EU Statement
on Article XII

Second Preparatory Committee
for the Ninth Review Conference
of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Geneva, 5-11 April 2022

Mr. Vice-Chair,

I 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, as well as Ukraine, and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

Article XII of the Convention requires States Parties review the operation of the Convention, with a view to assuring that the purposes of the preamble and the provisions of the Convention, are being realised taking into account scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention.

Since the BTWC was opened for signature in 1972, issues of science and technology of relevance to the Convention have changed considerably. Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology today are occurring at an accelerated pace, particularly given increasing convergences with other technologies including nanotechnology, machine learning and advanced computing.

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. Taking into account this fact as well as the heightened attention toward the BTWC due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that the provisions of the Convention

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
are appropriate in the future for dealing with both existing and emerging biological threats, whether they emanate from State or non-State actors.

Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology can have profound implications for the BTWC, both positive and negative. To avert an eventuality that life sciences are exploited for hostile purposes, while promoting the peaceful use of biology, the BTWC, as the legally binding global norm against biological weapons and cornerstone of international efforts to prevent biological agents or toxins from ever being developed, produced, stockpiled or otherwise acquired and used as weapons, needs to keep pace with advances in science and technology. This requires focused in-depth, expert exchanges around their implications of advancements.

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. Support for such a Review Process has gathered widespread support since the Eighth Review Conference and its establishment is urgent and necessary to keep pace with advancements. We specifically support the establishment of a dedicated board of experts and scientists as proposed by Germany. The involvement of the science community in the BTWC working processes would foster sound, science-based decision making as well as responsible research. Such a mechanism could help to identify emerging risks in dual use research and developments of particular concern and their potential relevance to the goals and objectives of the BTWC.

As science and technology will continue to evolve, such a mechanism would need to be sufficiently dynamic to adapt to changing circumstances. Participation should be, first and foremost, on the basis of relevant expertise, so that the mechanism can stay fit for purpose and keep up with scientific advancements. Taking into account the rapid developments in life sciences and in technology relevant to the Convention, the EU furthermore supports the Ninth Review Conference in delegating certain decision-making powers to the Meeting of States Parties.

The EU recognises that the support provided by the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) to States Parties for the implementation of their BTWC obligations and to the intersessional work programme is invaluable. The EU supports the strengthening of the ISU’s role, including through the establishment of a science and technology officer position within the ISU.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair.