



European Union

Key messages

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)

Meeting of Experts on Cooperation and Assistance (MX1)

Geneva, 30-31 August 2021

Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia^{*}, Montenegro^{*} and Albania^{*}, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

Allow me to thank you, on behalf of the European Union, for chairing this Meeting of Experts on Cooperation and Assistance and assure you of our full support and active participation in the forthcoming deliberations.

We are gathering today in a persistently difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has brought about a lot of suffering to many people around the globe. It has also underscored the necessity and

^{*} The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

importance of multilateral cooperation and investing in global preparedness. We express our solidarity with all the casualties of this common invisible enemy.

The European Union recognizes and appreciates your diligent effort, Mr. Chair, to take forward our discussions despite demanding circumstances caused by COVID-19, which have delayed or prevented our in-person meetings. It has undoubtedly been a challenging task vis-à-vis our endeavour to strengthen the Convention further. Nevertheless, thanks to many partners, including the ISU and chairpersons of meetings of experts we have managed to come to this meeting with a solid base for deliberations.

Today, the BTWC and our efforts to enhance the Convention will contribute to safety, security and resilience against biorisks.

Mr. Chair,

We agree that international cooperation, assistance, and timely communication are essential to support States Parties in their capacity building efforts, particularly in the domains of biosecurity and biosafety.

We strongly encourage local and regional ownership to ensure long-term sustainability of activities, stronger partnerships between donors and beneficiary States, and further coordination among donors. Developing national action plans, with the involvement of relevant agencies and stakeholders, and enhancing international, regional and sub-regional cooperation will help to achieve effective and sustainable outcomes. We support in particular further South-South cooperation for detecting, reporting and responding to outbreaks of infectious disease, or biological weapons attacks.

Here I would like to mention the two-part ad hoc seminar organised in May and in June this year by EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium together with Fondation pour la Recherche Strategique under the title “Considering potential lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen the BTWC”. The seminar provided a platform for reflections on both expert and

diplomatic levels pertaining to the implementation of Article X on cooperation and assistance as well as Article VII on emergency assistance in case of a violation of the Convention.

The seminar highlighted some of the key challenges facing the BTWC. As far as the intersection between the fields of security and health is concerned, the need to avoid duplication and most of all to respect the mandates and scopes of existing instruments, organisations, and mechanisms, was firmly expressed. Among the topics that received particular attention were the strengthening of biosafety and biosecurity, the importance of enhancing awareness and education of all life science stakeholders, the issue of cooperation and assistance to improve preparedness and response. The participants also shared the conviction that the pandemic has created a unique momentum that may allow to tackle some of these challenges at the next Review Conference in 2022 with the view of strengthening the Convention.

Mr. Chair, the EU recognises the crucial role of the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) in facilitating the implementation of Article X and we invite all States Parties to make full use of the BTWC Cooperation and Assistance Database. The EU will continue to support the operation of the current database and efforts to enhance it particularly by improving the identification and matching of relevant needs and assistance offers.

The EU has a long history of providing support to cooperation and assistance relevant for Article X of the BTWC. The EU Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/97 in support of the BTWC provides over 3 million EUR to the ISU over three years to carry out specific assistance and capacity building projects in third countries, including on biosecurity and biosafety, infectious disease surveillance, detection and control. We are grateful to the ISU for the continued professional implementation of this and previous EU Council Decisions.

The recent EU Council Decision, adopted on 9 December 2019, provides support to the strengthening biological safety and security in Latin America in line with the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. This Decision is implemented by the Organisation of the American States (OAS) and it provides 2.7 million EUR notably in support of improving legislative and regulatory basis of biosafety and biosecurity and raising awareness among relevant

sectors in the beneficiary countries Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The EU also continues to support the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in its efforts to enhance biological safety and security in Ukraine in line with the BTWC and UN Security Council Resolution 1540. This Council Decision provides 1.9 million EUR in support of the following projects: a) harmonisation of existing Ukrainian regulations on biosafety and biosecurity with international standards; b) establishment of the veterinary surveillance system sustainability in Ukraine; and c) awareness raising, education and training for life scientists on biosafety and biosecurity.

The EU continues to also support other initiatives and projects aimed at capacity-building in the areas of infectious disease detection, surveillance, diagnosis and containment. In the framework of the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, following ongoing projects should be particularly highlighted:

- Project 74 (MediPiet), running since 2014, aimed at enhancing health security in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions by supporting capacity-building for prevention, detection and control of biological, natural, or man-made health threats through the further roll-out of a sustainable training programme in intervention epidemiology with a strong involvement of senior local people. The project ends this year but a follow-up is underway called the EU initiative on Health Security led directly by the European Center for Disease Control (ECDC) for the same countries and with the integration of epidemic intelligence, rapid risk assessment, preparedness and response components added to epidemiology training.
- Project 75 (MediLabSecure), having an objective to strengthen and harmonize preparedness and response capacities on health threats related to (arbo)zoonotic viruses and their vectors in the target regions, and enhance awareness of the added value of the one-health concept with integrated surveillance, risk assessment and early warning to prevent and control epidemics and epizootics, through the strengthening of the network of human, veterinarian and environmental laboratories and public health institutions previously created by an earlier phase of MediLabSecure; and extending, since 2020, to

the Sahel region. The project has assisted more than ten partner countries in the identification of their first Covid-19 cases.

