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THE EU'S CBRN CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE AFTER SIX YEARS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The European Union's (EU) chemical, biological radiological and nuclear (CBRN) Centres of Excellence (COE) initiative has become a globally recognized and broadly endorsed collaboration tool to engage with partner countries and to help them build capacity to mitigate risks related to CBRN materials. It addresses the entire CBRN risk spectrum, from natural disasters involving such materials, to the prevention of, and response to, man-made incidents, including accidental and negligent releases or hostile use. Both the United Nations Security Council and the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction have endorsed the initiative (the latter has established a working group on the COE).[1]

The COE initiative is global in geographical reach, signalling that the EU has become a recognized global actor in the CBRN risk mitigation field. The regional and national structures that have been developed as part of the COE methodology, and the internal and external programming mechanisms (used to manage the system, coordinate with other partners, and deliver technical assistance and collaboration projects in different regional settings) have matured to a stage where they are becoming more widely used for developing international and regional collaborations. These collaborations with and between partner countries also often encompass agencies such as international organizations and specialized agencies of the UN. Furthermore, the thematic scope of activities

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author alone and do not reflect any official views of any EU entity or contractor.

[1] European Court of Auditors, 'Can the EU's Centres of Excellence initiative contribute effectively to mitigating chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks from outside the EU?', Special Report no. 17 (2014), observation 21.

SUMMARY

The Centres of Excellence (COE) initiative began in 2010 as a new methodology for providing technical assistance to countries outside the European Union (EU) in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) risk mitigation. The initiative was designed as a 'bottom-up' methodology that combines a (trans-) regional networking approach with national needs assessments and action plans developed by the partner countries, and a project delivery system to transfer EU expertise in a tailored manner to partner countries. Eight Regional Secretariats were established and partner countries were encouraged to (*a*) form National CBRN Teams to develop an all-hazards, all-government approach; and (*b*) identify and articulate their specific needs and priorities with regard to CBRN risk mitigation. This system has matured since 2010 and several evaluations have confirmed its potential as an effective capacity-building platform that builds on ownership, partnership and coordination with other donors.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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reaches beyond a narrow concept of CBRN risks to include emerging risk areas related to CBRN issues, such as cybersecurity, security risks emanating from climate change and food security.

This paper gives a brief overview of the genesis of the methodology and mechanisms applied by the COE initiative, describes its current status and main programme directions, and offers some observations on its future development.

II. BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the new millennium, the EU restated its firm commitment to international peace and security and, in this context, underlined its multilateral approach to strengthening non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control relating to weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The European Security Strategy, 'A secure Europe in a better world', adopted in 2003 and the EU's strategy against the proliferation of WMD adopted in the same year underscored this commitment.[2] The principles that underlie these measures are reflected in the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, 'Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe', adopted in 2016.[3] These include, among others, the promotion of peace and security and of a rule-based global order, in addition to a commitment to engage with others and revamp external partnerships by reaching out to states, regional bodies and groupings, civil society, and the private sector.

In 2006 the EU adopted Regulation (EC) 1717/2006 that created the Instrument for Stability (IFS).[4] The IFS had significant crisis response and prevention components, and provided funding mechanisms for capacity building in partner countries in stable conditions. Article 4(2) specifically authorized the European Commission (EC) to implement technical assistance measures in the field of CBRN risk mitigation. The IFS was superseded in 2014 by the Instrument contributing to Peace and Security (ICSP) adopted under Regulation (EU) 230/2014.[5] Pursuant to Article 5 of the regulation, the ICSP continued to provide funding for CBRN risk mitigation and capacity building measures in partner countries.

When the IFS was adopted in 2006 it was able to build on and expand previous EU programmes and interventions in the field of CBRN risk mitigation and technical assistance. In particular, these included the TACIS (Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States) programme and two Science Centres co-established by the EU, Canada, the United States and other partners, namely the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC, originally set up in Moscow and now located in Astana, Kazakhstan) and the Science and Technology Center in Ukraine (STCU, Kyiv). The IFS created an opportunity to overcome some of the shortfalls of TACIS, and expanded the thematic and geographical reach of these previous programmes.

The programme portfolio assumed by the IFS covered a range of thematic areas including the following.

1. The redirection of scientists and engineers formerly engaged in weapon programmes to alternative civilian employment.
2. The enhancement of safety practices at civilian facilities where sensitive CBRN materials were stored or handled.
3. Within EC competence, the provision of support for multilateral nuclear arrangements (nuclear safeguarding and, later, the establishment of the nuclear fuel bank).
4. The development of civil infrastructure for dismantling or converting former weapon-related facilities.
5. The strengthening of civilian capacity to prevent illicit trafficking in CBRN materials or agents, or the equipment for their production or delivery.
6. The implementation of export control of dual-use goods.
7. The development of civilian disaster preparedness measures.
8. The development of responses to biological threats.

[2] European Council, 'A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy', Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003; and Council of the European Union, 'Fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction: EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction', 15708/03, 10 Dec. 2003.

[3] European Union, 'Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe', June 2016.

[4] Regulation (EC) no. 1717/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 Nov. 2006 establishing an Instrument for Stability, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L327/1, 24 Nov. 2006.

[5] Regulation (EU) no. 230/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 Mar. 2014 establishing an instrument contributing to stability and peace, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L77/1, 15 Mar. 2014.

This broadened thematic scope signalled the beginning of an extension beyond the traditional weapon-oriented approach of CBRN risk mitigation to one that more comprehensively addressed the natural and man-made risks associated with CBRN agents and materials. The implementation of the IFS also signified a commitment by the EU to a geographical extension of its engagement—reaching beyond its direct neighbourhood in the South and East and the countries that had emerged after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The projects delivered under the IFS's long-term programmes in areas such as export control and biosafety/biosecurity began to engage countries further afield in South East Asia, the Middle East and gradually also in Africa.

The widening in the thematic scope of the IFS programme areas was also a reflection of the results of the 2009 Group of Eight (G8) summit, which shifted the focus from the concept of redirecting former WMD scientists to alternative employment towards a concept of engagement and development of collaborations with these scientists.[6] This shift in approach aimed to create conditions for the closer integration of former weapon scientists into scientific networks and collaborations in the EU and worldwide. Such a change in approach was also reflective of a broader discussion at the time that recognized that the achievement of sustainable outcomes required a move from traditional technical assistance methodologies based on 'one-directional' donor-beneficiary relationships to approaches that created ownership and political support, as well as institutional long-term commitment, in partner countries.

This geographical shift of IFS outreach was also a reflection of the EU's commitment to become a global actor in the area of peace and security, including with regard to WMD non-proliferation and CBRN security, and to accept and share responsibility for addressing global peace and security challenges with other partners.

These changes called for a new methodology, and in particular a stronger reliance on regional mechanisms as well as more active engagement by the partner countries. The IFS 2009–11 Multi-annual Indicative Programme advertised a move from 'an *ad hoc*, centralised approach to promoting integrated regional networks'.[7] The economic development in emerging countries, as well as globalization trends and related changes in the global pattern of manufacturing and trade, were beginning to result in greater availability of CBRN materials, agents and processing equipment in these countries. This, in turn, increased the number of laboratories and industrial facilities handling hazardous biological, chemical or radiological substances, as well as the number of transfers of such materials across borders. These trends were most visible in the migration of chemical industry manufacturing capacities from North America, Western Europe and Japan to countries in Asia and the Middle East, as well as the increasing global diffusion of biotechnological research, development and manufacturing capacity. These developments were compounded by a growing demand for the exploitation of nuclear energy in the Middle East and parts of Asia, and a rise in the use of nuclear materials in Africa.

Many of the countries concerned had yet to develop a strong safety and security culture to manage the risks associated with these materials and technologies. The risks of clandestine production, smuggling and exploitation of CBRN materials by criminals or terrorists was increasing, as was the possibility of accidental release during manufacturing, storage, transport and use. These emerging risks called for an extension of the national legislative and regulatory frameworks in these regions and for enhancing their enforcement capabilities. Perhaps most importantly, however, there was a growing need for countries to adopt a culture of safety and security. This was also in line with implementing the requirements of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) and other international actions agreed under global arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regimes.[8]

III. THE ADVENT OF THE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

Beginning in 2010 the CBRN COE initiative was instituted as a new and innovative methodology for

[6] Group of Eight (G8), 'Recommendations for a coordinated approach in the field of global weapons of mass destruction knowledge proliferation and scientist engagement', 9 July 2009.

[7] European Commission, 'The Instrument for Stability: Multi-annual Indicative Programme 2009-2011', Brussels, 8 Apr. 2009, p. 7.

[8] UN Security Council Resolution 1540 of 28 Apr. 2004. The resolution provides, among other things, that all states shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-state actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, in particular for terrorist purposes. The 1540 Committee was established to facilitate implementation of the resolution.

collaborating with partner countries outside the EU. The initiative was designed to develop a platform for collaborative capacity building measures planned and implemented together with other partners (EU member states, additional donor countries, international organizations including the UN, and a range of specialized agencies and organizations with specific mandates in areas of relevance to CBRN risk mitigation). It was also intended as a collaboration tool for selecting and implementing technical assistance projects relating to CBRN risk mitigation. The new methodology was designed to better deliver a coordinated strategy for strengthening CBRN preparedness and response capacity at international, regional and national levels. It signalled a move from the IFS's original approach of more narrowly defined (sectoral) cooperation actions and projects based on a peer-to-peer approach, to a regionally based and more integrated CBRN approach.

This new approach was a deliberate attempt to design a 'bottom-up' methodology that would build on a systematic context analysis and a detailed understanding of the actual needs and conditions of the partner countries—needs and conditions they themselves were to identify. The move from a peer-to-peer approach to this new methodology was seen as a way of creating new opportunities for developing partnerships and for overcoming a degree of fragmentation in the technical assistance programmes on CBRN risk mitigation that had hitherto been observed. The new methodology was to become a combination of a networking approach at national, regional and global levels, and of programme and project delivery aimed at awareness raising, outreach and capacity building at the nexus of development and security.

Not all elements of this new networking, collaboration and project delivery methodology were put in place simultaneously; nor were they established in the order that might have been expected or that practical experience might have logically dictated. Instead, the methodology was adapted several times based on a 'learning-by-doing' approach. This involved feedback from partner countries and international organizations that participate in activities of the COE initiative, internal reviews involving a range of stakeholders in the EC and the EU's External Action Service (EEAS), and external evaluations. The overriding design principles, however, remained basically unchanged throughout: (*a*) partner countries would participate on a voluntary basis (which would also relate to their participation in a relevant regional grouping); (*b*) the methodology would be 'light' with respect to bureaucratic burden and formal institutionalization; (*c*) the methodology would be bottom up with respect to the development of project proposals and thematic areas to be covered; and (*d*) the methodology would build on national systems developed by the partner countries themselves.

The Centres of Excellence methodology

National CBRN Teams

At the base of the COE methodology are the National CBRN Teams formed by the partner countries, held together by a National Focal Point (NFP) for the COE initiative. The concept of national CBRN teams was not unique to the COE initiative, but rather it reflected the experience of many countries after the terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001, the subsequent anthrax attacks in the USA, and later terrorist attacks in other countries. These experiences suggested that preparedness and response to CBRN threats at the national level required a coordinated inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder approach that would bring together a broad range of actors including: (*a*) specialized technical institutions (with responsibility for such areas as chemical safety and security, biosafety and biosecurity, and nuclear and radiological safety and security); (*b*) first responders (police, fire brigade, responders from the public health system and hazmat teams); (*c*) relevant stakeholders from the foreign policy and security apparatus; and (*d*) other actors that had roles to play in an integrated national preparedness, response and recovery system dealing with the emerging CBRN threats. These national stakeholders were also to include private industry, research and educational institutions, and other non-governmental organizations.

While the idea of national CBRN coordination was not new, the decision to set up National CBRN Teams was nevertheless an important innovation, and a step by partner countries towards creating conditions for developing systems that would help them to enhance their CBRN risk mitigation capacity, as well as increase their ability to more effectively absorb technical assistance in this complex and multidisciplinary area. The Charter of the COE Regional Secretariats provides some guidance on which ministries and agencies

a partner country should consider involving in its National CBRN Team (the Regional Secretariats are discussed in detail below). However, the composition of a National CBRN Team will always depend on domestic conditions and the administrative and regulatory system of the country concerned, and is at each country's discretion.[9] Ministries and agencies of particular relevance may include: CBRN agencies and authorities; customs administrations; law enforcement agencies; the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Defence; the Ministry of Environment; the Ministry of Finance/Economy/Trade; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Infrastructures; the Ministry of Interior; the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Scientific Research; universities, research centres and public laboratories; national focal points/contact points for other relevant regional and international organizations dealing with CBRN-related issues, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Security Council's 1540 Committee, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); civil protection services; emergency services; intelligence services; and other relevant stakeholders.

National Focal Points

The NFPs are essential for the success of the COE initiative. They foster the establishment of a National CBRN Team in the partner country, which includes awareness raising among policymakers and marshalling high-level political support for the COE initiative. The NFPs also identify and engage with relevant national stakeholders (including contact points of relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies that have mandates in CBRN preparedness and response, and national technical experts and institutions with competence in the CBRN field). The activities of the NFPs include: (*a*) leading the National CBRN Team, and planning and organizing its meetings and activities; (*b*) organizing and promoting interagency cooperation with national stakeholders; (*c*) engaging in regional and international coordination in the CBRN field; (*d*) acting as a point of contact and information disseminator for COE activities, projects, National Needs Assessments and gap analyses; and (*e*) developing a National CBRN Action Plan (NAP).

[9] For this and other COE documents, see the CBRN COE Portal, <http://www.cbrn-coe.eu>.

COE tools such as a Needs Assessment Questionnaire (NAQ) and a methodology for the development of a NAP have been developed to help National CBRN Teams and NFPs to set priorities, establish targets and assign responsibilities at the national level with regard to strengthening CBRN resilience.

Equally important is the role of the NFPs vis-à-vis external partners within the COE system. NFPs (*a*) liaise and collaborate with the Regional Secretariat; (*b*) participate in the development of project proposals and the discussion of project requirements within their region; (*c*) have responsibilities for monitoring the progress of COE project implementation; and (*d*), increasingly, are given responsibility in participating in the assessment of results of COE projects and their wider impact. They also facilitate contact between the implementers of COE projects and relevant national experts and institutions that should be involved in project implementation. Within the COE's project delivery structure, their role could perhaps best be described as that of a programme coordinator.

Additionally, NFPs collaborate with partner countries' NFPs as well as technical experts from the EC's Joint Research Centre (JRC) who support the COE system. They can submit project proposals to the Regional Secretariat as well as provide feedback on the implementation and monitoring of COE projects.

NFPs therefore play a key role at four distinct levels:

1. At the national level as national centres for bringing together stakeholders in CBRN risk mitigation, raising awareness of the requirements in this field and generating political support and buy-in within their country.
2. At the regional level to facilitate regional collaboration and cooperation in the context of the Regional Secretariat and its activities, such as regional workshops and roundtable meetings.
3. At the COE level in collaboration with EU partners from the COE initiative, including the EC's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) and JRC, as well as other elements of the COE system such as the Governance Group and the On-site Technical Assistance (OSA) team that have been established as part of the COE support structure, and are available to the NFPs for advice and in-country support when needed.
4. At the international level as partners of other global actors including states with outreach

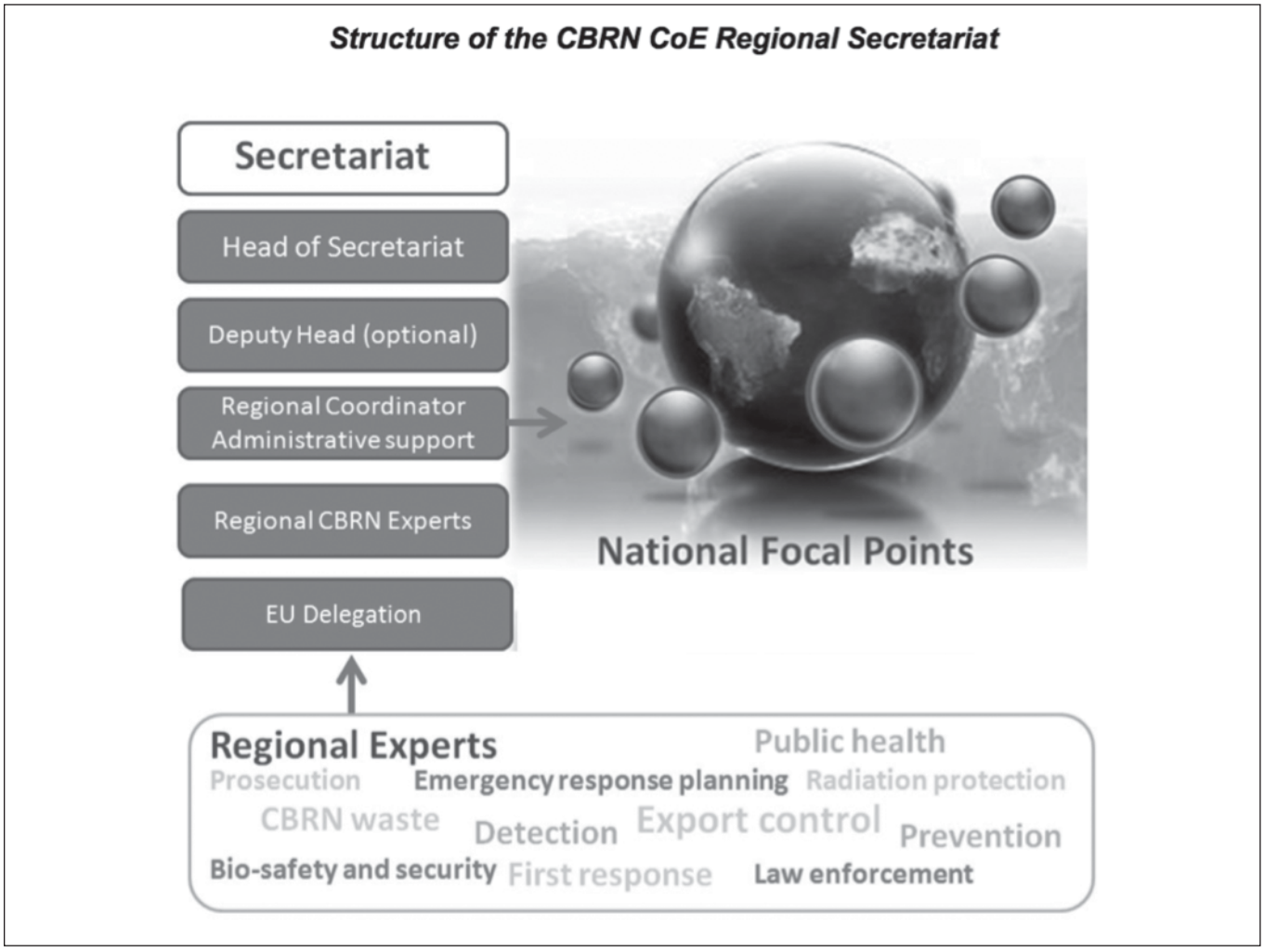

Figure 1. The functioning of a Centres of Excellence Regional Secretariat and its relationship to other actors in the initiative

Source: European Union (EU) Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Centres of Excellence (COE), The Secretariat Charter: Structure and Tasks of the EU CBRN COE Regional Secretariats, COE Portal, <http://www.cbrn-coe.eu>.

programmes in the CBRN field such as Japan and the USA, and international organizations such as the IAEA, the OPCW, the Implementation Support Unit of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), the WHO (with regard to health-security aspects of the 2005 International Health Regulations), and others.

Regional Secretariats

At the regional level the NFPs collaborate through the Regional Secretariats that have been set up under the COE initiative (see figure 1). These are relatively small administrative structures situated within one of the partner countries participating in a given region of the COE initiative. It should be noted that these regional structures are based on the voluntary participation of partner countries that join a particular regional grouping; hence, they are not always congruent with the regional groupings of international organizations and regimes. This can lead to a mismatch between the composition of the COE regional groupings and the regional groups of international organizations and their regional centres/offices, which at times can complicate the coordination function of the Regional Secretariats.

