Shocks without frontiers

Transnational breakdowns and critical incidents:
what role for the EU?
A Green Paper

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Foreword

By Antonio Missiroli

A long, hot – but also wet – summer in Europe, with endemic forest fires in the Iberian peninsula and unstoppable floods in Switzerland and elsewhere; catastrophic hurricanes in the United States, Central America and the Caribbean; an earthquake of disastrous proportions in the Kashmir region; growing fears of an avian flu pandemic in Eurasia spreading into the European Union – not to mention the effects of the terrorist attacks in central London or the dramatic images of poor would-be immigrants climbing barbed wires in Ceuta and Melilla.

These phenomena and events are very diverse[1], of course, but they all contribute to a new and powerful sense of vulnerability in Western societies. The perception – and arguably also the reality – of risks and threats is changing rapidly and radically, and with it grows the demand for adequate responses.

Inevitably, the public debate has started taking stock of all this. Attention has shifted towards the ability of agencies – national, European and multilateral – to cope with such new vulnerabilities. There are increased calls, in the media as well, for additional resources and expertise to be devoted to addressing these new and mostly unexpected challenges: some of them eminently 'natural', some primarily man-made, but almost all a combination of old and new factors – from climate change to globalisation.[2]

Not that these challenges are entirely new. Even before this last 'year of living dangerously', events such as the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, the spread of AIDS, recurrent oil spills from sinking cargo ships (Amoco Cadiz, Erika, Prestige), lethal chemical incidents (Seveso, Bhopal, Toulouse), computer bugs, the anthrax scare of autumn 2001 (that, inter alia, disrupted upset ordinary mail delivery across the world) or the SARS scare of spring 2003 (that originated in South Asia and shut down the Canadian city of Toronto), let alone critical electricity failures (New York in September 2003, Moscow in winter 2004), have all shown how even affluent societies can be, at the same time, safer and more vulnerable.[3]

Furthermore, a study carried out recently by the United Nations University highlighted the need for a new definition of "environmental refugee", arguing that as many as 25 million people have already been driven off their original habitats by falling soil fertility, drought, flooding and deforestation, and forced to join already fragile and overcrowded urban squatter communities – and possibly migrate further North.[4]

What all these diverse phenomena have in common, especially regarding their overall impact on our societies and systems, is that:

a) They combine both well-known and entirely unexpected risk factors, as already mentioned, thus making it more difficult to put in place appropriate and ready-made policy responses.
b) They prompt a growing demand for public intervention, even in societies that are increasingly 'privatised' (including the United States).
c) They put public leaders and decision-makers under huge pressure: their very first acts in such crises are often decisive for their future credibility and legitimacy, as proved by the contrasting cases of Gerhard Schröder (the floods of summer 2002 in East Germany) and José Maria Aznar (the oil spill off the Northern coast of Spain in 2001, the terrorist acts of March 2004);
d) They do not respect geographical, political, or bureaucratic barriers: such shocks are quintessentially 'without frontiers', and put into question traditional policy boundaries and divisions of labour.
e) They create serious policy dilemmas by pitting values (individual freedom and public transparency) against interests (collective security and damage control).
f) At the same time, they require and trigger solidarity, in terms of both values (humanitarian aid) and interests (effective action).

Suffice it here to recall the 'earthquake diplomacy' that, in September 1999, brought Greece and Turkey closer to each other and, lately, even allowed some collaboration between India and Pakistan in Kashmir; or the cooperation between Indonesian authorities and rebels in Aceh in the wake of the tsunami of December 2004 that eventually helped bring about a peace deal – sponsored and monitored, notably, by the EU.

This is why the European Policy Centre (EPC) has decided to act – within the limits of its resources, of course – and do two things in the first instance. First, to publish this innovative and thought-provoking 'Green Paper' drafted by a group of experts from very different backgrounds: it explores and assesses what the EU as such, in particular, could or should do in this domain, irrespective of what individual Member States may already be doing on a bi- or pluri-lateral basis. Second, to launch a dedicated Task Force to channel these ideas into a broader framework, refine them through further research and analysis, and make them directly available to the Brussels 'policy community'.[5]

This Issue Paper, therefore, is at the same time a point of arrival for the pioneering work of the initial group, and a point of departure for its expansion and dissemination.

The Task Force, for its part, will focus on the possible new dimensions of crisis management in, for and by the EU, as also defined in this publication. It will try to build bridges and lines of communication between some existing EPC work programmes (The Future of CFSP, Political Europe and Global Governance, including its Human Security Forum) while keeping the door wide open to new approaches and proposals. It will start in January 2006 and invite all those interested in its activities to provide suggestions as well as additional expertise and resources – in the hope of meeting a growing demand among policy-makers and citizens alike.

The EPC is grateful to the European Science Foundation (ESF), who funded the initial project; the Leiden University Crisis Research Center (CRC) and the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), who co-sponsored and organised the pivotal Ste Maxime Conference in June 2005; and all the individual participants in this exercise, too, for agreeing to publish their product in the EPC's Issue Paper series – with a view, of course, to continuing and enhancing a mutually beneficial collaboration.

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Introduction

The inevitability of transnational breakdowns

Governments in today's world face a discomforting Catch-22. The same forces of modernity that improve citizens' lives and bring unprecedented prosperity also make those citizens vulnerable to critical incidents and the effects of transnational breakdowns.

