

FROM SENSE-MAKING TO DECISION-MAKING



Sharing experiences on the management of transboundary crises in the EU



A seminar held on 4 April 2019 at the Romanian Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels.

FINAL REPORT

On 4 April 2019, the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU (Integrated Political Crisis Response – the IPCR Team) organised in Brussels a workshop and simulation on transboundary crisis management. The workshop brought together 75 national and EU crisis management officials who exchanged good practices and lessons learned on the management of transboundary crises in the EU. A transboundary crisis simulation also allowed participants to articulate national approaches and served to raise awareness on EU crisis response mechanisms.

The workshop was opened by the Romanian Secretary of State and Head of the Department for Emergency Situations, Mr. Raed Arafat, who underlined the challenges that public organisations and strategic decision-makers at the national and EU level face when confronted with crises, and the importance of pre-established procedures and contacts of the crisis management community and adequate crisis communication. Prof. Dr. Arjen Boin, from the Department of Political Science at Leiden University, used the definition of U. Rosenthal of a 'crisis' as 'a serious **threat** to the basic structures and/or fundamental values of a social system that requires **urgent** decisions under conditions of deep **uncertainty**' and highlighted today's key trends. These include notably the declining legitimacy of public institutions, the rising influence of social media, a changing threat environment and the increased complexity of our systems. It was acknowledged that transboundary crises such as financial crises, migration, climate change, cyber-attacks and foreign interference are difficult to respond to because they are particularly hard to predict, detect and manage. Such crises tend to have a relatively long incubation period followed by a rapid escalation. They may originate in one sector but can quickly transform and expand to others, potentially provoking misunderstanding and confusion between different authorities.

Looking to the future, the Deputy Director of the EUISS, Dr Florence Gaub, and Security and Defence Editor, Dr Daniel Fiott, informed participants about the foresight methodologies and crisis scenarios developed by the EUISS since 2017. This work is useful in anticipating and better prepare for, or possibly even prevent future crises.

Risk management and prevention is more effectively achieved at the national level because local actors have a better understanding of local and regional aspects to crisis response. Nevertheless, there was recognition that the EU can play an important role in facilitating a coordinated response to transboundary crises and EU member states increasingly recognise the relevance of EU-level response mechanisms. Even though the EU is better prepared for transboundary crises than in the past, multiple participants called for greater clarity about the extent of the EU's crisis response architecture and about when and how EU crisis response bodies can assist member states. It may therefore be worthwhile to develop a transboundary capacity, including in terms of early warning and information fusion (transboundary sense-making).

Representatives from EU institutions and bodies walked the audience through the EU toolbox for strategic crisis management, encompassing different approaches and instruments at their disposal. Presentations referred to:

- > **Strategic and political coordination of crises:** the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU presented the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) as a very flexible instrument, which might be triggered either by the Presidency of the Council or when a member state invokes the EU 'solidarity clause' (Article 222 TFEU). IPCR supports decision-makers in the Council reach better coordination at the EU level when responding to a crisis. The complementarity of ARGUS and IPCR mentioned.
- > **European Commission crisis response:** the Secretariat-General of the European Commission informed participants about ARGUS, which is the internal coordination process of the Commission's response to major multi-sectoral and transboundary crisis and also an alert system to share information in the early stages of a crisis.
- > **Response to public health emergencies:** the Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) underlined its role in public health emergencies such as pandemics. It actively promotes capacity building in the member states and, when a crisis arises facilitates a coordinated response. Prevention is encouraged by different actions, such as member states' joint procurement of vaccines.
- > **Energy security:** the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy (DG Energy) is responsible for crises that involve critical infrastructure within the energy sector. It emphasised preparedness measures in the gas sector (stocks of gas and oil are constantly monitored, coordination group meetings take place on a regular basis to address potential supply disruptions) and challenges to cope with major electricity crises (given their immediate effect and transmission the responsibility mainly lies with national-level operators).

- > **Intelligence:** the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN), originally created to address Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) related-issues, was expanded to include counter-terrorism and the security of the EU member states. INTCEN is based in the European External Action Service (EEAS) but it works in close collaboration with other EU institutions and bodies. It plays a key role in sense-making, and in particular for the fusion of information from various sources.
- > **Crime and cyber:** the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) plays a key role in law enforcement and cybersecurity. It works closely with national law enforcement agencies and EU institutions. For example, Europol adopts a law enforcement forensic approach to identify the actors behind different types of threats and this means intense cooperation with the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA). Following the 2017 WannaCry cyber-attack, the agency developed a law enforcement emergency protocol.

The afternoon session saw participants engage in a crisis simulation. The simulation was presented by the EUISS and the Council IPCR Team and centred on a transboundary (hybrid threats) crisis scenario across fictitious countries in the EU and its neighbourhood. Participants were divided into working groups not with the aim to solve the crisis, but rather to exchange on the different national and institutional approaches and respective challenges to respond to that crisis. The simulation was followed by an interactive discussion where crisis response officials from the member states and EU institutions shared lessons from past crises. Participants welcomed the discussions and the simulation as a useful tool and appreciated the event as a first opportunity to set up an informal network of crisis management coordinators/ representatives across the EU (member states and relevant institutions and bodies). A shared platform would be practical for crisis managers to coordinate decision-making across borders and ensure coherent communication.