- Project 76 (StrongLabs), aiming to minimize potential biological risks related to climate change by improving the detection of, response to, and recovery from outbreaks and health emergencies, strengthening samples transport systems, implementing laboratory biosafety & biosecurity regimes and assuring that quality laboratory diagnostic capacity exists for priority diseases.
- Project 81 (BioSec), aims to provide a set of recommendations for improving biosecurity management systems in South East Asia with effective tools to enhance capabilities to respond to highly communicable diseases or global catastrophic biological events, such as pandemics.
- Project 86 (LabPlus Africa), reinforcing preparedness and response to CoVID-19 and other epidemics in Africa through an innovative approach to address unmet needs of diagnostics and health services through mobile platforms delivering laboratory and health services for those living in hard-to-reach regions with very limited healthcare infrastructure, and focusing on local capacities and sustainability with the support of the development of a regional hub and training centre of excellence in West Africa.

More generally, the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative has continued to support the development of national and regional action plans for the mitigation of hazards and threats, training workshops, risk assessment, testing and exercises, and creation of schools of excellence, involving eight regional secretariats and more than 60 countries.

Decision 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats to health provides the framework to improve preparedness and to strengthen the response capacities to health emergencies of biological, chemical, environmental and unknown origin. The EU is an important security actor as codified in numerous policy frameworks, e.g. civil protection, health security, food security, infrastructure protection, hybrid threats and disaster relief. Key initiatives have been adopted recently at the EU level to prevent terrorist attacks, in particular, in the context of the European

Agenda on Security and the Security Union. Building on work done by relevant projects and exercises under the Health Programme in relation to this topic, the Joint Action TERROR has been initiated, and is currently ongoing, to strengthen preparedness and response to biological and chemical terror attacks. Considering the known challenges to cross sectoral work it is a clear objective for the Joint Action to deliver mapping of relevant stakeholders, provide gap analysis and suggest ways in which this knowledge can be used to ensure strengthened collaboration between sectors. Therefore, the Joint Action TERROR will develop knowledge on main gaps in health preparedness and present analysis on how health, justice and civil defence can be better prepared, and will thereby contribute to the objectives of the Security Union.

Last year, a consortium of EU Member State authorities presented the results of an EU project regarding the biosecurity situation in the EU and tools to strengthen European biosecurity. The consortium found that a coherent EU-wide framework for biosecurity should be improved as different levels of biosecurity governance exists within the EU. The consortium developed a biosecurity toolbox containing over 60 existing resources on for instance best practices, legislation and training manuals, which can be found on the website of the European Biosecurity Regulators Forum. The EU embraced the conclusion of the consortium to create a European biosecurity platform with delegates from all EU Member States. The aim of such a platform would be to foster the coordinated development with the support of Member States of policies, guidelines and tools required to address identified gaps in biosecurity capabilities.

Mr. Chair, the EU P2P Export Control Programme for Dual-use Goods and the Export Control Targeted Initiatives enhance the capacities of partner countries globally on strategic trade controls of dual-use goods, which are highly sensitive products and technologies used for either civilian or military applications. Since 2004, the EU has committed 37 million EUR and worked with 46 partner countries around the world, 20 of which have adopted the EU control lists on dual-use goods. Effective strategic trade control systems are a major contribution to international peace and security as they combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related materials, equipment and technologies.

Finally, Mr Chair, universalisation of the Convention is a priority for the EU, which is why in July 2020 the EU organised an outreach campaign towards thirteen of the fourteen countries that are

not yet members of the BTWC. The EU furthermore financed, under the EU Council Decision 2019/97, the Universalisation Workshop for Africa that the ISU organised on 4 March this year. We have been pleased to observe that following these efforts notably three African countries, Chad, Namibia and South Sudan, have indicated that they are taking steps towards joining the Convention. Here I would like to draw attention also to the important work done by VERTIC as a partner of the ISU. Among other things, they provide on a cost-free basis gap analysis of legislative needs of states that are planning to accede the Convention and assistance in drafting legislation in order to help countries comply with the obligations of the Convention.

In closing, Mr Chair, I hope to have shown the EU's commitment and contribution to international cooperation and assistance as well as to the way forward in further developing it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair