

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action**

(2018/C 054/08)

**Rapporteur-General:** Marcin Ociepa (PL/ECR), President of Opole City Council

**Reference document:** Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council — A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action

JOIN(2017) 21 final

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. Welcomes the Commission's communication A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action (JOIN (2017) 21 final), particularly the emphasis on local and regional authorities' important role as key players in building resilience in the EU's neighbourhood on the basis of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; points out, however, that this emphasis on their role needs to be translated into tangible European Union and Member State policy actions, such as involving EU partner countries' local and regional authorities, as well as their associations, in EU external action, supporting capacity building for local and regional authorities in various policy areas, etc.
2. Agrees with the definition of resilience set out in the document on the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), but calls on the Commission to recognise that local and regional authorities build resilient societies and are a cornerstone of stable democracy, enabling countries to become more resilient. Believes that the EU's strategic approach should observe the bottom-up principle and should also assist and facilitate the exchange of good practices among EU Member States' and neighbouring countries' local and regional authorities.
3. Strongly supports stepping up work on resilience, in line with the EUGS, with a special focus principally on relations with the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhood, but also on relations with those third countries with which EU Member States have special cooperation links.
4. Draws attention to the need to develop appropriate and effective financial and technical support instruments, having the flexibility to cope with any changes that may occur, and with the greatest possible proportion of funding being used to provide practical support for building resilience, rather than to cover programme management costs.
5. Underlines the importance of effective cooperation between the European Union and partner organisations such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund: building resilience is a goal that these organisations share.
6. Supports the four building blocks (better analysis of the risks and causes of the lack of resilience; better monitoring of external pressure to enable the appropriate action to be taken early; integrating resilience into the programming and financing of external action; developing international policies and practices on resilience) and the 10 guiding considerations for a strategic approach to resilience set out in the annex, which enable a strategic approach to resilience to be integrated into EU external action and identify local and regional authorities as indispensable to increasing contributions to strategy development, conducting policy dialogue, programming aid, and implementing solutions.
7. Points out that the issue of resilience must be embedded in the right context: in development, investment and education policies as well as in international cooperation agreements, thus making it possible to better plan measures to strengthen resilience, including those undertaken at local, regional and cross-border level.

8. Agrees with the view that building external resilience is a means, not an end. In this context — and in order to strengthen security and achieve lasting stability — long-term measures are needed involving state, social and community institutions from EU Member States and partner countries.

9. Stresses that, in order to build resilience, the implementation of national, regional and local risk management strategies and plans needs to be encouraged; analysis of their compliance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 <sup>(1)</sup> also needs to be promoted. Also emphasises the importance of developing cooperation between cities and regions and the role played in this respect by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and its 'Making Cities Resilient' campaign.

10. Recognises that migration measures have to be comprehensively considered in the context of our overall political relationship with partner countries. Such action should be based on the principles of ownership by the partners, cooperation and full respect for humanitarian and refugee law and human rights obligations, including the right to protection.

11. While taking note of the Commission's focus on the gender dimension and vulnerable economic sectors, underlines the need for a wider focus on the resilience of the most vulnerable members of society. The most vulnerable sectors and individuals can vary depending on place of residence and can be affected by disasters to different extents. Therefore, these sectors and social groups often require greater attention as part of the overall resilience-building efforts.

12. Expects efforts to be stepped up to speed up the implementation of the EUGS and underlines the importance of a place-based approach involving local and regional authorities when aiming to deliver the objectives of the EUGS in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals, part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### **LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES AS KEY PARTNERS IN BUILDING EU EXTERNAL RESILIENCE**

13. Underlines local and regional authorities' important role in building resilience, as they constitute the first level at which decisions and responses are formulated when risks or threats arise; they are also the closest level of government to citizens, one that must be distinguished by good governance and democracy. As local authorities run emergency services (police, fire brigade, medical services) and possess the broadest and deepest knowledge of their local area and community, they are to a large extent responsible for the strength and quality of resilience.

