilience as one of the six strategic priorities. Featuring a 2 trillion EUR budget, the new MFF will feature a streamlined structure of just four main headings instead of seven (preparedness primarily falling under Global Europe), and greater flexibility through fewer, more agile programs. On resilience and preparedness in particular, the forthcoming budget will [include](#) nearly 400 billion EUR in loans for member states facing severe crises, 10.7 billion EUR in common funding for civil protection and health emergency preparedness, as well as an agricultural reserve to support farmers and stabilize markets in the event of a crisis, equipping the EU with faster, more efficient, and flexible tools to respond to crises. This

is a massive increase in funding; the entire budget of DG ECHO, as originally programmed in the EU's MFF from 2021-2027, was 9.76 billion EUR for all seven years. In the next budget, 10.7 billion EUR in common funding has been allocated for civil protection alone. Although this increased investment falls short of the Niinistö report's calls for 20% of the EU budget to be spent on security and preparedness, more is to be spent on resilience at the EU level than ever before under the upcoming budget cycle.

While civil preparedness and resilience improved at the EU level in 2025, more can be done on the military side moving forward. The EU fundamentally needs to spur investment and development of its defense industry as its primary goal. However, instilling the lessons and operating procedures of preparedness while fostering its defense industrial base must go hand in hand. In particular, the Niinistö report highlights the importance of strengthening dual-use research and defense innovation, as well as civil-military cooperation at the EU level. Military mobility is another underdeveloped initiative where the EU can invest. Communication systems are also a point of focus in the Niinistö report, highlighting the need for secure, resilient, and interoperable systems in the event of a crisis; the EU Critical Communication System (EUCCS) remains an ongoing project to this end.

The Niinistö report called for a profound change of mindset in how the EU understands and prioritizes preparedness. The frequency and tenor of conversations around enhancing civil preparedness at the EU level are a direct result of this report's call, as well as a broader reflection of the uncertainty and challenges facing Europe's security landscape. As the EU seeks to make preparedness and resilience more central to its mandate through the upcoming MFF budget process, ultimately, the responsiveness and willingness of the member states remain key to success. While the EU is demonstrating it is stepping up as a geopolitical and military player, at the same time, it is recognizing that preparedness and resilience begin at home.

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