




**International Cooperation in the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Field: EU Centres of Excellence initiative and other related programme**

საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობა ქიმიური, ბიოლოგიური, რადიაციული და ბირთვული უსაფრთხოების სფეროში: ევროკავშირის ინიციატივა და დაკავშირებული სხვა პროგრამები

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**Abstract**

**Introduction:** In 2010, the European Union launched the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative (CoE) to mitigate CBRN threats outside its borders that could pose a risk to the EU. The initiative establishes multilateral partnerships with 63 partner countries across eight regions worldwide. Its aim is to help partner countries develop National Action Plans (NAPs) and build and strengthen local risk mitigation capacities. **Methodology:** This study's methodological framework relies on a comprehensive analysis of secondary qualitative sources. These sources include reports and resolutions from the European Commission, the European Court of Auditors and the European Parliament. It also examines official documents and digital resources from major international organisations, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature and scientific monographs. **Results:** The study highlights that the EU CBRN CoE's institutional architecture is based on robust internal coordination networks involving key stakeholders such as the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). These bodies are coordinated by the European Commission's Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) service, which acts as the initiative's decision-making body alongside the European External Action Service (EEAS). The CoEs have achieved several major milestones. They have done a great job of improving the world's preparedness for disease outbreaks, including those caused by COVID-19, Ebola and other emerging infectious diseases. The article illustrates how the CoE initiative collaborates with other international organisations and key stakeholders, creating mutual leverage and synergies in the process. However, the results suggest that the initiative is facing challenges. For instance, individual donor programmes tend to operate in isolation from one another, and insufficient communication exists between different international actors in partner countries to prevent their work from overlapping. **Conclusion:** In order to ensure long-term sustainability, the EU CBRN CoE must evolve into a global coordination platform. The study concludes that the FPI, EEAS, JRC and UNICRI need to develop a more synchronised strategy. Additionally, the political support of EU delegations must be strengthened. Ultimately, partner countries should be supported in establishing a single, flexible national strategy that aligns the requirements of all international stakeholders, thereby avoiding the duplication of capacity-building efforts.

**Keywords:** EU, EC JRC, UNICRI, EU CBRN CoE, CBRN risk mitigation, international cooperation.



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## აბსტრაქტი

**შესავალი:** ევროკავშირმა ქიმიური, ბიოლოგიური, რადიაციული და ბირთვული რისკების შემცირების გამოცდილების გაზიარების ცენტრების ინიციატივა (EU CBRN Centres of Excellence) 2010 წელს ამოქმედდა, რათა შეემცირებინა ევროკავშირის საზღვრებს გარეთ არსებული საფრთხეები. სწორედ ამ მიზნით, აღნიშნული ინიციატივა აყალიბებს მრავალმხრივ პარტნიორობას 63 ქვეყანასთან მსოფლიოს რვა რეგიონში. მისი ერთ-ერთი მთავარი მიზანია დაეხმაროს პარტნიორ ქვეყნებს ეროვნული სამოქმედო გეგმების (NAPs) შემუშავებაში, რაც ითვალისწინებს რისკების შემცირების ადგილობრივი შესაძლებლობების შექმნასა და გაძლიერებას. **მეთოდოლოგია:** წინამდებარე კვლევის მეთოდოლოგიური ჩარჩო ეფუძნება სხვადასხვა თვისებრივი მეორეული წყაროს კომპლექსურ ანალიზს. შესწავლილია ევროკომისიის, ევროპის აუდიტორთა სასამართლოსა და ევროპარლამენტის რეზოლუციები და ანგარიშები. გარდა ამისა, ნაშრომი ეყრდნობა წამყვანი საერთაშორისო ორგანიზაციების ოფიციალურ დოკუმენტებსა და ციფრულ რესურსებს, აგრეთვე სამეცნიერო მონოგრაფიებსა და რეცენზირებად ჟურნალებში გამოქვეყნებულ სტატიებს. **შედეგები:** კვლევამ აჩვენა, რომ EU CBRN CoE-ის ინსტიტუციური არქიტექტურა ეყრდნობა მყარ შიდა კოორდინაციის ქსელს, რომლის მთავარი ფიგურანტები არიან ევროკომისიის ერთობლივი კვლევების ცენტრი (JRC) და გაეროს რეგიონთაშორისი დანაშაულისა და მართლმსაჯულების კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი (UNICRI). ევროკომისიის საგარეო პოლიტიკის ინსტრუმენტების (FPI) სამსახური საერთო კოორდინაციას უწევს ამ ორგანოებს და ევროპის საგარეო ქმედებათა სამსახურთან (EEAS) ერთად მოქმედებს, როგორც გადაწყვეტილების მიმღები ორგანო. EU CBRN CoE ინიციატივამ მიაღწია რამდენიმე მნიშვნელოვან შედეგს. პირველ რიგში, დიდი სამუშაო გასწია მსოფლიო უკეთ მომზადებულიყო პანდემიებთან გასამკლავებლად, მათ შორის, COVID-19, ებოლას ვირუსით და სხვა ახალი ინფექციური დაავადებებით გამოწვეული აფეთქებების წინააღმდეგ. სტატია ასახავს, თუ როგორ თანამშრომლობს ევროკავშირის ეს ინიციატივა სხვა საერთაშორისო ორგანიზაციებთან და დაინტერესებულ მხარეებთან, რაც ქმნის ურთიერთდახმარების ბერკეტებს და სინერგიას ამ პროცესში. თუმცა, შედეგები მიუთითებს, რომ ინიციატივა გამოწვევების წინაშე დგას. არსებობს ტენდენცია, რომ ინდივიდუალური დონორების პროგრამები ერთმანეთისგან იზოლირებულად საქმიანობენ. ასევე, არ არის საკმარისი ორმხრივი და მრავალმხრივი კომუნიკაცია იმის უზრუნველსაყოფად, რათა არ მოხდეს პარტნიორ ქვეყნებში სხვადასხვა საერთაშორისო აქტორების მიერ განხორციელებული სამუშაოების გადაფარვა. **დასკვნა:** გრძელვადიანი მდგრადობის უზრუნველსაყოფად, EU CBRN CoE უნდა ჩამოყალიბდეს, როგორც გლობალურ საკოორდინაციო პლატფორმად. FPI, EEAS, JRC და UNICRI-მ უნდა გააგრძელონ ერთიანი, ყოვლისმომცველი სტრატეგიის განვითარება. ამასთანავე, უნდა გაძლიერდეს პოლიტიკური მხარდაჭერა ევროკავშირის დელეგაციების მხრიდან. ხელი უნდა შეეწყოს ერთიანი ეროვნული სამოქმედო გეგმის შემუშავებას, რომელიც დააკმაყოფილებს ყველა საერთაშორისო აქტორის მოთხოვნებს და თავიდან აიცილებს პარტნიორი ქვეყნების შესაძლებლობების შექმნისა და გაძლიერების პროცესში ძალისხმევის დუბლირებას.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ევროკავშირი, ევროკომისიის ერთობლივი კვლევების ცენტრი, გაეროს რეგიონთაშორისი დანაშაულისა და მართლმსაჯულების კვლევითი ინსტიტუტი, ქიმიური, ბიოლოგიური, რადიაციული და ბირთვული რისკების შემცირება, საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობა.

**რეკომენდირებული ციტირება:** გივი ამირანაშვილი (2026). საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობა ქიმიური, ბიოლოგიური, რადიოლოგიური და ბირთვული იარაღის სფეროში:

## Introduction

Sixteen years ago, in 2010, the European Union launched the EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative (EU CBRN CoE) under the European External Cooperation Instrument for Stability. The EU CBRN CoE was initiated as a new methodology for providing technical assistance to countries outside the EU with the aims to mitigate chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats and risks, if not countered, that may create a threat to the EU.

Since its inception, the initiative has evolved into the world's largest platform for voluntary cooperation in the field of CBRN risk mitigation (European Union, 2025). The EU CBRN CoE Initiative was established in response to growing global public concern about chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks. Mitigating CBRN risks has now become a significant aspect of EU cooperation with other regions. Failure to address CBRN threats could pose a risk to the EU.

Importantly, the legal basis for implementing the CBRN CoE is the Instrument for Stability (IFS) (Regulation (EC) No 1717/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006, establishing the Instrument for Stability; Official Journal L 327/1, 24 November 2006), as well as its multiannual thematic strategy papers (for the years 2007–2011 and 2012–2013) and annual decisions (annual action programmes).

Established in 2006, the IFS incorporated substantial crisis response and prevention components, providing effective funding mechanisms for capacity building in partner countries. The Initiative's budget was set at €109 million for the period 2009–2013 and €130 million for the period 2014–2020. Article 4(2) notably authorised the European Commission (EC) to implement technical assistance measures in the field of CBRN risk mitigation (Trapp, 2017).

From 1991 to 2006, the TACIS programme was the EU's main way of helping former Soviet nuclear weapons scientists who were working in the civilian nuclear energy sector. In January 2007, it was replaced by the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC). The INSC's main goal is to promote a 'nuclear safety culture' by strengthening the regulation and safety of licensed nuclear installations. Additionally, this assistance has covered the treatment and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste (Pardo, 2012).

Nowadays, CBRN materials have many beneficial applications and are widely used: chemicals are used in industrial, pharmaceutical and agricultural production; biological agents are essential for producing vaccines that protect us from disease; and radioactive materials are used for treating cancer, sterilising food and providing electricity. However, alongside this widespread presence comes an assortment of risks to people, the economy and the environment.

Over the past few decades, the international community has recognised the importance of regulating these materials from both security and safety points of view, such as CBRN terrorism, trafficking, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as environmental contamination, industrial accidents, and major disease outbreaks.

As CBRN threats know no borders, the EU cannot restrict its actions to EU territories. With this in mind, the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament have consistently emphasised the importance of integrating the EU's internal and external security policies, the latter of which covers CBRN matters (European Parliament, 2015).

## Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is based on a comprehensive qualitative analysis of secondary sources. The primary data consists of official institutional documentation, including reports from the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors, alongside resolutions passed by the European Parliament. To ensure a global and multi-sectoral perspective, the research evaluates regulatory frameworks, compliance standards, and strategic documents from key international bodies, such as:

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1540 Committee;
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA);
- The World Health Organization (WHO);
- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW);
- The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC).

Furthermore, the empirical baseline is enriched by reviewing government reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and official digital registries from relevant international networks. Synthesizing this literature serves as the foundation for developing the practical, evidence-based recommendations presented at the conclusion of this study. These insights aim to enhance synergy and operational cooperation between the EU CBRN CoE Initiative and broader global actors in the CBRN risk mitigation domain.

### **What is the EU CBRN CoE initiative?**

The EU CBRN CoE Initiative has been implemented with the technical support of relevant international/regional organisations, the EU Member States, the UN, and a range of specialised agencies and organisations with specific mandates and experiences in the CBRN risk mitigation domain. They also contribute to the Initiative. In the view of B. Kienzle (2013), this initiative is different from other EU non-proliferation initiatives bearing in mind that it encompasses both weaponised and non-weaponised CBRN materials (Kienzle, 2013).

CoE initiative is based on a unique partnership model that encourages national ownership, regional coordination and international dialogue. It is not about finding one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, it is about collaborating to understand risks, define priorities, and develop long-lasting systems. Every country, region and stakeholder contribute to this collective effort because, in today's world, CBRN safety and security can only be achieved together (European Union, 2025). As the risks evolve, so must the tools and partnerships used to address them.

One of the EU CBRN CoE initiative's main objectives is to assist partner countries in drafting their CBRN NAPs, which define national CBRN risk mitigation priorities and the measures required to address them. Based on the NAP, countries can prepare CoE projects to submit to potential donors for funding (Vardulakis, 2015). In short, the National CBRN Action Plan is a document that sets out a national vision for CBRN risk mitigation and ensures the effective implementation of capacity-building projects.

