



Key EU messages

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)

Meeting of Experts on Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology

(MX2)

Geneva, 1-2 September 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*, Serbia* 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 and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, allow me to thank you, on behalf of the European Union, for chairing this important Meeting of Experts and to assure you of the EU's and its Member States' full support.

The EU is committed to making progress on strengthening science and technology related aspects of the Convention and encourages all States to support and promote the relevant proposals.

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

During the past year, the world has experienced the largest pandemic in a century and we have witnessed how vulnerable the world is to bio-events. This underscores the importance of global preparedness and cooperation which has been discussed for many years in the context of this convention.

The past two years have witnessed significant global research and advances in biological sciences. Many of these discoveries are potentially dual-use, which reinforces the importance of our convention and this meeting of experts in particular.

Due to the pandemic, no formal BTWC meetings have taken place since the Meeting of States Parties in December 2019. Meanwhile the informal Webinars organized by the ISU on all five MX topics as well as the informal consultations on MX 2 organised in the run-up to this meeting have been extremely useful as they have allowed States Parties to express their views and proposals. The pandemic also had an impact on the implementation of the EU Council Decision 2019/97 in support of the BTWC, but we are pleased that the ISU was able to hold a number of events in virtual mode in these challenging circumstances.

Taking into account the heightened attention toward the BTWC due to the pandemic, and given the fact that much of the technology related to the BTWC is inherently of dual-use nature, we must ensure the strengthening of the Convention in such a way that it remains relevant in the face of rapidly evolving life sciences and bio-technology and so that its provisions are appropriate in the future for dealing with both existing and emerging biological threats, whether they emanate from State or non-State actors. We encourage all States Parties to make and support proposals that have a wide-based support and on which the State Parties are likely to reach consensus in the Ninth Review Conference.

Mr. Chair, this is the last Meeting of Experts before the Ninth Review Conference. It is vital that the States Parties work together to reach consensus on a number of initiatives and take concrete decisions to strengthen the Convention. Some of the key initiatives in this regard that already enjoy wide-ranging support will be discussed here, in MX2.

The EU supports a Science & Technology Review Process based on more frequent and focused assessments of relevant scientific and technological developments, which may have implications

for the BTWC. We specifically support the establishment of a dedicated board of experts and scientists as proposed by Germany. We furthermore support the incorporation of a standing science and technology function in the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and more regular sharing of information of relevant events and work conducted by international academics and States Parties.

The EU continues to attach great importance to promoting closer interaction with the S&T communities and involving non-governmental experts, scientists, professional associations and industry in our work. In this context, it is worth mentioning that since the last MX in 2019, the EU has funded under the EU Council Decision in support of the BTWC the organisation by the ISU of two Biosecurity Diplomacy workshops for Young Scientists from the Global South. These workshops brought together youth from the Global South and exposed them to the concept of multilateral disarmament negotiations and enabled their engagement with diplomats and high-level experts.

Moreover, I would like to inform you that the EU is currently working on a new, additional Council Decision that would provide a further 2 million EUR for building resilience in biosafety and biosecurity through the BTWC against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the planned projects under this future Decision is to hold an international Science and Technology Conference in preparation for the Ninth Review Conference. This Conference will target mainly experts from academia, governments and industry to incorporate their views into the discussions that will feed into the programme of the Ninth Review Conference.

Mr Chair, the EU welcomes and encourages the development of biorisk management standards within the life sciences community. We recognise that biorisk management standards can play a complementary and supportive role in the implementation of the obligations of the BTWC. Therefore, we encourage States Parties to provide assistance, where appropriate, for the implementation of biorisk management standards in life science institutions in accordance with Article X.

The EU also strongly supports the proposal concerning the establishment of a voluntary Code of Conduct for biological scientists and other relevant personnel. We very much appreciate the efforts made by China and Pakistan in developing their proposal in this regard while we recall the two

important principles that the code must be voluntary and it must follow a bottom-up approach, in other words, it must be negotiated with scientists. We look forward to the discussions on the proposals made to this effect and encourage States Parties to seek consensus on this important issue.

We furthermore encourage awareness-raising activities among relevant professionals in the private and public sector and training and education programmes for those granted access to biological agents and toxins relevant to the BTWC. Here, I would like to draw your attention to the EU Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/2108, that was adopted after the last MX meeting in 2019, and that supports, in the context of the implementation of the UNSCR 1540, the strengthening of biosafety and biosecurity in a number of countries in Latin America, among other things through awareness-raising among professionals in relevant sectors.

Thank you, Mr. Chair