Europe is emblematic of this paradox.[6] The more tightly European societies, economies, and infrastructure are drawn together, the greater the benefits of scale; yet, the risk of cross-border problems increases as well. Consider the realities exposed by real-life events: states experiencing the pressures of quicker migration flows; terrorist networks moving seamlessly across borders; electricity failures with wide-ranging effects; incremental climate changes that alter transportation patterns, communication flows and trade balances.

In short, as Europe integrates its most basic life-sustaining systems, ranging from technical infrastructure to electrical grids to transportation networks, it also opens itself to new threats. What may start as a small glitch can, in today's world, snowball into a widespread transnational breakdown. Are European states, institutions and governing elites ready to address these serious challenges? What means do they have at their disposal? Should there be a collective approach to addressing such problems? If so, what should such an approach resemble?

This Green Paper examines the potential role of the European Union in assisting Member States in dealing with transnational breakdowns. By some accounts, the Union appears set for greater involvement. The events of 11 September 2001 laid bare the realities of modern threats and prompted EU governments to enlist the Union in the fight against terrorism.

The formulation of the European Security Strategy, the adoption of a solidarity declaration after the Madrid bombings, and moves toward greater intelligence cooperation soon followed. Natural disasters, both in Europe and Asia, and a looming flu pandemic have prompted Member States to vest the EU with incremental amounts of authority to play a role in the management of transnational threats.

Yet many obstacles stand in the way of EU cooperation. The appearance of more policy initiatives belies national hesitation regarding how much authority to delegate to the Union level. Political uncertainties, manifest in references to the subsidiarity principle and vague declarations, exacerbate institutional divisions in the EU. Some EU crisis management initiatives are

vested in the Council of Ministers-dominated policy framework, others in areas where supranational actors like the European Commission play a greater role. These political and institutional divisions impose inherent limits on the Union's potential role: it is unlikely to be hands on; it will be more about resource pooling, coordination, monitoring, information sharing, regulation, mobilisation and funding.

This Green Paper takes stock of recent efforts aimed at improving the security and safety of the Union and its citizens. It reports the findings of a select group of EU scholars, security and crisis experts who shared their insights at an exploratory workshop sponsored by the European Science Foundation (ESF) held in Ste Maxime, France (25-26 July, 2005).[7] In discussing the Union's capacity to cope with transnational breakdowns, these experts connected three well-defined research domains:

1) The *crisis and disaster management research community* addresses breakdowns in social systems and explores the responses of citizens, media and government.
2) The *international relations and security research community* studies global threats, contemplating how a secure society can be achieved in an increasingly insecure world.
3) The *comparative politics and EU research community* studies how institutional, political and social characteristics shape "the art of the possible" in supranational policymaking and implementation.

This Green Paper inquires into what we refer to as the "coping capacity" of the Union. While we recognise that the EU is not an international organisation that can command forces independently from its Member States, it is clear that it harbours mechanisms that may complement the coping capacity of the Member States in the face of transboundary threats. The term "coping capacity" comprises all activities and resources that enable a social system to prevent, respond to and recover from threats to its core values and life-sustaining functions.

In this Green Paper, we answer the following questions:

- What will transnational incidents and breakdowns of the future look like?
- What challenges do they pose to European governance?
- What is the current organisational capacity of the EU to deal with these critical incidents and breakdowns?
- Should the EU improve its coping capacity?
- If the Member States should decide that the EU requires a better coping capacity, what would be a feasible road map for institutional design?

I. Transnational breakdowns: low-chance, high-impact events

It is impossible to predict when and where breakdowns will occur. Even if we consider a limited number of 'threat domains', the number of plausible breakdown scenarios is alarming.

Peter Schwartz, an authority on threat scenarios, shows how simple extrapolations of inevitable developments – climate change, demographics, terrorism, technology jumps – produce futures that differ significantly from today's state of play.[8] The chances of these scenarios actually materialising are decidedly low. If they do occur, however, the threat to European security and prosperity is significant. Just consider three hypothetical scenarios:

January 2007 Europe suffers from extreme cold, which causes a multiplicity of problems. The seasonal flu epidemic spreads across the continent. On the same day, Paris reopens its airports after two days of snow blizzards and freezing rain, Switzerland announces three suspected cases of people infected by avian flu. Several days later, the World Health Organization confirms the outbreak. Germany and France announce that they will close their borders with Switzerland. Two days later, Poland reports a series of suspected cases. The Polish Prime Minister urgently appeals to the EU to provide vaccines; several Member States have ruled out sharing this scarce resource. Neighbouring countries want to close their borders. The UK has already done so. The Secretary-General of the United Nations urges Europe to "battle this problem with all available resources in order to prevent a disaster of worldwide proportions".

June 2007 A *coup d'état* in Algeria comes as a rude surprise to the meeting of the European Council, which has reached a deadlock over a European military operation in Kosovo. The new Algerian regime announces "the final phase of the war against colonialism" and heralds the "birth of a truly Islamic state". In the following weeks, a massive flow of refugees begins to reach several European countries. At the same time, a string of small explosions occur in Paris, Madrid, and Milan. A hitherto unknown group of Algerian origin demands immediate action on the part of the EU: the new Algerian regime must be dealt with forcefully or more attacks will follow in all European capitals.

Summer 2007 A heat wave holds the European continent in a tight grip. France has declared a state of emergency: the elderly are dying and water has become scarce across the country. Forest fires torture Spain, Portugal and Greece. Electricity blackouts occur regularly (and randomly) across Europe; the energy market – now governed by a small number of transnational companies – has a problem with cooling water (the rivers

have heated up beyond a critical threshold). As a result, critical systems (trains, mobile telephone networks, hospitals, airports) have become unreliable. European leaders – many of whom are on vacation – come under increasing pressure to act. Consumer organisations and non-governmental organisations across Europe start a coordinated campaign in favour of re-nationalising the energy companies.

The ambiguity of future threats

These scenarios are not the far-fetched musings of an imagination run wild. They derive from rational extrapolations of contemporary threats, which experts say are likely to materialise at some point in the foreseeable future.

It is not a question if the climate will change, for instance, but when we will feel the effects of such change. The 20th century has seen three pandemics and health experts warn that the next one may hit at any time. Many countries in the Union's backyard are judged by observers to be politically, economically and socially unstable. California has experienced the "real time" limitations of a modern energy market; energy experts are confident that even more severe blackouts may well occurr in Europe. There is simply no reason to assume that Europe will be able to steer clear of all possible future threats.

Two characteristics set these threats apart from conventional ones. First, they defy easy categorisation as either "internal" or "external." Pandemics do not respect man-made borders, but they benefit from their absence. Modern terrorism may be inspired by faraway events and sources, but its agents carry European passports. Climate change may affect coastal regions more than the European heartland, but its economic effects are likely to be felt by all Europeans. Modern threats unfold in unimaginable ways that appear predictable only in hindsight.

Second, modern threats have the potential to cause disproportionate effects. The Union has proved a spectacular success in integrating the various life-sustaining systems of its Member States, which has helped to spread prosperity across the continent. The resulting complexity and tight coupling of economic, legal, social and, increasingly, political systems render Member States vulnerable to routine incidents that strike in one area but multiply exponentially, wreaking havoc in distantly related systems.

In recent years, the vulnerability effects of modernisation have become all too apparent. Migration flows may first affect Spain or Italy, but they will put pressure on social systems in all Member States. A food scare in Belgium undermines public trust in food safety in neighbouring countries

and beyond. A terrorist act in Madrid or London raises fears in all capitals. An economic crisis in one country can undermine a common currency shared by many others. A ruptured oil tanker threatens multiple coastal lines.

The breakdown of one critical system may cause the breakdown of others. The 9/11 attacks brought the airline industry to its knees. The Anthrax attacks in the US affected postal systems across Europe, which, in turn, affected many organisations depending on an uninterrupted mail flow. A teenager in Malaysia can introduce a computer virus that will grind financial systems to a halt. A flu pandemic or a smallpox attack will cripple schools, banks, supermarket distribution lines, airliners and hospitals. Hurricane Katrina moved the price of oil sharply higher, which undermined Europe's nascent economic recovery.

The recombination of well-known and rather elementary threats can thus lead to a chain of critical incidents that cause vulnerable systems to break down. The threats may seem conventional, but the vulnerability of modern systems turns them into major system threats (or disruptions). As dangers impinge on the core functions of a social system, the public will demand that governing elites fulfil the most elementary task of government: to provide a sense of order and security, while ensuring life-sustaining functions.[9]

II. Managing transnational incidents and breakdowns: critical challenges for government

When the core functions of a society come under threat, all eyes turn to the government of that society. In liberal-democratic societies, it is a prime responsibility of government to keep its citizens safe from harm and to maintain life-sustaining systems such as water, electricity, food chains, infrastructure and all other systems that are considered crucial in a society.

The possibility of such a breakdown poses a complex set of governance challenges. We categorise these challenges according to the well-known phase model of crisis and disaster management:

- *Prevention* It is usually best to prevent harm from happening in the first place. The challenge here is two-fold. First, governments must design proper prevention mechanisms. These typically include regulation and inspection regimes which build on the precious lessons of previous mishaps. In doing so, governments must weigh the potential benefits of strong prevention policies against the price that excessive regulation may have on social habits, economic activities, and civil liberties Second, governments must recognise that not all incidents and breakdowns can be prevented. This would require a level of foresight and understanding that governments simply do not possess.

- *Preparation:* If incidents and breakdowns are inevitable, preparation to deal with such disturbances becomes a pre-eminent task. Policies, organisational structures and resources must be in place so that a disturbance can be properly dealt with. Responders must be trained and facilities ready. Planning is severely hindered, however, by the unknown nature of the next contingency. It is one thing to prepare for familiar incidents (a fire, a hostage situation, a major traffic incident), but it is difficult to plan for dramatic events such as biological weapon attacks, long-term energy failures or extreme weather. The real challenge, as impossible as it sounds, is to prepare for the unknown.