It should be stressed that many bodies play an important role in the CoE Initiative. Overall coordination of the Initiative is carried out by UNICRI and the EC JRC in close cooperation with the European Commission's Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) service acting as the Initiative's decision-making body and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Outstandingly, the EEAS Security Policy Unit has proposed the concept of a Centre of Excellence as a first concrete step towards a CBRN policy. Indeed, it does not consider to substitute CBRN policy in general, but contains all the elements to test new CBRN paradigms extensively. In other words, the concept proposes a new methodology to provide CBRN assistance and cooperation to third countries. The associated success has already been recognised by the international community, but the EU CBRN CoE initiative is now facing concrete challenges of implementation. So, if successful, this may help vulnerable states to respond to new CBRN risks and threats in an appropriate manner (*Annex 1-European Community contribution agreement with an international organization*).

This holistic, interagency approach involves the European Union and its 27 Member States forming multilateral partnerships with 63 countries spanning eight regions worldwide. These regions include the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhoods, the Middle East, the Gulf, Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. Each region is supported by a CoE Regional Secretariat, which plays a key role in promoting and facilitating cooperation at regional and international levels (*EU CBRN Risk Mitigation CoE*, 2026).

The EU CBRN CoE Initiative is one of the largest long-term civilian security external programmes of the European Union (Simonart, 2020). Interestingly, there is a proposal to extend the CBRN CoE Initiative “to third countries that are not covered under the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative, but are nevertheless of relevance for the EU's efforts to promote a global culture of CBRN safety and security.” (European Commission, 2020).

Importantly, the CBRN CoE network comprises the following: EU Member States, Eight CoE Regional Secretariats, International organisations, International working groups (e.g. the Working Group of the G8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction). This network, involving many CBRN actors, the bottom-up, national, and regional approaches combine to make the Initiative a unique support mechanism. Partner country governments appoint a “national focal point” (NFP), who is their primary representative for the Initiative, responsible for liaising with CBRN stakeholders at the national (National Team, project beneficiaries, and other local actors), regional (CoE regional secretariat) and international levels. It can be argued that the “*Centre of Excellence is perfectly mirroring the EEAS internal/external security challenge.*” (Commission of European Communities, 2021).

The EU CBRN CoE, based on lessons learned from Ebola, Fukushima and Syria, is a unique initiative as it focuses on regional cooperation and inclusiveness (Schmid, 2018).

Notably, the Centres of Excellence network is now operating effectively. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic period it proved to be effective and useful when several CoE Regional Secretariats initiated a series of webinars to exchange expertise and share their experiences and best practices concerning the management of the epidemic. Most importantly, *ad hoc* support was very helpful to several CoE countries in terms of being able to set up proper procedures to detect the first cases of infection (Council of European Union, 2020).

### **EU CBRN CoE Network**

As previously noted the bodies responsible for implementing the EU CBRN CoE Initiative, are UNICRI (the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute) and the EC JRC (Joint Research Centre). This enables them to adapt quickly to new situations and challenges, guarantee genuine ownership, and ensure effective task and responsibility sharing among all stakeholders. Furthermore, both, decision-making (EC) and implementing bodies (UNICRI and EC JRC) strive to ensure that different projects and initiatives are implemented in compliance with guidelines and agreed CBRN policies.

The following question is to be addressed to both implementing bodies (JRC and UNICRI): what are the main contributions and commitments to the CoE Initiative?

In fact, the JRC, which is the specialised department within the Commission for technical and scientific support, assists CoE partner countries in the selection and drafting of CoE regional project proposals and the needs assessments, as well as maintaining monitoring mechanisms for the projects and the Initiative as a whole. The UNICRI, however, sets up the CoE Regional Secretariats and assists partner countries during the establishment of the national CBRN structures (CBRN National Team) in the CoE partner countries, with the drafting of CBRN National Action Plans and organisation of round-table meetings. Thus, JRC provides proper technical expertise, while UNICRI relies on the UN's diplomatic network in order to involve potential countries and convince them to participate in the CoE Initiative.

More specifically, the JRC (*a*) supports networking and information sharing (including through a dedicated online portal); (*b*) helps with project proposal development such as the development of terms of reference, project implementation monitoring, evaluation of project outputs, outcomes and impact; and (*c*) assists in the development of National Needs Assessments and NAPs by partner countries. It supports the Regional Secretariats with technical expertise and participates in regional meetings where new project proposals are submitted and discussed (Trapp, 2017). It, together with the EU CBRN CoE Regional Secretariats, organises workshops for the development of the NAP and National Needs assessments if necessary.

Currently, UNICRI's role is more closely associated with the networking function of the CoE Initiative and it supports the work of the Regional Secretariats. UNICRI provides a regional coordinator to each of the CoE Regional Secretariats and assists partner countries with the development of National Needs assessments and NAPs. It also assists the Regional Secretariats by identifying needs, priorities, and opportunities at the regional level.

It is worth noting that, in accordance with the EU-UN Joint Visibility Action Plan (2006) and the Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union External Actions (2008), UNICRI has designed a specific communication strategy.

### **International Coordination**

The European Union has been putting in place a framework that provides for cooperation and coordination between all levels of government and international partners. The fact is that no single country or organisation possesses all the necessary resources, expertise, statutory power, and capacities needed to respond to all international risks and hazards such as public health emergencies caused by pandemics (like COVID-19), natural disasters, environmental emergencies, chemical, biological, or radiological attacks, or new and emerging infectious diseases. It can be argued that an effective response to CBRN risk requires frequent cooperation and efficient coordination between all international partners.

For over 15 years, the EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative (EU CBRN CoE) has been doing a great job of making the world more prepared to deal with disease outbreaks, including COVID-19, Ebola, and other emerging infectious diseases. The Initiative has facilitated capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, laboratory enhancements, and emergency response mechanisms, ensuring that national and regional stakeholders are equipped to anticipate, detect, and respond to biological threats effectively (European Union, 2025).

The CoE Initiative collaborate closely with international organisations, regional institutions, academic organisations and private companies. By collaborating with other EU programmes, international donors, and key stakeholders, the Initiative can increase its impact, avoid duplication, and generate new opportunities for cooperation. For example, the CoE Initiative actively collaborates with several international organisations, including the IAEA, the OPCW, the WHO, INTERPOL, and various UN bodies. These partnerships facilitate aligned programming, complementary initiatives and greater outreach to national stakeholders. This includes regular participation in meetings related to UNSCR 1540, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as active involvement in nuclear security events organised by the IAEA (European Union, 2025).

Following the Ebola crisis, in October 2017 the Italian Presidency of the G7 Global Partnership and the EU CBRN CoEs organised a workshop with 11 African countries to identify measures for mitigating biosafety and biosecurity risks in Africa. Notably, authorities across the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Southeast and Eastern Europe participated in peer-to-peer webinars, shared risk communication strategies, and supported each other through established networks (European Union, 2025).

It is important to note that numerous initiatives and projects are conducted by international organisations and other donors/programs in order to foster CBRN capacities in CoE partner countries. These are as follows: the EU's INSC (Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation) and IcSP (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace) instruments, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organisation (WHO, implementation of the regulation), the EUROPOL's Counter-Proliferation Programme (CPP), the US Departments of State and of Energy (US DoE), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the World Customs Organisation (WCO) Programme on Nuclear and Radiological Materials, the WCO's Strategic Trade Control Enforcement Programme, INTERPOL's bioterrorism project, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Therefore, each contribution is unique and beneficial to the CoE Initiative. However, it should be noted that most of the existing initiatives and programmes has a one-by-one approach, covering either nuclear or chemical or biological materials, and mostly based on a country's needs.

Generally, projects financed through the Centres of Excellence Initiatives focus on proliferation, but most notably on biosafety and biosecurity, CBRN first response, CBRN risk assessment, waste management, transferring best practices, and strengthening coordination among CBRN institutions in the event of a CBRN accident.

For example, in the fields of biosafety and biosecurity, the EU CBRN CoE initiative works with the WHO, OIE and FAO on an ongoing basis. It also works with key stakeholders in the G7 Global Partnership Programme and the Pentalat. The Global Partnership Programme, as well as initiatives such as the Global Health Security Agenda, are helpful in addressing and improving global responses to health security threats.

In accordance with the Commission's decision and the Border Monitoring Working Group's experience, which was established in 2007 and comprises European Commission services, the EEAS, the IAEA and the US (Second Line of Defence), work continued within the existing working groups and new working groups were established (including those focusing on export control and the engagement of scientists). This was undertaken within the framework of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative. The primary objectives of these working groups are to enhance the coordination of activities between the US and EU. This also includes the Export Control Capacity-Building Working Group, which was established in 2012 (European Commission, 2017).

Furthermore, the EU CBRN CoE Initiative collaborates proactively with the Arab League, the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The CBRN CoE Initiative also works with other donors (e.g., the US, Japan, Australia) in order to avoid duplication and to find synergies with other international bodies (e.g., the G7 Global Partnership).

For example, the first EU CBRN CoE–African Union Forum, held in Addis Ababa in 2023, demonstrated the increasing leadership of African nations in developing CBRN policies and promoting collaboration. The event brought together representatives from the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, international organisations and CoE Partner Countries to explore joint solutions to shared challenges. With 28 African nations participating in the initiative, the forum reinforced the continent's presence in global discussions and solidified its commitment to mitigating CBRN risks (European Union, 2025).

In October 2023, Algeria hosted CHEMEX Africa, a large-scale exercise led by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) involving 33 African countries. The EU CBRN CoE supported the event by sending On-Site Technical Assistance experts, National Focal Points and representatives from

the North Africa and Sahel Regional Secretariat. The Algerian authorities demonstrated strong national commitment and welcomed international partners, showcasing the effective collaboration between the EU CBRN CoE network, the OPCW and the host country. This exercise was a significant step forward in enhancing regional preparedness and multilateral coordination, while strengthening the link between operational response and long-term capacity building (European Union, 2025).

Its important to note that the eight CoE Regional Secretariats involved in the EU CBRN CoE initiative are committed to enhancing their cooperation with other international organisations within the framework of this initiative. For example, the CoE regional secretariat for South East and Eastern Europe (SEEE CoE region) was the first to establish closer ties with the NATO CBRN Centre in Vyskov in 2017 (European Court of Auditors, 2018).

Interestingly, the CoE Initiative collaborates effectively with two intergovernmental organisations: the Science and Technology Centre in Ukraine (STCU) in Kyiv, and the International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC) in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. These organisations are actively promoting the nexus between science and security. They support the multilateral cooperation in security (EU, USA, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Ukraine, and the Caucasus) and reach out to new partner countries. Beyond their core activities related to knowledge security, these science centres are implementing partners both for the EU CBRN CoE Initiative and also for the activities in the field of export control.

Also, it should be noted that the International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC) and the Science and technology Centre in Ukraine (STCU) have been involved as implementers in various CoE regional projects (CoE projects 53, 52, 50) activities, and regional table top and field exercises (SUNKAR 2017, Astana, Kazakhstan and LIONSHIELD 2018, Tbilisi, Georgia).

Fovermore, the CoE Initiative plays an active role in raising its profile at international forums, including non-proliferation and biosafety summits, and health security platforms. For example, certain countries that are part of the CoE have used international forums to promote the EU CBRN CoE initiative on the global stage. For examplly, Georgia (CoE partner country from SEEE region) organised a side event to the First Committee of UN General Assembly several times. In addition to this, representatives of Georgia, Montenegro, and Serbia delivered presentations on their CBRN NAPs (national action plan) at the meetings of state parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of the Biological Weapons Convention, as well as at the meetings of the G7 Global Partnership against the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

In addition, permanent missions of Georgia, the Kingdom of Morocco, and the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations have initiated the creation of a UN Group of Friends of CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance. The UN Group of Friends (GoF) of CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance serve to address and promote various CBRN-related topics at the United Nations, including the Security Council, by actively engaging with Member States, donor countries, and the UN Secretariat. On 8 December 2015, the first meeting of the group took place.

The long-lasting impact of the CoE Initiative generally depends greatly on the implementation of the CBRN National Action Plans proposed by different international organisations for CoE partner countries. These NAPs include various measures which cannot be carried out in full using national budgets and Initiative resources alone. Other sources of funding should be used in the implementation of NAPs such as, for instance, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, the European Development Fund, the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation, etc.

It is also important to note that the National CBRN Action Plan should take into account the existing instruments and activities of other international organisations and actors, for example:

- a) The Integrated Nuclear Security Support Plan (INSSP) of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
- b) The National Action Plan to fulfil UNSCR 1540 (in coordination with UNSCR 1540 Committee, UNODA and OSCE)
- c) The World Health Organisation (WHO) Protocol for Assessing National Surveillance and Response Capacities for the International Health Regulations
- d) The INTERPOL CBRNE Terrorism Prevention Programme
- e) The World Customs Organisation (WCO) capacity-building

It is increasingly becoming apparent that, in spite of some steps being made towards coordination with other initiatives, organisations, and donors, one of the challenges is to ensure synergy between the work of all the different regional and international players in the field of CBRN.

In fact, most of the countries that are partners of the CoE are also members of the relevant international organizations involved in CBRN risk mitigation, such as: the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Organisation for Security

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), World Customs Organisation (WCO), World Health Organisation (WHO), and INTERPOL. Many of them have ratified major non-proliferation conventions, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The main achievements are that CBRN NAPs can facilitate cooperation with international organisations and the fulfilment of international obligations. The National CBRN Action Plan may serve as a means for a country to integrate such efforts while avoiding duplication of work already performed for existing assessments or plans. It is a notorious fact that various international actors are working together with CoE countries in all CoE regions on different CBRN-related strategies and National Action Plans (i.e., IAEA, the Integrated Nuclear Security Support Plan, the UNSC 1540 National Action Plan, and weapons of mass destruction counter-proliferation strategies supported by the US government). This information highlights how CoE countries are actively involved in implementing various NAPs and strategies developed by other international organisations specialising in CBRN risk mitigation.

The aforementioned examples all demonstrate the importance of the CoE's bilateral and multilateral cooperation with international stakeholders in the field of CBRN risk mitigation. In order to support the CoE Initiative, the European Commission's FPI and the EEAS worked together with other relevant Commission Directorates-General, in particular with DG NEAR, as well as with other donors so as to identify potential synergies and available funding sources.

Although a lot of effort has been made to ensure progress in cooperation among various stakeholders at the international level, it can be argued that the CBRN issue within the CoE Initiative is often disjointed. For instance, as the Auditors of the European Court have pointed out in their 2018 report, despite the fact that the neighbourhood is a priority area for the CoE Initiative and the EU generally, DG NEAR's involvement in the Initiative has been limited (European Court of Auditors, 2018).

Taking into account the number of actors involved and the sensitivity of CBRN issues, proactive bilateral and multilateral communication at EU and international levels is essential to ensure that the work carried out by various international actors in CoE partner countries is complementary and does not overlap. All the activities must be conducted in the CoE countries/regions synchronously. They should be available in a single data stockroom. Furthermore, this tool should be based on stakeholders' experiences from the CBRN domain, from EU MS policy, and from their own past experiences. If the CoE Initiative can manage to place itself as a coordination platform not only between CoE countries but also between other donors and international organisations, this would represent a tremendous success. Indeed, this is of great importance for the sustainability and the credibility of the CoE Initiative.

Therefore, the involvement of international and regional organisations in the CBRN field, as well as coordination with existing initiatives, is of great importance. The ability to communicate on an international level is essential to the success of the CoE Initiative and should be considered a key factor in achieving its goals. This communication must encompass stronger partnerships with international organisations, regional institutions, academic bodies and private sector companies. By aligning its efforts with those of other EU programmes, international donors, and key stakeholders, the Initiative can increase its impact, avoid duplication, and unlock new opportunities for cooperation (European Union, 2025).

## Summary

Past events have shown that the EU, and the world in general, are not well prepared to prevent, detect or respond to CBRN threats. For instance, in the case of COVID-19, for the first time, the cooperation amongst countries or the first time, the cooperation amongst countries including within the EU by and large could have been better organised. As Angela Merkel, former Chancellor of Germany said, the European Union was facing "its greatest test" since its foundation, with the new coronavirus pandemic. In this regard, the reinforcement of EU CBRN CoE Initiative could act as a safety belt for the EU security environment. The creation of eight secretariats (CBRN CoEs) in eight regions is the first step towards this ownership. It is a first step towards building regional confidence-building measures. Indeed, the Centres of Excellence are a long term, iterative process to build a culture of CBRN safety and security.

Furthermore, to ensure a successful approach to all aspects of the CBRN policy, the FPI, the EEAS, the UNICRI and the JRC must continue to develop a comprehensive CBRN strategy. This strategy must incorporate all national, regional and international CBRN components into a common approach. The strategy must comprise a holistic and robust communication approach that consolidates information, enhances shared understanding, and facilitates the transfer of best practices from one CoE region/CoE partner country to another. This is required because all stakeholders, while operating autonomously, could establish common

goals, identify and manage the appropriate resources necessary to achieve these goals, clearly delegate responsibilities, functions and tasks, and elaborate functioning channels of communication.

Furthermore, there is currently no international discussion forum for EU CBRN NFPs and CoE CBRN NFPs to share information, methodology, best practices, experience, guidelines, studies or lessons learned. Therefore, it is important to organise face-to-face meetings between the parties involved. More attention should be given to promoting and raising the international profile of the CoE Initiative. Participating in major international meetings (such as the meetings of state parties of BWC and CWC, the UN General Assembly or the Global Partnership meetings) is a must if needed to put the Initiative on the spot and ensure coordination with other major donors and international organisations, otherwise there is a risk of marginalising the CoE Initiative.

It is also important that the Foreign Policy Instruments (FPIs) interact frequently with the other Directorate-Generals of the Commission, particularly DG NEAR and DG ECHO. This would address gaps that the CoE Initiative alone has not filled. Furthermore, to ensure the Initiative's effective implementation, the JRC's role and that of its staff must be reinforced. Furthermore, to strengthen political support for the CoE Initiative and thereby improve the coordination between international stakeholders and CoE partner countries, it is essential that the FPI and EEAS work together in order to regularly involve EU delegation in the CoE Initiative and increase the political visibility and prominence of the CoE Initiative in general.

Furthermore, effective communication and cooperation must be facilitated between the EU CBRN CoE Initiative and international treaties and other initiatives. For example, coordination and cooperation with other international organisations, such as the WHO, OSCE, IAEA, UNSCR 1540 Committee, OPCW and NATO, as well as the US, should be intensified and elevated to a higher level. The intention should be to exchange information and avoid duplication of effort. Where appropriate, mutual leverage and synergies of actions can also be identified.

As has been mentioned, various international organizations are collaborating with CoE countries on different CBRN-related strategies and national action plans, such as the Integrated Nuclear Security Support Plan, the 1540 National Implementation Action Plan, and WMD counterproliferation strategies supported by the U.S. government. Therefore, more effort should be made to rationalize these efforts and create links among international organizations operating in CBRN areas, both within and outside the CoE Initiative. Specifically, it is essential to advocate for a single national strategy/action plan that fulfills the requirements of all international actors. The NAP methodology and the contents of workshops should be sufficiently flexible to adapt to changing circumstances and to allow for interaction with methodologies from other international organisations.

To facilitate the implementation of the CBRN NAP, donor coordination mechanisms should be established regularly at the national and regional levels. This would create synergies and maximize the use of resources devoted to CBRN risk mitigation. In this respect, EU delegations can play a significant role in identifying additional funding sources.

Moreover, it is essential to strengthen the role of EU delegations in the CoE Initiative. Political support provided by the EU delegation to CoE partner countries should be continued in a systematic and regular manner.

It can be argued that the true success of the EU CBRN CoE will not rest on CBRN expertise and its extensive network of law enforcers, diplomats, and military officers. There are already many support/training/academic CBRN centres in the world, and none of them is really emerging from anonymity. Such capacity-building initiatives are too often piling up on each other, duplicating effort, and sometimes even competing against each other. The current EC approach is that the EU will not succeed if the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence (CoE) initiative is just additional projects with technical networks of experts and with sophisticated databases. The thing is that any proposal, any idea and initiative, should be described as special, "pilot actions". In such cases, CoE initiative would be much more successful, and the EU would go further in terms of CBRN.

In summary, stronger, smarter and more responsive bilateral and multilateral partnerships are needed to effectively address tomorrow's challenges and respond to CBRN risks of any origin worldwide.

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