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# Forward, Resilience! – Ideas on how to Strengthen Resilience in Germany

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**The Federal Government's 2016 White Paper was the first German strategic document to give prominence to the term resilience. The "firmness against crises" in the face of present and future dangers and threats is even attached such special significance there that its promotion is considered one of the five most important national key areas of engagement in German security policy. Despite this clear commitment to strengthening resilience in Germany, however, no substantial progress has (yet) been made since the White Paper was published. A process geared towards broad participation and resulting in a kind of "National Action Plan for Enhancing Resilience", comprehensive investments, as well as specifically promoting commitment throughout society could pave the way for this objective.**

When the Federal Government's White Paper on security policy and the future of the Bundeswehr was published in July 2016, it came as no surprise that building resilience throughout government and society was attributed a central role in ensuring security in Germany. This demand was based on the simple insight that despite the best possible protective measures, open societies will remain vulnerable in the face of a still complex and dynamic security environment. In this respect, an essential component of a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to security is to strengthen the "firmness against crises", that is to, cope with, absorb and adapt to inevitable incidents such as environmental disasters, terrorist attacks or propaganda.

The 2016 White Paper contains some guidelines for enhancing resilience, such as refining existing structures, infrastructure and processes, or establishing the capacities for the early and preventive identification of vulnerabilities. However, due to the document's location on the strategic level, it only gives very generic answers to the question of how overall resilience can be strengthened in the future. As a consequence, no substantial subsequent steps have yet been taken. All we know is that building resilience must be seen as a whole-of-society task that requires the state, economy, the scientific community and society to interact closely. Which measures could be taken, and which framework conditions should be in place to make progress in building resilience in Germany?

## **Measures to advance the strengthening of resilience in Germany**

Due to the complexity of building and strengthening resilience as highlighted in the 2016 White Paper, it is first of all necessary to compile and coordinate different expertise, perspectives and requirements from the state, economy, the scientific community and society to promote resilience. This would also mean to include lessons and initiatives on the international level like for example in NATO and European Union as well as in other partner countries like for example Israel. One conceivable option would be a guided process based on broad dialogue and inclusive participation which can be compared to the different participation phases of the 2016 White Paper or the Review 2014 and PeaceLab 2016 processes on part of the Federal Foreign Office.

This participation process alone would already be of paramount importance in view of further strengthening resilience in Germany. There are two essential reasons for this. Firstly, mutual dialogue enables all actors to develop a common understanding of the different existing vulnerabilities and the resulting (acceptable) levels of risk for state, economy and society. This, again, could contribute to a broader acceptance of the necessity for promoting resilience in Germany and could, at the same time, place the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach called for in the White Paper on a firm footing from the very beginning.

Secondly, debates on further strengthening resilience in Germany would offer the opportunity to rebut one of the most widespread points of criticism directed at resilience: that the concept was essentially nothing but “old wine in new skins”. This criticism is based on the fact that concepts aimed at optimal encountering of crises already existed even before the term resilience became popular in recent years, especially in regard to the security environment. As a result, structures and instruments promoting resilience, or offering a high degree of resilience, may already exist – though without (so far) being labelled as such. In Germany, this especially holds true for the areas of civil protection and disaster relief. For example, the “National Strategy on Critical Infrastructure Protection” (KRITIS Strategy) issued in 2009 and the “Civil Defence Concept” newly issued in the summer of 2016 are already contributing effectively to crisis prevention and crisis management in Germany. But, all in all, the resulting capabilities reflect “merely” one specific part of resilience. The firmness against crises has many more forms, however, such as a robust economy or the mental ability to cope with extreme situations on part of individuals or of collectives. Therefore, the questions of whether existing activities and projects can already be considered a contribution to resilience promotion, how they may be linked more effectively and where a specific need for strengthening exists, based on the joint vulnerability and risk analysis, could be discussed jointly in these debates. That is how future resilience initiatives can make a real contribution to comprehensive security.

The results of the dialogue and participation process should ideally translate into a (government) document providing the strategic framework for the future strengthening of resilience in Germany and pointing out specific steps towards its implementation. To achieve this ambition, this kind of “National Action Plan for Enhancing Resilience” should at least include the following four aspects:

### **1) Create a Framework Model**

Firstly, a common understanding of resilience is indispensable. On the basis of the principles already set out in the 2016 White Paper, the plan would have to provide a detailed description of what a firmness against crises specifically signifies in practice. This means defining basic characteristics and capabilities of resilience, such as robustness, flexibility or inclusiveness. These would be absolutely necessary to develop specific measures to promote resilience or determine its (desired) nature. In addition to that, the elements that make up overall resilience in Germany as mentioned in the 2016 White Paper must be specified. Due to the expected large number of areas at state, economic and social levels where (strengthening) resilience is crucial, developing a “Resilience Framework Model” would be helpful. This model would categorise individual areas and address major requirements that need to be fulfilled. For disaster control, for example, this would require not only the provision of public and commercial measures to prevent and manage crises, but also society’s ability to protect and help itself.