- *Consequence management:* Once an incident or breakdown occurs, administrative and governing elites must try to avert or contain the threat, minimise the damage, and prevent critical systems from breaking down. Several problems are sure to emerge. There will be deep uncertainty as to the causes of the incident and the necessary response strategies. Communication between all parties involved will be hampered by time pressure and the aforementioned uncertainty. Tough dilemmas must be solved under the glaring light of an ever-present media. Coordination will be a problem: it is never clear who amongst the many actors involved should make what decisions.

After critical decisions are made, implementation hurdles pose another set of problems.

- *Aftermath politics:* The aftermath of an energy- and emotion-consuming event is usually marked by the desire for a quick return to normalcy. Much work remains to be done, however. Lessons must be learned about the causes and effects of the chosen response; these lessons can then be fed back into the prevention regime. In liberal democracies, the government is likely to be subjected to some sort of accountability process. Both learning and accountability processes tend to be heavily affected by the "politics of crisis management": all stakeholders will seek to impose their definition of the situation upon the collective sense-making process that takes place in the aftermath of any crisis. Institutionalised forms of inquiry occur in a heavily politicised environment.

Deepening challenges of transnational breakdowns

These challenges are hard to meet at the national level. Transnational incidents and breakdowns compound the challenges for any single government. The challenges deepen along two dimensions.

First, a transnational threat has incredible damage potential: a pandemic threatens all European citizens; a food scare affects the entire European food market; and climate change has implications for all European regions. Second, the enlarged scale creates unknown dynamics. These threats take on new dimensions as they proliferate through modern systems. We do not know what these disturbances will look like and how they will unfold.

The transnational scale of modern threats demands responses that individual national states alone cannot, or will not, provide. The nature of the threat is unknown, information flows and coordination issues run into international barriers, and aftermath politics take on a whole new dimension. All this becomes even more complicated when we consider that there is no clearly defined authority for trans-boundary contingencies.

In short, we are likely to see a series of "rude surprises" that outstrip the coping capacity of available bureaucratic toolboxes.[10] Normal political and administrative routines simply do not suffice in the face of these threats.[11] The fuzzy character of these threats makes them hard to recognise (they do not fit the known problem categories) and hard to stop. Snowballing threats require a rapid reconfiguration of available administrative capacity, but flexibility is not a characteristic strength of modern public bureaucracies.

There is a more optimistic note to all this. It is true that modernisation – the sum of technology development, improved infrastructure and transport systems, financial and information efficiencies, and globalisation – increases the vulnerability of social systems. These same forces, however, also boost the capacity of social systems to deal with adversity. It is due to these forces that many types of incidents that used to bring societies to a grinding halt no longer pose a real threat.

The underlying question, then, is whether the increased capacity to deal with transnational contingencies is sufficient to offset their potential damage. This question easily translates to the EU context: does the Union use its transnational governance capacities to prepare for transnational incidents and breakdowns?

III. Assessing EU coping capacity: a preliminary overview

What mechanisms does the EU have in place to manage critical incidents and breakdowns? How does the Union seek to enable Member States to deal with these contingencies? What complementary capacity does the EU offer?

To answer these questions, we have surveyed the organisational and policy means that the Union might direct toward impending threats.[12] We used a broad brush, studying a wide range of organisational and policy means (regardless of whether such means were intentionally designed to enable this type of management effort).

The EU has always possessed *implicit capacity* to manage transnational incidents. Monitoring capabilities aimed at trade flows, for instance, or the surveillance of agricultural activities, have long been part of its remit. Yet, the Union has only begun to *explicitly* build up its coping capacity in recent years.

One might argue that the capacity to manage transnational incidents and breakdowns was designed into the DNA of the EU. After all, the Community/Union was built on the lessons of World War II. Those lessons suggested that if Europe was to be safe and prosper, the main powers of the continent should be brought into a bond of cooperation. Supranational institutions were created to facilitate cooperation and preserve the common cause. The elaborate structures of cooperation, coordination and negotiation that have evolved since then can be interpreted as a potent set of mechanisms to prevent and deal with international and transnational incidents.

The structures that make up the institutional heart of the EU certainly enhance the capacity to deal with other types of transnational incidents and breakdowns. But while familiarity, practice, and close working relationships make it easier to deal with contingencies, questions have emerged in recent years as to whether this implicit capacity would suffice should a transnational breakdown materialise.

Building coping capacity

The initial violent disintegration of Yugoslavia painfully demonstrated the EU’s limited ability to deal with 'backyard crises'. In response, the Council developed the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

The ESDP marked a significant expansion of the Union’s role and tasks. The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) included the so-called Petersberg tasks, providing the EU with authority and (fairly limited) means to initiate

humanitarian and peace-keeping missions well beyond its borders. In other words, the ESDP enables the Union to address crises in non-EU countries – acting partially on the notion that such crises may eventually cause breakdowns within the Union. One might thus argue that the ESDP has implicitly and indirectly bolstered the EU's capacity to prevent future breakdowns within its borders.

This link between external crises and internal security was made explicit in the European Security Strategy (ESS) formulated in 2003. The ESS identifies a wide range of threats (terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure, and organised crime) that impact upon the security of EU citizens. In recent years, the Union has increased its capacity to project force outside its borders (it has conducted 11 missions on three continents since 2003). The symbolic nature of these missions is hard to overstate: mixed teams of Europeans bringing peace rather than waging war far away from home.

At the same time, it is clear that the Union's capacity to protect its 'homeland' from external threats by means of sending military and civilian teams abroad remains rather limited. Proponents of a larger EU role have their wish lists, of course, but it is far from clear whether the bigger Member States will invest in an enhanced common capacity. The rejection of the proposed Constitution – which included the Solidarity Clause – does not bode well (at least not for the immediate future).

In a parallel development, the European Commission put the Community Civil Protection Mechanism (established 23 October 2001) into operation. This mechanism aims to facilitate and coordinate cooperation between Member States in the wake of a disaster (it is clearly developed with natural disasters in mind). The Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) serves as the contact point for all national partners. During recent disasters, several Member States have made use of the mechanism to request assistance from other countries (most recently, Portugal requested assistance in its fight against forest fires). Yet, the primary response has remained a national responsibility (the EU does not 'take over').

Within the bureaucracy that serves the Commission, a network with a more specialised capacity to deal with breakdowns or incidents has emerged over the years.[13] Quite a few of the Commission's Directorates-General (DGs) have formulated plans, developed policies and set up crisis centres in order to minimise the impact of disturbances.

DG Public Health and Consumer Protection, for instance, possesses an intricate set of tools to deal with the outbreak of contagious diseases and food safety incidents (ranging from BSE to foot-and-mouth disease). The same DG prepares for the possible outbreak of biological and chemical

outbreaks, intentional or not. The BICHAT program (including its rapid alert system) aims to build an EU-wide capacity for the timely detection and identification of dangerous agents, and sets out guidelines for what public health officials need to do in case of an outbreak.

The fragmented nature of the Commission's coping capacity has come under increasing scrutiny within the institution itself. To strengthen the coordination between the various crisis centres – the Commission has at least ten of them – it developed a central network called ARGUS (20 October 2004). Moreover, the Civil Protection Mechanism housed in the Commission has been employed outside the EU, in the case of the earthquake in Turkey, for instance, and modalities are being designed to allow the mechanism to complement ESDP efforts abroad as well.

In the wake of the Madrid bombings (March 2004), the EU has reinvigorated its efforts to cooperate and coordinate further in the domain of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). Agencies such as Europol and Eurojust seek to coordinate the work of national security and criminal justice agencies, which should enhance the capacity to deal with terrorist and crime-related threats. The appointment of an anti-terrorism coordinator within the General Secretariat of the Council underscores this aim. The recent establishment of the Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Frontiers and Immigration (CIREFI) suggests a growing capacity to deal with immigration-related incidents.

Clearly, much has happened in recent years. But this progress has been accompanied by institutional divisions, such as the gap between Commission efforts to deal with "internal" incidents and the efforts of the Council to address breakdowns on foreign soil. Ambiguous responsibilities have resulted in some threats being addressed, in similar ways, by both Commission and Council, without much apparent coordination. The Office of Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) assists in the management of disasters that occur in what are considered developing countries. The Council, on the other hand, has broadened its views of incidents and breakdowns to take into account the direct effects that foreign crises may have on "homeland security." In some places, the gap has been bridged. In fact, most recent efforts seem to aim at further improving the coordination between both domains of EU governance.

A preliminary assessment of the Union's capacity to deal with critical incidents and breakdowns begins by highlighting the absence of a comprehensive philosophy that may inspire, connect, and coordinate the many different activities that have been initiated – explicitly or implicitly – within the EU. Some might consider the ESS or the Solidarity Clause as a potential source of inspiration and legitimacy for the formulation of such a philosophy, but we note that the need for such a

philosophy simply has not been recognised as yet. Whether such a need really exists, depends of course on one's assessment of the current state of affairs.

EU coping capacity: observations

To facilitate such an assessment, we offer the following set of observations with regard to the Union's capacity to manage transnational threats:

- *Defining threats*. For any EU role in the face of a critical incident or looming breakdown, it is often necessary for the Council to explicitly define a situation in terms of an emerging threat in need of an urgent response. The recognition of adversity, in other words, is typically political in nature. Sometimes this may seem a rather technical activity, for instance when the Commission activates the civil protection mechanism after a disaster has occurred. But when Member States cannot agree on the seriousness of an emerging threat, it may be hard for the Union to activate its various capacities.

- *Coordinating capacities.* The EU has developed considerable capacity to coordinate the efforts of Member States and to pool information at the European level. In some critical areas, such as epidemiological surveillance, the EU-wide databases appear quite comprehensive. The question is whether these intricate structures and mechanisms will function adequately under time pressure. Coordination is often an arduous, time-consuming process, but emerging threats may have to be dealt with quickly (leaving little time for extended face-to-face meetings). Moreover, it is not clear whether the existing system can handle the surge in communications that is typical of critical incidents and breakdowns.

- *Short versus longer term*. Experts seem to agree that the EU is much better at achieving long-term goals, whereas it finds it much more difficult to achieve short-term ones. This is a great quality that sets the Union apart from national governments, which find their capacity to address long-term goals burdened by the highly politicised nature of the policy-making process. The often-noted technocratic character of EU policy-making may be less suited to handling critical incidents and breakdowns, however. The politically charged nature of these events requires immediate action and short-term results – something the Union is not particularly well designed to accomplish.

- *Monitoring policy domains*. The Commission's bureaucracy (consisting of the various DGs) has developed a remarkable capacity to monitor policy domains across Europe. The Commission has 'ears and eyes' that allow it to document and follow routine trends – such as

emerging food risks – while observing sharp deviations that might raise warning flags. This capacity is limited to mapping events that fall clearly within a particular domain (agriculture, nuclear energy). But most incidents and breakdowns do not respect policy domains. Such transboundary manifestations of adversity may not immediately appear on the Commission's radar screen, because one DG does not recognise them as aberrations (precisely because they are unexpected, the DGs are not likely to have developed means to look out for them). Moreover, it is not clear whether the DGs' information networks can adequately digest information coming from far and wide, possibly indicating the emergence of an incident that may prove critical in its consequences.

- *Intelligence sharing*. In the wake of recent terrorist events, the EU has stepped up its efforts to improve intelligence sharing between the Member States. Even though the Union and its agencies have made great strides in this politically sensitive domain, it is clear that there is much room for improvement. The Member States remain unwilling at best to accept too much information-sharing responsibility with other EU partners.

- *Regulatory instruments*. Even though many critical incidents and breakdowns may exhaust the reach and range of the Union's policy toolbox, the involved EU bodies typically reach for regulatory instruments in the face of adversity. A standard reaction to new forms of adversity is to define the threat, categorise it, trace it and subject it to regulation. This may work well once the threat is fully understood. New threats typically defy institutionalised solutions, however; they require innovative approaches.

- *Learning lessons*. While we observe considerable 'lessons learned' exercises taking place in the EU context, we see very little translation of such lessons into reform. The string of crisis management missions in recent years, for instance, suggest a range of issues in need of evaluation: the division of competence between the pillars; the predominance of coordination efforts; the belief in early warning mechanisms; the collaboration between civil and military spheres; the collaboration with other international organisations and non-Member States; and the relations with and between Member States. Evaluations take place, but the resulting documents rarely see the light of day or are acted upon. Much can be gleaned from previous experience, which would help the EU to improve its capacity to deal with critical incidents and breakdowns.

IV. Towards increased coping capacity?

The question arises as to whether the EU can and should do more to enhance its capacity to deal with critical incidents and breakdowns. The answer to this question depends on the stand one takes on two critical issues:

a) The potential consequences of future incidents and breakdowns;
b) The EU's current institutional, political and administrative potential to deal with trans-boundary incidents and breakdowns.

We adopt the argument that future incidents and breakdowns pose serious risks to European citizens, which requires at least some degree of coping capacity.[14] The remaining question is whether this capacity should be embedded at the EU level. Three types of answers seem to be most common:

Answer 1: *The EU was never designed to manage breakdowns. Leave it to the Member States.*
There has been much debate about what the Union should do and what it should refrain from doing. The Constitution debacle has fortified the position of those who think that the EU's role has expanded too far and in too many directions. In their view, to take on yet more responsibilities that clearly belong to the Member States is not only unfeasible: it is undesirable. They consider the Union first and foremost an instrument for enhanced coordination amongst Member States. The idea that the EU can manage a trans-boundary crisis ignores the very nature of its institutional character and must therefore be rejected as unfeasible. Moreover, to suggest that the Union can play a role where it obviously cannot is to raise expectations in an irresponsible fashion and should therefore be avoided.

Answer 2: *Trans-boundary threats require transnational coping capacity. The EU must do much more to fuflil this role.*
The world will see more and more crises and disasters with transnational and cross-system effects. The shockwaves of a terrorist attack travel well beyond its immediate geographical location. Relatively common disasters such as Hurricane Katrina affect policy domains across the globe (in addition to causing untold suffering on the ground). A slight environmental fluctuation can destabilise the intricate balance between cross-national systems. While the agents of breakdown are hard to address, the impact of such breakdowns can be (mis)managed. In fact, one may argue that the quality of the response is crucial to ensuring the well-being of European citizens. The EU should invest heavily in upgrading its coping capacity and it should do so soon.

Answer 3: *Trans-boundary threats may require transnational coping capacity, but the EU is not where that capacity should be developed. Look toward NATO or create a separate international organisation for that purpose.*
Transnational incidents and breakdowns require a supranational actor to coordinate the response effort. The EU cannot do that. 'Brussels' may tell Member States what to do, but the Union has few means to enforce its recommendations and guidelines (certainly in the short term). It is subject to the willingness of the Member States to share information and resources. The limited size and fragmented nature of its bureaucracy is insufficient to make up the backbone of a fully-fledged response operation. Other international organisations – most notably NATO – are much better suited to play such a role. The EU should play an active role in enhancing NATO's capacity and working with NATO, but it should refrain from further developing its own coping capacity. If NATO cannot assume this role, the EU may elect to select, initiate or foster another international organisation.

Initiating a debate

The questions we ask and the possible answers we identify above remain a product of discussions amongst a fairly narrow set of experts. Both in academic and policy discourse, very little debate is found on the question of coping capacity in the light of critical incidents and transnational breakdowns. We strongly believe such a debate is timely and necessary. To help kick it off, we now begin to discuss the ideal-typical answers formulated above.

We would begin by arguing that the first answer – "the EU should not do anything to improve its coping capacity" – would amount to undermining the long-term legitimacy of the Union. In recent years, the EU has taken firm steps to improve its coping capacity after several events revealed a lack of effective transnational response. These steps have more than symbolic value, as our inventory demonstrates. They have created capacity (however limited) and have increased expectations.

These expectations have become manifest during a number of Council meetings in recent years. There appears to be a widespread feeling in European (and non-European) political and policy circles that the EU should assume a more assertive stance on the international stage. This 'feeling' has translated into treaties, declarations and, most recently, the proposed 'Constitution'. While the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch represents a setback, it should be noted that these No votes seemed to have had very little to do with the proposed enhancement of the Union's external role.

The same can be said for the civil protection ambitions. The Solidarity Clause agreed after the Madrid bombings and written into the proposed Constitution symbolised the emerging awareness that the EU should be investing in its coping capacity. The European Security Strategy (ESS) was written with the Union's position on the world stage in mind, but the underlying thinking has filtered into the security debate that was triggered by the Madrid and London bombings. Both the Solidarity Clause and the ESS appear to evoke little controversy in an otherwise acrimonious debate on the future of the EU.

If there is a politically informed consensus that trans-boundary breakdowns require coping capacity at the EU level, current political reality seems to rule out NATO assuming a driving role in this regard. First, the military nature of the alliance makes it less suitable to coordinate civilian responses to trans-boundary breakdowns. Second, the current membership list of NATO differs in fundamental ways from the EU membership list, which undermines the alliance's capacity and legitimacy to operate on EU territory. None of this rules out cooperation between NATO and the Union, especially when it comes to certain types of threat: attacks with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, for instance. However, membership incongruity between the two organisations does seem to exclude the option of contracting out all coping capacity to NATO.

These initial thoughts translate into two baseline assumptions, which we offer here as an invitation for further scrutiny and debate:

1. The EU must use its coping capacity in the face of critical incidents and major breakdowns. If it does not, the EU will reinforce the prevailing notion of a technocratic organisation losing its relevance amongst European citizens.

   Major crises, disasters and breakdowns evoke a clamour for governmental assistance. Even in the United States, where less government often seems a majority preference, the slow reaction of the federal government to the dramatic impact of Hurricane Katrina invited intense criticism from all sides. If one of the scenarios outlined above would materialise in Europe, the absence of an EU response could evoke a similar backlash. The fragmented response to the BSE outbreak raised serious questions with regard to the Union's capacity to serve its citizens rather than its Member States.

2. The EU must develop a comprehensive strategy to guide the development of its coping capacities in an efficient and effective way.

If consensus could be reached on the need for the Union to enhance its coping capacity in the face of critical incidents and trans-boundary breakdowns, an encompassing strategy is a first requirement. The EU harbours a variety of policies, mechanisms, and organisations that could be of assistance in initiating a supranational response. This variety has grown out of different needs and different aims. A first step would be to think through how all these potential building blocks can be related to the larger cause of enhanced coping capacity. In the concluding section, we offer some thoughts that may inform such a strategy.

V. A roadmap for institutional design: critical parameters

The Union seems to have stumbled into what we may call – somewhat grandly perhaps – a philosophy of crisis management. Two components of this implicit vision – which may be derived from such formulations as the European Security Strategy and the Solidarity Clause – stand out.

First, it broadly defines potential threats to the Union and its citizens. These threats may emerge on faraway continents, on the EU's doorstep, or on the territory of one or more of its Member States. What they have in common is the object of threat: the core values and life-sustaining systems of the Union.[15] Second, the EU's implicit vision dictates that such threats are a matter of common interest and mutual solidarity. A threat to a certain policy domain or a certain geographical area is a threat to the Union as a whole.

If this philosophy is ever to inform the actual practice of coping with emerging calamities at the European level, it will require translation into clearly formulated policies, organisational structures, available resources and rules of interaction. Indeed, many issues related to incident management demand attention and discussion. This will no doubt be a long and arduous process, but that is the price to be paid for prevention and response systems that work in a European context.

To conclude, we flag up the most crucial issues that will have to be addressed before an effective coping capacity can emerge:

- *Organise an extensive debate on the desirability and feasibility of developing European coping capacity*. As we have pointed out in this report, it is by no means widely agreed that the EU needs to develop coping capacity. The further development of such capacity is not a technical operation; it is a deeply political enterprise. An effective system is informed by political considerations, which, in turn, must flow from political debate. The development of an effective coping system should be placed on the Union's political agenda.

- *Define when a threat assumes trans-boundary proportions*. It should be clear which types of threats and threat thresholds demand a reaction at the European level. Again, such definitions can only be the outcome of a political process. This process must be initiated as soon as possible. Only when it is clear how the EU determines whether a threat is a Member State responsibility or requires a supranational response can a fitting capacity be developed.

- *Map available and potential capacity*. An effective coping system for the critical incidents and trans-boundary breakdowns discussed in this

report does not have to be built from scratch. Scattered across the pillars and organisational units of the Union, one can find the building blocks for such a system. Once the design requirements have been formulated, the Union must engage in a process of self-discovery. It must scrutinise what units and policies enable or constrain the EU's capacity to deal with trans-boundary adversity.

- *Capitalise on the existing monitoring capacity* to enhance a comprehensive risk and threat assessment capacity. The EU harbours considerable capacity to map and monitor policy fields, but this capacity is predominately geared towards foreseeable developments and routine deviations. The Union should use its monitoring capacity to map unforeseen developments and potential contingencies. This would amount to a reformed early warning system.

- *Bridge the gaps between pillars*. Even a cursory review of the various crisis-related resources in the EU will reveal overlap and communication gaps between the Union's pillars. While abstract in nature, the consequences of these pillars are very real. An effective response to trans-boundary contingencies is unlikely in a political-administrative context where the right hand does not know what the left is doing. This is not to say that all overlap is to be eliminated. It does mean that the Council and Commission should continuously coordinate all activities that relate to transnational threats.

- *Do not reinvent the wheel*. The EU can (and does) justifiably claim that it is a unique system of governance. At the same time, many of the issues that define effective crisis management are surprisingly common to all government systems. The crucial issue of combining local response with central responsibilities is, for instance, a perennial topic of discussion in all systems of governance. The Union might learn valuable lessons by studying other large-scale systems that have wrestled with similar issues. The United States and Russia, for instance, may provide a better understanding of best practices and avoidable mistakes. To learn from crises and disasters around the globe, the EU should initiate a Rapid Reflection Force – a team of experts that can rapidly draw lessons from breakdowns in other systems.

- *Launch crisis management training and exercises at all levels of operation*. An effective response begins and ends with the officials that make critical decisions in the heat of crisis. The EU should not wait for its coping system to be fleshed out before it begins to train officials and units, instilling some basic skills and creating a minimal level of awareness. Political and administrative leaders across EU institutions

must engage in sustained training programmes that prepare them for critical decision-making.

- *Communicate a clear philosophy on crisis management*. However defined, it is clear that the EU cannot deal with all risks and adversity that will beset the Union and its Member States. To avoid inflated expectations, the EU should communicate what it can do and what it cannot do. It should outline where Union responsibility ends and the responsibility of individual Member States begins.

- *Develop relations with potential partners*. Once a transnational breakdown occurs, the EU will likely engage with international partners - such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations. The EU should prepare to work with these partners under extreme conditions. This requires intense preparation. Joint exercises should be held at regular intervals.

Endnotes:

[1] Since 1988 the World Health Organisation (WHO), with the support of the Belgian government, has been maintaining an Emergency Events Database that now collects all major disasters and catastrophes since 1990: see http://www.em-dat.net

[2] See for instance Gordon Brown, Hilary Benn, "Disaster relief: Let's put on some institutional muscle," *International Herald Tribune*, 20 October 2005, p.6; Ariane Chemin, "Scenarios catastrophe pour une grippe fatale," *Le Monde*, 29 octobre 2005, p.12; Patrick Lagadec, Erwann Michel-Kerjan, "Crisis management: A new era calls for a new model," *International Herald Tribune*, 2 November 2005, p.6.

[3] See Antonio Missiroli, "Disasters: Old and new perspectives", in Antonio Missiroli (Ed.), "Disasters, diseases, disruptions: A new D-drive for the EU", Chaillot Paper no.83, Institute for Security Studies, Paris (2005). p.9-20.

[4] http://news.bbc.co,uk/2/hi/science/nature/4326666.stm. This is, incidentally, the legal basis on which Samoan immigrants are challenging Australian authorities in court and asking for financial compensation.

[5] For a first attempt in this direction, see Arjen Boin et al., "Catastrophes of tomorrow demand EU leadership today," *European Voice*, 20-26 October 2005, p.9.

[6] See endnote 3

[7] For details on the ESF conference, see www.eucm.leidenuniv.nl.

[8] See Peter Schwartz, *Inevitable Surprises: Thinking ahead in time of turbulence*, New York: Gotham Books, 2003.

[9] Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius, *The politics of crisis management: public leadership under pressure,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[10] The term "rude surprise" was coined by Todd R. LaPorte (2005). See his paper "Anticipating rude surprises: Reflections on 'crisis management' without end". This paper can be accessed at: www.inpuma.net/news/call4paperswrkshp2005.htm

[11] See Patrick Lagadec, *Preventing chaos in a crisis: Strategies for prevention, control and damage limitation,* London: McGraw-Hill, 1991.

[12] A preliminary inventory was prepared by A. Boin, M. Ekengren and M. Rhinard, *Functional security and crisis management in the European Union* (2005). Report presented to the Swedish Emergency Management Agency.

[13] For an inventory, see Boin, Ekengren and Rhinard (2005) *op.cit*.

[14] We build on a range of sources: C. Perrow, *Normal accidents*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (second edition), 1999; OECD *Emerging risks in the 21st century: An agenda for action,* Paris, 2003; Schwartz, 2003, *op cit*. For a summary statement, see E. Quarantelli, P. Lagadec and A. Boin "Future disasters and crises" in H. Rodriguez, E.L. Quarantelli, and R. Dynes (eds) *The handbook of disaster research,* Springer-Verlag, 2006.

[15] Bengt Sundelius, "Disruptions: Functional security for the EU" in: Antonio Missiroli (Ed.) "Disasters, diseases, disruptions: A new D-drive for the EU," *Chaillot Paper* no. 83, Paris: ISS (2005): 67-84.