Fostering resilience for sustainable peace

A contribution of COMECE, Pax Christi International and Justice & Peace Europe to the forthcoming Joint Communication on 'Resilience as a strategic priority of the external action of the European Union (EU)' from the EU High Representative and the European Commission.

1. Introduction

All over the world, we are **witnessing victims** of crises and conflicts and the instability they create. These may result from social, economic and environmental injustice, often leading to violence and war. We have also seen the emergence of hybrid threats which instigate vulnerabilities and put peace at risk. Globalisation has increased dependency and rising inequalities are posing a serious challenge to sustainable development.

In light of this fragile environment, we welcome the **EU Global Strategy**[1] that has set resilience as one of the EU's strategic priorities in its external action. The current geopolitical context requires efforts to strengthen the **resilience capacities** of **people, families, communities, states and societies** in order to prepare them for situations of shock and stress.

However, we note that the "principled pragmatism approach" introduced by the EU Global Strategy has been regarded by some observers as potentially lowering the ambition of EU's external action. We would therefore like to emphasise that the EU should **maintain an ambitious approach** in its relations with other countries and their citizens. Moreover, the form of EU's external engagement, and especially with regard to its resilience work, should shift more towards people-centered and long-term empowerment policies based on partnerships.[2] This should apply in all cases, to the EU's action in its neighbourhood, as well as globally.

The upcoming **Joint Communication on resilience**[3] should therefore further build on the evaluation of existing strategies[4] and provide a common narrative and

---

[1] The *EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy* (2016) sets out 5 priorities (the Security of our Union, State and Societal Resilience, an Integrated Approach, Cooperative Regional Orders, Global Governance), online available at: http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/

[2] European Parliament Research Service, *Resilience in the EU's foreign and security policy* (2016), online available at: http://bit.ly/1WOpW0H

[3] European Commission, Roadmap, *Resilience as a strategic priority of the external action of the EU* (2017), online available at: http://bit.ly/2mb1OGa

guidance for resilience-fosering efforts. They should be embedded in EU's conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies and mainstreamed into all external and internal policies.

It is our hope that the Joint Communication will help implement the EU's priority on resilience through **concrete policy initatives and actions**, as requested by the Foreign Affairs Council[5] and in line with the commitments in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Through this position paper, COMECE, Pax Christi International and Justice & Peace Europe aim to orient and help the EU to define a **vision of resilience** from the **perspective** of the **Church and faith-based organisations**. Our perspective is built upon needs and experiences from the field, gathered through the peace work of our organisations and members all around the world.

2. The importance of a clear vision of resilience

The EU Global Strategy defines resilience as "*the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crisis*"[6]. While such a broad definition of resilience allows for flexibility and for a wide application across various policies, it might also open the door to some undesirable limitations which should be avoided. In this respect, we would like to point to some possible **challenges and risks,** in particular:

- The definition of resilience used by the EU Global Strategy prioritises the resilience of states and societies and appears to neglect the **resilience of individual persons, families and communities** which lie at the very core of the concept.

- When fostering resilience of certain society groups, attention must be paid to the relations between the different groups in a particular society and with regard to the state. Prioritising one group at the expense of others, neglecting the existing bonds within the society, and ignoring **the local context** could endanger social cohesion and reinforce conflict dynamics.[7]

- Moreover, the Global Strategy seems to limit resilience to the ability to "reform" in order to be able to "withstand" and "recover" from crisis. This definition, however, fails to sufficiently cover the **full spectrum of potentially needed abilities** at all stages of the crisis cycle.

- If the resilience agenda is to be understood merely as an effort to ensure security and stability in the EU's neighbourhood, it might lead to creating double standards and to **tolerating** or even fostering practices of state institutions that

---

[4] Such as the Communication on the EU Approach to Resilience (2012), Council Conclusions to EU Approach to Resilience (2013), Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (2015), but also in the UN, OECD and NATO frameworks

[5] Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Global Strategy on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy*, 17 October 2016, online available at: http://bit.ly/2li882w

[6] See the EU Global Strategy, p. 23

[7] Interpeace, *Using resilience to build peace* (May 2016), online available at: http://bit.ly/1UqEU6Y

are possibly **corrupt**, **undemocratic** or **authoritarian**. In addition, the EU's resilience-fostering efforts should **not be restricted** only **to** the EU's **immediate or wider neighbourhood**, but rather have a global scope.

- The focus on resilience might imply a **shift of responsibility** from the EU to third countries. The concept of resilience must not be used as a pretext for lowering the level of **the EU's political and financial commitment** to supporting and engaging with third countries and their citizens. The ambition of the EU must remain high, and the responsibility must not be shifted away but fully shared with stakeholders.

- The EU's phrase "**building** resilience" might imply that there exists no potential to which resilience efforts could build upon, while our experiences from the ground suggest differently. Referring to "**fostering" or "strengthening**" resilience may be more suitable.

- Regarding resilience merely as an end in itself might be somewhat restrictive and provide only a limited vision. It should rather be understood as a **continuous process** that contributes to the building of sustainable peace.

- With making resilience one of the key priorities for the EU's external action, the Global Strategy has introduced a **new focus** which now needs to be translated into tangible and effective policies and measures. This will above all require more flexibility in the adaptations of the institutional framework and development of **new ways of cooperation** between various stakeholders in order to ensure policy coherence, consistency and complementarity.

3. Our understanding of the notion of resilience

3.1 Resilience of whom?

The **goal** of resilience policies should be to contribute to building **sustainable development** and **peace**, which are interlinked. Peace is more than security and stability. It is a constant process that involves creating an environment which is guided by the principles of the rule of law, social and ecological justice, and respect for human dignity[8] in pursuit of the common good, where all human beings can live a dignified life[9].

Fostering resilience is thus a way of peace-building, which should be based on an **integral approach**[10], with the concept of "**human security**"[11] and the "**rights-based approach**" at its heart. Resilience policies should be **people-centered, comprehensive**, **multisectoral**, **context-specific** and **forward-looking**.[12] They

---

[8] Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 494, online available at: http://bit.ly/1Pf5yNy
[9] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1905 ff., online available at: http://bit.ly/1CJ8i5I
[10] COMECE, *Europe's Vocation to Promote Peace in the World* (2016), p. 15, online available at: http://bit.ly/2ccV4o9
[11] UN Trust Fund for Human Security, *Human Security in Theory and Practice* (2009), online available at: http://bit.ly/21SP9ub
[12] Ibid.

should put first human persons, respect for their rights, and their integral development as well as the development of the society at large.[13]

Consequently, in terms of **subjects**[14], the primary focus of resilience-fostering efforts should be the **individual person** ("*human resilience*"), his or her **family** ("*family resilience*"), the **local community** ("*community resilience*") and the **society** ("*societal resilience*"), with a **particular attention** given to its **most vulnerable** members.

Fostering the resilience of **state** structures ("*state resilience*") should be measured by its contribution to the **common good** of the society and its members as well as to the global common good of the **region** ("*regional resilience*") and of the **international community** ("*international resilience*").

Indicators of progress in resilience-fostering efforts should not be restricted to security, stability and economic growth only. They should also cover human rights, rule of law, and democratic principles, as well as social and environmental resilience factors in view of promoting sustainable livelihoods for people in peaceful, just and inclusive societies.[15]

3.2 An empowerment approach based on subsidiarity, solidarity and dialogue

In our understanding, fostering resilience means to support people, families, local communities, the society at large and states to develop the strengths and abilities that enable all stakeholders to become actors in their personal and collective fulfillment, with full respect for human rights as a necessary part of this process.

The concept of resilience implies a stronger **emphasis on local communities.** However, they cannot accomplish the task of development in isolation from others[16]. Accordingly, the EU's role in fostering resilience of third countries and their citizens should not be as an external "interventionist" but rather as a **partner and facilitator.**

Consequently, resilience-fostering efforts should be based on an **empowerment approach** deeply rooted in the principles of **subsidiarity** and **solidarity**, allowing for adequate **participation** of all stakeholders at all levels.

Strengthening resilience should thus be done in a way that fosters **partnerships** and enables **local co-ownership** of the processes and projects. In order to reflect the specificities of different subjects and contexts, it is important to have a proper degree of **differentiation** in resilience-fostering efforts. This requires developing **tailor-made** initiatives in **dialogue** with all stakeholders and taking into account their **particular vulnerabilities**, **needs**, **skills**, **capacities** and **resources**.

---

[13] Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (1967), 14, online available at : http://bit.ly/1EVoK1z

[14] European Commission, *The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from food security crises* (2012), p. 5, online available at: http://bit.ly/2lcE08M

[15] CONCORD, *Sustainable Development: the stakes could not be higher* (2016), online available at: http://bit.ly/2mMzwlt

[16] *Populorum progressio,* 77

Despite the need for a differentiated approach, there should be a **common denominator** within all resilience-fostering efforts. A people-centered approach implies that the respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles must be integral.

Fostering resilience should also be understood as a **mutually beneficial process**. Enhancing resilience of others will contribute to **strengthening the EU's own resilience** and that of its citizens.[17] During the dialogue processes in the resilience-fostering framework, the EU can also **listen and learn** from its partners. For the EU to be able to continue to **lead** resilience efforts **by example**, further work needs to be accomplished. This applies in particular to the commitments under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

3.3 How to pursue a resilience-fostering approach

The definition of resilience used by the EU Global Strategy implies in principle two elements: a **preventative** ("*to withstand*") and a **post-crisis** ("*to recover*").

Thus, on the one hand, the concept of resilience can contribute to **more sustainable ways of conflict prevention** and reinforce efforts of **pre-emptive peace-building**[18]. It can encourage policies aimed at addressing the **systemic factors** underlying societal vulnerabilities instead of focusing too much on acute prevention of events. It can open up possibilities for **transforming** the **root causes** of potential crises and stresses.[19] The concept of resilience can contribute to developing "**a political culture of acting sooner**[20]", a proactive and forward-looking approach that steps in at a very early stage where the seeds of a potential crisis or conflict can be transformed and managed in a sustainable way.[21]

On the other hand, the concept of resilience can also stimulate **more action in post-crisis situations**, such as post-conflict management, reconstruction, reconciliation and transitional justice. The respective actions should always be oriented towards a **long-term transformative approach** which does not necessarily imply restoring the original conditions since these might have contributed to the crisis itself.

Additionally, it is important that the concept of resilience also entails **actions fostering abilities needed throughout the cycle of the crisis and beyond** in order to promote sustainable development and peace. This should also include abilities for constant adaptation and coping with an ongoing crisis, with repeated adverse events, or with **long-term** stress.[22]

---

[17] Council of the EU, *Conclusions on the EU Global Strategy* (17 October 2016), online available at: http://bit.ly/2li882w

[18] Cf. EU Global Strategy, p. 29; and COMECE, *Europe's Vocation to Promote Peace in the World*, p. 12.

[19] This may apply to a variety of cases, such as violent extremism, climate change, mass migration, unemployment, social exclusion ....

[20] EU Global Strategy, p. 30

[21] COMECE, *Europe's Vocation to Promote Peace in the World*, p. 12

[22] *The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from food security crises* (2012), pp. 2 ff

If understood as a constant and long-term process, fostering resilience fits well with the EU´s **integrated approach to conflicts and crises**, characterised by being *multidimensional*, *multi-phased*, *multilevel* and *multilateral.*[23]

As a result, resilience can engender **hybrid and creative solutions** and **new ways of working** together **in dialogue** with the stakeholders by:

a) being **mainstreamed** into and **creating synergies** between **different policy fields;**[24]

b) bringing together **different types of actors and instruments**[25], all acting on the basis of their comparative advantage in order to ensure **complementarity**;

c) engaging **actors at different levels** on the basis of a **bottom-up** approach.[26]

Resilience-fostering efforts should also not be limited to tactical and reactive actions with regard to countries in the EU´s immediate neighbourhood. In the sense of a pre-emptive peace-building approach, the EU should also take into account the **wider strategic regional and global geopolitical context** and pursue resilience-fostering efforts in regions that are currently not at the centre of media attention.

4. Examples of putting resilience into practice for sustainable peace

The road to strengthened resilience of people, families, communities, states and societies can be challenging and will need time, as it might involve stress, learning new behaviours, and taking different actions.

It is vital to **understand context-specific dynamics**, to give special attention to **vulnerable groups,** and to develop actions that can build on **existing strengths and capacities** of all stakeholders. Individual persons, families, communities, civil society and governments should **enter into dialogue**, as only this way can processes of change be sustainable.[27]

One of the key challenges in effectively implementing the concept of resilience will be to **interconnect and coordinate** the different organisational frameworks and

---

[23] EU Global Strategy, pp. 28-29

[24] In particular, the following policy fields may be taken into consideration: European Neighbourhood Policy; Enlargement Policy; Development Cooperation; Humanitarian Aid; Trade, Climate and Energy Policy; Youth, Education, Culture and Sport Policy; Migration and Asylum Policy; Diplomacy, Security and Defence Policy …

[25] In particular, the following actors may be considered in this respect: civilian, military, state, non-state, civil society, Churches, religious communities, economic actors …

[26] In particular, the following levels can be mentioned: the individual person, the family, the local community, the society, the state, the region, the international community …

[27] United Nations Institute for Peace, *The Resilience Approach to Peacebuilding: a New Conceptual Framework*, online available at: https://www.usip.org/insights-newsletter/the-resilience-approach-peacebuilding-new-conceptual-framework

approaches of the various stakeholders[28]. To this end, **appropriate and inclusive platforms for dialogue and cooperation** will have to be reinforced at and across different levels, allowing for mutual exchange and effective participation. At the EU level, this will above all require that the responsibilities between various institutional actors be better coordinated and structural divisions between political guidance and financial resources be addressed more efficiently.

Resilience implies an **integral approach** whose crucial aspect is **comprehensiveness**. The strengtening of resilience in one area can be undermined by a lack in other sectors. If people have more food and water, but their community has no dispute settlement mechanism, resilience is at risk. A comprehensive approach should be based on **risk and vulnerability analysis**[29] for understanding **underlying causes of crisis.** It should look at all relevant areas of economic and social development, as well as ecological integrity.

A key element in fostering resilience with regard to conflicts and catastrophes of all kinds is the **process of coming to terms with the past**. In this respect, it might be important to develop appropriate instruments for dealing with the causes, processes and responsibilities of past crises and to support long-term processes of reconciliation.

Moreover, it is important to **understand the external environment** that can impact the resilience of people, families and communities. Actions to strengthen resilience should be combined at **different levels** in order to **reinforce each other**. It is not only important to work on peace-building initiatives at a local level, but also to advocate at national, regional and international levels for sustainable peace processes.

Actions **addressing patterns of conflict in nonviolent ways** have the potential to foster resilience at all levels while being part of the aforementioned integral and comprehensive approach. **Nonviolent approaches** can contribute to reaching sustainable peace by building mutual confidence and **transforming relationships** from adversarial to cooperative[30].

The Pax Christi network has experience with nonviolent approaches at different levels all over the world. To illustrate, in Kenya, key perpetrators of violence became agents of peace after participating in **conflict training in nonviolent communication**, learning to dialogue and resolving disputes before they escalated to violence.[31] In Latin America, training on **how to advocate nonviolently for**

---

[28] European Parliament Research Service, *Resilience in the EU's foreign and security policy (2016),* online available at: http://bit.ly/1WOpW0H

[29] Cf. European Parliament Research Service, *Resilience in the EU's foreign and security policy* (2016), online available at: http://bit.ly/1WOpW0H

[30] Cf. the method of "Integrative Complexity" aiming at changing the structure of thinking in view of preventing violent extremism. More information online available at: http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/news/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Prevention-of-Extremism-the-IC-method.pdf

[31] Elizabeth Kanini Kimau, *Nonviolence as a tool for empowering warring communities to be agents of their own change* (14 February 2017), online available at: https://paxchristipeacestories.com/2017/02/14/nonviolence-as-a-tool-for-empowering-warring-communities-to-be-agents-of-their-own-change/. More information and examples of nonviolent

changes in conflicts with the extractive industry has been accomplished by its members.[32]

Working with civil society actors and Church organisations around the world reveals that in many places there is **shrinking civic space**. The contribution of **civil society actors – including faith-based organisations, Churches and religious communities –** to sustainable development and peace through their on-going field work and advocacy efforts should be duly recognised. **Article 17(3) TFEU[33]** provides a good instrument for **dialogue** at the EU level in this respect. With regard to civil society organisations, the EU should also **increase its political support** for them and provide access to proper **funding and capacity-building for their activities**.

5. Conclusion

Declaring resilience as a strategic priority of the EU is an important step. In the follow-up, the EU High Representative and the European Commission should elaborate a Joint Communication that provides a **precise understanding** and identifies **effective ways** in the EU's policy framework to put resilience into **practice.** In this respect, the EU should invest **adequate personal and financial resources** in order to fully realise the potential of resilience.

COMECE, Pax Christi International and Justice & Peace Europe hope that the Joint Communication can help to make the necessary steps forward, and we recommend, in particular, the following:

1. to include and prioritise in the definition of resilience, the **individual, family and community levels,** with particular attention for the most vulnerable members, and reflect the **full spectrum of abilities** potentially needed at **all stages of the crisis cycle and beyond.**
2. to mainstream the **strengthening of resilience** into all the EU's external and internal policies with the **objective** of contributing to **sustainable development** and **peace.**
3. to take a sufficiently **ambitious and long-term approach and take into account the global geopolitical context,** and not to understand resilience merely as a shift of responsibility to third countries.
4. to pursue an **empowerment** approach based on **subsidiarity**, **solidarity**, **participation**, **dialogue**, **partnership** and **local co-ownership,** with full **respect for human rights**, **the rule of law** and **democratic principles** as indispensable parts of this process.

---

approaches to conflict can also be found on the website of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative under the section of the 2016 Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome which was organised by Pax Christi International and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which brought together more than 80 people for an unprecedented gathering to discuss the Catholic Church's history of and commitment to nonviolence: https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/framing-papers/

[32] Pax Christi International, *Nonviolent approach to conflicts related to extractive projects,* online available at: http://www.paxchristi.net/news/nonviolent-approach-conflicts-related-extractive-projects/3260#sthash.XXYEV8fV.2uVNiFyd.dpbs

[33] According to Art. 17(3) TFEU, the EU "shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue" with Churches and religious communities

5. to apply an **integral approach** with policies that are **people-centered, comprehensive**, **multisectoral**, **context-specific** and **forward-looking.**
6. to create structural **synergies** between **different** EU policy **areas**, bring together **different types** of actors and instruments, and engage stakeholders at and across **different levels** with appropriate and inclusive platforms for dialogue, cooperation and coordination.
7. to carry out **risk and vulnerability analyses** for understanding the local context and the underlying causes of crisis in the wider **external environment**.
8. to elaborate in dialogue with all the stakeholders **tailor-made initiatives** and **invest in nonviolent approaches** to conflict at all levels.
9. to **strengthen civic space** by supporting and actively involving **civil society actors, Churches and religious communities** in resilience processes.
10. to develop **indicators** of resilience-fostering efforts based on **sustainable development factors**.

Brussels, 23 March 2017

Contributing organisations:

The **Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union** (COMECE) brings together the Bishop delegates from Bishops´ Conferences of the 28 Member States. For more than thirty years now, COMECE has been closely involved in the process of European integration and sharing its reflections with EU institutions. COMECE is the Catholic Church partner of EU institutions in the Dialogue foreseen by Article 17(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Its permanent General Secretariat, based in Brussels, analyses EU policies on a day-by-day basis, striving to bring the specific contribution of the Catholic Church into the European debate.

Pax Christi International is a Catholic and faith-based peace movement with 120 member organisations around the world promoting peace, respect for human rights, justice and reconciliation. Its International Secretariat in Brussels coordinates the representation of the movement on the international stage, such as towards EU institutions, by bringing the voices of member organisations to policy makers enabling them to receive first-hand experiences as well as solutions from the ground. Specifically, Pax Christi International aims to promote nonviolent practices and strategies to conflicts (e.g. nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, conflict transformation and peacebuilding strategies).

The **Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions** (Justice and Peace Europe) is a European network of 31 national Justice and Peace Commissions, working for the promotion of justice, peace, respect for human dignity and the care of creation. It contributes to raising awareness of Catholic social doctrine in European societies and European institutions. Its General Secretariat is based in Brussels where it works closely with COMECE, in particular in the area of external relations of the EU.

Contact details:

COMECE	Pax Christi International	Justice and Peace
19, Square de Meeûs	Rue du Progrès 323	Europe
B-1050 Brussels	B-1030 Brussels	19, Square de Meeûs
Belgium	Belgium	B-1050 Brussels
		Belgium
E-mail:	E-mail:	
comece@comece.eu	communications@paxchristi.net	E-mail:
Website:	Website: www.paxchristi.net	secretary@jupax-europa.org
www.comece.eu	Tel: + 32 2 502 55 50	Website: www.jupax-europa.org
Tel: +32 2 235 05 10		Tel.: +32 2 235 05 17