### **2) Set Priorities and Goals**

Secondly, the objectives of strengthening resilience in Germany must be clear. It would be advisable to define these objectives according to the different categories of the “Resilience Framework Model” such as cyber or society. Against the backdrop of limited resources and capacities for enhancing resilience, it must also be determined who or what is particularly vulnerable or, to put it differently, whose resilience is more relevant or critical for whole-of-society security. This may apply to certain groups of persons or occupational categories (for example, police, fire brigade and paramedics), or also sensitive infrastructure (IT networks). Conversely, it

means that priorities must be established to enhance the firmness against crises in the short, medium and long term. The establishment of such priorities is politically sensitive, which means that corresponding decisions need to be taken at the highest political level. To discuss and prepare these decisions as part of a broad understanding of security, an interministerial steering committee, which may also be charged with coordinating contributions of federal ministries to the different resilience promotion measures, could be established at the Federal Security Council. In addition, it would be useful to establish an “Advisory Council for Resilience Promotion” at the German Chancellery. Consisting of representatives from all relevant areas of state and society, the Advisory Council could assist with any questions on strengthening resilience.

### **3) Design Tangible Projects**

Thirdly, a catalogue of specific measures and initiatives on strengthening resilience in Germany is required. Ideally it should be derived from the categories of the “Resilience Framework Model” and from political objectives. On the one hand, each individual measure would require a decision as to which actor should generally be in lead for its implementation and how the other actors should contribute. On the other hand, strategies, instruments and tools need to be determined at political, social, technical or economic levels to ultimately implement resilience promotion. To achieve the ambition of building resilience in a sustainable way as a whole-of-society task, top-down and bottom-up measures should be balanced to allow the actual sharing of responsibility between the state on the one hand, as well as economy and society on the other. Establishing resilience partnerships at local or municipal levels – in a densely populated area or a major city – would be one example of this bottom-up approach. Experience on networking between the different actors and joint, effective action in the event of disturbances (which is gained from such small-scale pilot projects) could then be transferred to other regions so that resilience is built gradually from the bottom up.

### **4) Define Indicators and Evaluate Results**

And fourthly, there is a need for national resilience indicators. Only if it is clear how to measure the firmness against crises, will it be possible to determine to what extent it already exists, how effective promotion measures are and whether political objectives have been achieved.

### **Basic conditions for further strengthening resilience in Germany**

Enhancing resilience in Germany can only be successful if two essential conditions are taken into consideration. Firstly, building resilience simply costs money. Regardless of whether and to what extent resilience already exists in Germany at political, social, technological or economic levels, additional investments will be inevitable if this degree of resilience is to be maintained, let alone improved. Particularly with regard to the firmness against new, hybrid vulnerabilities caused by, for example, cyber attacks or social media propaganda campaigns, there is still substantial room for improvement. But that is not all. It is also mandatory to invest in personnel capacities and a better networking between state, economic and social actors. Structures that are filled on a permanent or ad-hoc basis such as crisis committees require adequate personnel, regular training and access to relevant information at all levels.

Secondly, building resilience requires real commitment throughout society. In principle, it is in the private sector’s own interest to minimise the susceptibility to breakdowns and failure of its services. But since its planning is primarily focused on economic considerations, it is not always consistent with whole-of-government resilience objectives. Given that these objectives are difficult to achieve without including, and closely cooperating with the economy, the state should not only appeal to industry’s own responsibility to make its indispensable, whole-of-society contribution to national resilience promotion but also define specific conditions and requirements for this purpose. Good examples are Germany’s “National Strategy on Critical Infrastructure Protection” and “Baseline Concept on Risk and Crisis Management of Critical Infrastructure Operators”. Moreover, it would be conceivable to create state incentives to support the economy, for example, through specific development programmes.

Encouraging people to become more involved (themselves) in strengthening resilience will be an even greater endeavour. The ironic discussion on stocking up on emergency supplies for self-sustainment, sparked by the publication of the new Federal “Civil Defence Concept” in the summer of 2016, was symptomatic of this issue. Nonetheless, each individual’s firmness against crises, be it towards propaganda, fake news or terrorist attacks, ultimately forms an integral part of society’s intended overall resilience. To make the general public understand this – ultimately leading to their willingness to actively contribute – will require a great deal of explaining and persuading. Launching an information campaign on the importance of resilience and each individual’s responsibility in particular appears to be suitable – especially when civil society and media partners are being involved. To be successful such a campaign would first and foremost have to bridge the mental gap between present day societies’ striving for “invincibility” and the idea of fostering firmness against crises because are eventually inevitable. In addition, it would have to explain the very complex idea of resilience in a tangible manner while at the same make sure not to fall victim to the foreseeable slapstick and comedy such a campaign might spark in the press and social media (“Duck and Cover!”).

## Conclusions

Even though strategic key elements of strengthening resilience in Germany were specified in the 2016 White Paper, there is still no targeted follow-up process nor are important basic conditions in place to put political ambitions into practice. This necessary follow-up process could be initiated through a broad dialogue and the participation of all relevant actors. Available experience and differing expectations of the state, industry, the scientific community and society on how to refine resilience promotion could thus be gathered. At the same time, such action ensures that, from the very beginning, promoting resilience in a sustainable way is advanced and performed as a whole-of-society task. The comprehensive dialogue and participation process should result in a strategic framework document that serves as a guideline for implementing and refining resilience promotion in Germany in the future. Such a “National Action Plan for Enhancing Resilience” primarily requires a common understanding of resilience, clear objectives and priorities as part of a German resilience policy, a catalogue of specific measures and initiatives to promote resilience, as well as national resilience indicators that are used to determine different degrees of resilience. If it were also possible to provide sufficient means to enhance resilience and to promote commitment throughout society, resilience strengthening in Germany could take a major step – forward.

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