14. Points out that all activities and cooperation with local and regional authorities to build resilience should be carried out in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

15. Draws particular attention to the importance of local communities' capacities with regard to communication activities, prevention, response during threats and subsequent recovery — from families, associations and churches, right through to all levels of local and regional authority.

16. Draws attention to the role of local and regional authorities in identifying threats and assessing risk. Thanks to highly developed and tried and tested crisis management systems, adapted to regional conditions and the characteristics of the local community, local and regional authorities are able to effectively and rapidly identify threats and assess the risks they pose. Thus more attention should be paid to the reports and analyses produced by regions and municipalities when identifying threats and assessing risks.

17. Points out that in order to strengthen cooperation between (political, humanitarian, development-related) EU players so as to resolve protracted crises outside the EU, more consideration should be given to the experience of local and regional authorities, including via a network of contacts, good practices, dialogue, etc. The EU has enormous potential in this regard that it should harness, arising from the experience built up by its eastern, southern and outermost regions, since due to their geographic position they have been closely cooperating with their neighbouring countries for years.

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<sup>(1)</sup> CDR 5035/2016 — rapporteur: Adam Banaszak (ECR/PL); CDR 2646/2014 — rapporteur: Harvey Siggs (ECR/UK).

18. Highlights the need to support the continuous strengthening of local capacities to manage risk and take early action at a local level.
19. Calls for measures to help local and regional authorities to fulfil their duties to protect critical infrastructure, especially in terms of financing this protection and providing the appropriate tools and resources.
20. Points out that, in order to build resilience, more support should be given to the work of various types of cross-border structure and the Euroregions — in particular Euroregions on the EU's border — by implementing regional and cross-border projects in the area of infrastructure, security, social, education, economic and cultural policy.
21. Points out that efforts need to be stepped up towards a more effective information policy on the risks and shocks that might negatively affect resilience. It is imperative that local and regional authorities are always involved in information policy in this area.
22. Stresses the need to replicate — at central level — tried and tested solutions, mechanisms and models of good practice developed and put in place in the regions by local and regional authorities, and also emphasises the benefit of mapping the good practices of local and regional authorities for the use of EU regions and municipalities, as well as regions and municipalities in the areas covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy.
23. Recommends paying particular attention to cooperation between local and regional authorities on education, which is vitally important for building resilient societies. Urges the EU institutions to support local and regional authorities in this area while upholding the principle of subsidiarity.
24. Recommends that measures be taken to increase local communities' awareness of threats — particularly hybrid threats as well as threats related to energy security — and what local preparations can be made for them. These measures should be carried out in close cooperation with local academia and industry, the security services and local and regional authorities.
25. Emphasises the role of civil society as a key factor in building resilience. Draws particular attention to the support and collaboration of NGOs. Active citizenship and third-sector organisations make it possible to design and carry out modern, creative campaigns and methods in relation to education and humanitarian aid, and to develop socially-positive attitudes in partner countries, particularly those at high risk of hybrid threats.
26. Stresses the need to step up efforts to counteract hostile propaganda by third countries produced as part of hybrid warfare. Welcomes the establishment of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force and recommends expanding its cooperation with national, regional and local authorities.
27. Calls for greater cooperation with local and regional authorities on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Local and regional authorities are the level of governance that is closest to citizens — therefore in addition to knowing their local communities the best, they also play an important role as leaders and representatives of their communities.

#### **THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN BUILDING RESILIENCE**

28. Underlines its first-hand experience of international cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly of Local and Regional Authorities (ARLEM) and the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), as well as joint consultative committees and working groups, and recommends making use of these platforms and their experiences when strengthening the resilience of the European Neighbourhood Policy countries.
29. Stresses the importance of the sharing of expertise and knowledge as well as best-practices between local and regional authorities from the EU and from third countries both at the political and at the administrative level. Highlights the positive role the CoR plays in this regard in relation to Libya (via the Nicosia Initiative) and Ukraine (through the U-LEAD programme).

30. Agrees with the Commission communication that cooperation with the OSCE needs to be further developed so as to prevent armed conflicts. Also points out the need for closer cooperation with the UN, the African Union and other international partners in order to build resilience.

31. Supports the EU's efforts to ensure that its standards and best practices — including those arising from local and regional authorities' work and experience — are reflected in relevant multilateral instruments and policy settings, including the ILO, the WHO and the G20.

32. Agrees that building resilience is a multidimensional task. Considers that measures relating to infrastructure, security, the economy, society and education — measures that enable socially inclusive sustainable development — should take priority. Local and regional authorities play an incontrovertible role in these sectors. Notes, in terms of geographical scope, that partners from the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership should be the main focus. At the same time, the role and impact of countries in the Middle East and Central Asia on the EU's resilience should be borne in mind.

33. Agrees that research under the Horizon 2020 programme needs to be expanded in order to build resilience, especially with regard to security, the economy, social sciences, food and water security, migration and forced displacement. Calls for local academia — as regional centres of expertise — to be involved more in this research. To this end, promotional, institutional and social measures need to be stepped up.

34. Concurs with the view that strategic communication is an effective tool in the fight against terrorism and extremism and in defence against cybercrime. Considers it essential to move as quickly as possible to safeguard the EU and partner countries from the effects of external disinformation campaigns that aim to discredit the political and social systems that underpin our identity, security and stability.

35. Points out that regional and local capacities need to be given a bigger role in terms of resilience and risk analysis so as to increase resilience. This is particularly the case for EU border regions. Such measures will increase sensitivity to conflicts in the EU's immediate vicinity and make it possible to develop improved methods for assessing the type and impact of risks, pressures and partner countries' vulnerability to shocks.

#### **SECTORAL POLICIES SPECIFIC TO THE PARTICULAR CONTEXT OF BUILDING RESILIENCE**

36. If resilience is to be placed in its proper context, it needs to be taken into account in EU sectoral policies at every level — national, regional and local. By taking a specific approach, addressing each situation individually within their respective areas of responsibility and activity, sectoral policies will be able to build resilience more effectively.

37. Emphasises that tackling the root causes of irregular migration (poverty, inequality, population growth, lack of employment, educational and economic opportunities, instability, conflict, human trafficking, organised crime, climate change, environmental degradation and the long-term consequences of forced displacement) is one of the key measures in building resilience. Therefore, it should also be borne in mind that aid to weaker and vulnerable communities has the greatest impact in the locations that are threatened.

38. Recommends developing a detailed framework on employment and decent work and considering the role and place of local and regional authorities within sectoral employment policies and social policy, based on the work of the International Labour Conference.

39. Stresses that particular attention should be paid to the security of critical transport infrastructure, specifically focusing on local and regional authorities in this regard, as they are often directly responsible for the condition of this infrastructure and for the areas crossed by such critical transport infrastructure.

40. Welcomes the fact that the Commission is committed to working with local and regional authorities to improve resilience in rapidly growing urban areas where a lack of planning or investment in measures to mitigate the risks of climate change and geophysical risks means that there is a threat of shocks and stresses causing serious harm to people and economic damage. Removing the principal risk factors by means of public and private investment (on the basis of risk identification) is more cost-effective than relying on post-disaster response. Highlights the role of sectoral dialogue with local and regional authorities on sustainable urban development in enhancing resilience and innovation, in line with the aims of the New Urban Agenda.

41. Stresses the particular importance of humanitarian aid with regard to disasters, natural catastrophes and other occurrences that require this aid. Humanitarian aid must be provided in full respect of the fundamental principles of humanitarianism, neutrality, impartiality and independence, while respecting human rights deriving from the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Brussels, 10 October 2017.

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ

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