

What resilience means for Europe in practice

MATCH  POINTS

Key Takeaways from
MatchPoints 2026



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- 1. Europe is entering an age of permanent instability:** A central conclusion throughout MatchPoints 2026 was that instability is no longer treated as a temporary disruption, but increasingly as Europe's operating condition - across security, technology, energy, climate and economics.
- 2. Resilience is becoming Europe's new governing logic:** European policymaking is increasingly shifting from optimisation and efficiency towards robustness, redundancy, adaptability and strategic capacity - while still seeking to preserve openness, cooperation and innovation.
- 3. Europe's biggest resilience challenge is political cohesion:** Europe's ability to withstand pressure will depend not only on capabilities and resources, but on whether European societies and governments can sustain trust, coordination and collective political action under pressure.

MatchPoints 2026, Aarhus University's annual flagship conference, took place under the theme "Resilience in a Challenged Europe", exploring how European societies can navigate growing geopolitical, technological, economic and environmental pressures through keynote speeches, panel debates and thematic sessions.



Across defence, technology, energy, climate and economics, resilience is reshaping how Europe thinks about security and interdependence. A central insight from the conference was that Europe no longer treats instability as a temporary disruption, but increasingly as a lasting condition shaping political decision-making.

What is resilience?

The concept of resilience originally emerged as a technical term describing the ability of a material or system to absorb a shock and return to its original state. The word itself derives from the Latin *resilire*: “to bounce back”. Over time, the concept of resilience expanded across disciplines.

In psychology, resilience came to describe the ability of individuals to recover and adapt after trauma.

In ecology, the concept increasingly referred not simply to returning to equilibrium, but to the capacity of ecosystems to continue functioning under changing and unstable conditions.

The growing prominence of resilience in contemporary politics reflects how concepts often travel between disciplines and historical contexts, gradually acquiring new meanings as societies confront new forms of uncertainty and disruption.

[This text box draws inspiration from reflections by Jens Erik Kristensen, historian of ideas at Aarhus University, on the evolving meaning of resilience across disciplines.](#)

In that sense, resilience is no longer primarily understood as the ability to “bounce back” after crises. Increasingly, it refers to the ability of societies, economies and institutions to adapt, endure and remain functional under conditions of sustained uncertainty and pressure.

More broadly, the conference discussions pointed towards a political shift from a European model centered primarily on efficiency and optimization towards one increasingly focused on robustness, redundancy, strategic capacity and political cohesion.



Resilience is – and will remain – a key issue of our time, much as globalisation and competitiveness were twenty years ago.

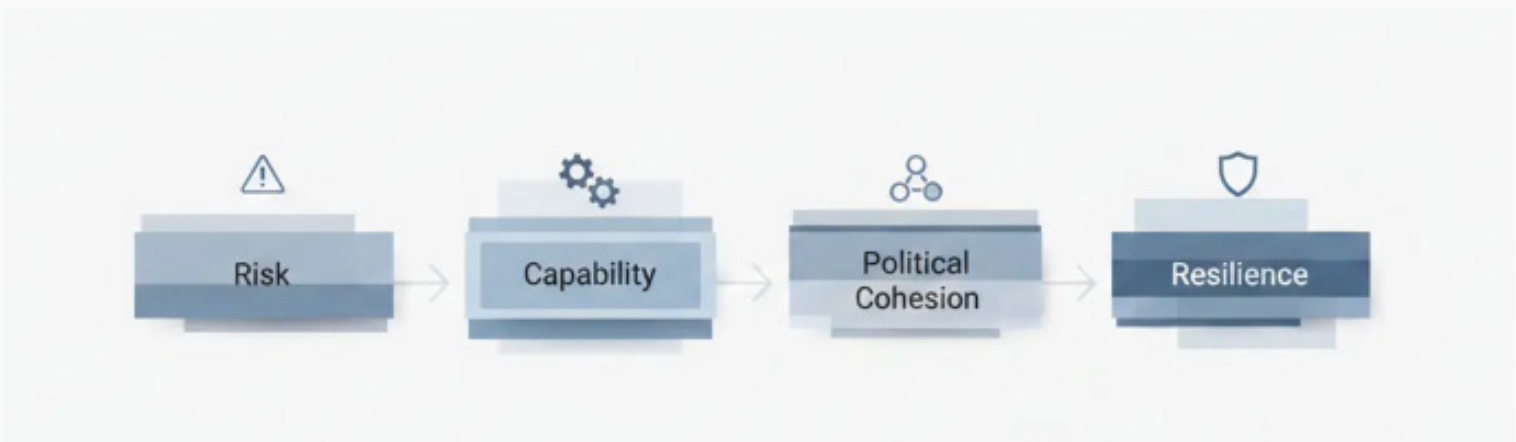


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Dimensions of European Resilience

Many of the discussions throughout MatchPoints 2026 pointed towards three interconnected dimensions at the centre of current debates on European resilience: Risk, Capability and Political Cohesion.



- Risk reflects the recognition that instability is no longer exceptional. Across areas such as security, energy, technology and supply chains, European societies are increasingly exposed to geopolitical confrontation, economic coercion and strategic dependencies.
- Capability captures the ongoing shift from optimisation towards robustness. Across defence, infrastructure, energy systems and technology, European states are increasingly building capacities designed to reduce vulnerabilities and absorb disruption.
- Political Cohesion is the decisive link. Capabilities alone do not create resilience; they also require coordination, trust and political direction. Cohesion ultimately shapes Europe's ability to prioritise, cooperate and sustain collective action under pressure.

Taken together, these dimensions point towards a broader understanding of resilience: not as a return to equilibrium, but as the ability to adapt and remain functional in a world increasingly shaped by long-term instability.

Thematic sessions on resilience

In three parallel sessions before lunch and in three parallel sessions after lunch resilience in Europe was discussed and for each session the same question was answered: "In the goal of achieving a resilient Europe – what is the biggest challenge when it comes to ..."? in the box below the answers from the sessions are given.

MATCHPOINTS 2026 | Parallel Session Responses
Resilience in a Challenged Europe

In the goal of achieving a resilient Europe – what is the biggest challenge when it comes to...?

<p>Sustainable Energy Independence</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #004a7c;"/> <p>As a society, we need to plan at a high level and invest massively into electrification across sectors as well as in research and innovation.</p>	<p>Sustainable Food Systems</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #004a7c;"/> <p>Maintaining focus on sustainability of the agrifood systems while ensuring affordability for consumers and resilience in the supply chains.</p>	<p>Trust in a Digital Society</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #004a7c;"/> <p>To build digital systems that people can trust and use these digital systems to build trust between people.</p>
<p>A Healthy Population</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #004a7c;"/> <p>The biggest challenge is improving preparedness for and prevention of disease while ensuring resilience in health care systems and civil society.</p>	<p>Biodiversity and Biosphere Resilience</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #004a7c;"/> <p>To turn biodiversity knowledge into action that restores ecological complexity and makes landscapes resilient to climate and societal change.</p>	<p>Safe Water Management</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid #004a7c;"/> <p>The lack of coordination among the many public (and some private) stakeholders, the absence of 'initiators/champions/first movers', and the lack of citizen participation/buy-in/awareness.</p>

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The breadth of the thematic sessions further illustrated how resilience increasingly functions as a shared lens across very different policy areas. Despite addressing issues ranging from energy and food systems to water governance, biodiversity, public health and digital trust, many of the discussions pointed towards similar underlying challenges: how to reduce vulnerability, manage interdependence and maintain societal functioning under conditions of growing uncertainty and disruption.

The European resilience dilemma

The discussions at MatchPoints 2026 highlighted that resilience is not politically neutral. The pursuit of resilience inevitably produces new trade offs: between openness and security, efficiency and redundancy, interdependence and strategic autonomy, and national sovereignty and collective coordination.



In his keynote, Professor Francis Fukuyama connected these tensions directly to Europe's resilience agenda. He warned that over-correcting vulnerability by detaching from partners can be as dangerous as dependence itself. Even long-standing allies, he observed, may become unpredictable or coercive - *"The United States itself is becoming one of those dangerous allies."*

Rather than eliminating interdependence altogether, several discussions pointed towards trust as an increasingly important principle for managing dependencies and cooperation in an era of geopolitical fragmentation. Resilience may therefore depend not on ending interdependence, but on differentiating between trusted and non-trusted dependencies.

Several discussions also pointed towards another emerging tension within Europe's resilience agenda: the balance between control and innovation. Participants including Nana Bule and Anders Hjarnø argued that attempts to eliminate uncertainty and dependency entirely may ultimately undermine technological dynamism and innovation capacity. Resilience may therefore also require accepting a certain degree of openness, experimentation and lost control.



Taken together, these discussions pointed towards a broader European dilemma: how to build resilience and strategic capacity without retreating from the forms of openness and cooperation on which the liberal order depends.

Coining the concept of “getting to Denmark”, Francis Fukuyama argued that stable and prosperous societies ultimately depend on trust, strong institutions and social cohesion. His broader point was that resilience cannot be reduced to military capabilities or economic security alone. In an increasingly fragmented world, the erosion of trust - within societies, between institutions and among allies - may itself become one of Europe’s defining vulnerabilities.

Final Conclusions

The discussions at MatchPoints 2026 suggested that resilience is not simply another policy trend. It reflects a deeper transformation in how Europe understands security, stability and political action in a more unstable world. Ultimately, Europe’s resilience challenge may not simply be building capabilities, but sustaining the political cohesion required to act collectively under pressure. Moving forward, many of the discussions pointed towards the need for more cross-sector approaches to resilience, linking debates on defence, infrastructure, technology, climate adaptation, supply chains and democratic trust more closely together. Several discussions also suggested that Europe’s resilience agenda will increasingly require balancing robustness with openness, and strategic capacity with innovation and cooperation.