The Regional Secretariats work under the direction of a Head of Secretariat nominated by the country hosting the Regional Secretariat (sometimes supported by a deputy head and by experts from the partner countries) supported by a Regional Coordinator and an administrative assistant, both of whom are staff members of the UN Interregional Crime and Justice

Research Institute (UNICRI). National CBRN experts are designated by their respective government and are available to work for the Regional Secretariat for a certain time period. During this period they are hosted in the Regional Secretariat when their presence is required and travel in the region when needed. The Regional Secretariat can host up to three CBRN experts at the same time.

Some local EU delegations deploy staff members to support Regional Secretariats in the implementation of the COE initiative (at the time of writing this was the case for EU delegations in Manila, Amman and Nairobi). Since 2016, three Regional Secretariats (African Atlantic Façade, Eastern and Central Africa, and South East and Eastern Europe) have been supported by a technical expert from a newly formed OSA team. The OSA experts provide technical support in such areas as project definition, the development of terms of reference for COE projects, project implementation monitoring, needs assessment, and the development of NAPs. OSA experts render technical advice to the Regional Secretariat to which they are assigned, and support the JRC in its work with regard to (*a*) the specification of project objectives, content and requirements; and (*b*) the evaluation of project outputs and outcomes. They also are available to help implementers identify local experts and institutions that they can rely on in the project delivery. The OSA team is coordinated by a team leader who works out of Brussels under the direct guidance of DG DEVCO. The experience so far of deploying this additional technical support has been positive, and another project has recently been approved that will deploy an additional three technical experts—one each to the Regional Secretariats in Central Asia, the Middle East, and in North Africa and the Sahel. Furthermore, an individual OSA expert has been deployed to the Regional Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council region.

The effective functioning of the Regional Secretariats is critical for the COE initiative. Their functions and responsibilities have been set out in a Regional Secretariat Charter and include the following.

1. *Facilitating information sharing and coordination*: (*a*) ensuring liaison with the partner countries of the EU CBRN COE Regional Secretariat; (*b*) engaging relevant stakeholders in the region, including EU delegations and relevant international/regional organizations, EU member states and partners present in the region; (*c*) coordinating with the different partners of the COE; and (*d*) organizing roundtable meetings with NFPs to coordinate activities at the technical level.

2. *Assisting countries in the region in building capacity to assess and address needs as well as identifying expertise*: (*a*) supporting the NFPs in establishing the National CBRN Team; (*b*) assisting partner countries in assessing their needs, identifying expertise and developing their NAP; (*c*) contributing to the preparation of project proposals with partner countries; (*d*) liaising with the EC for technical input and to avoid overlap of the technical areas covered by the project proposals; and (*e*) sending project proposals to be reviewed by the EC to NFPs for their final clearance.

3. *Facilitating the implementation and monitoring of projects in the region*: (*a*) discussing and developing a start-up strategy with implementing agencies to initiate projects in the region; (*b*) facilitating start-up contacts between implementing agencies and relevant national institutions in partner countries, when necessary; (*c*) facilitating contacts between the implementing agencies and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in partner countries, when necessary; (*d*) receiving, on an ad hoc basis, information from partner countries about the implementation of projects; (*e*) providing the project managing authorities with inputs on the progress of the implementation of the projects; and (*f*) facilitating monitoring missions.

4. *Promoting the regional visibility of the COE initiative*: (*a*) representing the initiative during relevant workshops, seminars and conferences; (*b*) drafting and disseminating press releases on COE activities in the region, relying also on the EU delegation press offices; (*c*) submitting relevant COE information and documents to the EC JRC to populate the regional COE section of the online COE Portal; (*d*) receiving and managing information from implementing agencies about events to be publicized on the COE Portal; and (*e*) clearing local press releases coming from implementing agencies according to standard criteria.

The European Commission Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development

The central hub of the COE system is built around DG DEVCO which bears responsibility for implementing a programme of technical assistance and collaboration with partner countries in accordance with Article 5 of the ICSP. In this, the COE system is one of its primary tools. DEVCO is supported by a number of

EU internal, and some external, actors. The EEAS provides strategic support and links the evolving COE structures to EU delegations. 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. The JRC also implements some of the projects (for example in the areas of export controls, illicit trafficking and in nuclear forensics). In addition, a Governance Team can be called upon to provide high-level political and diplomatic support and expertise.

The UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

Finally, there is UNICRI. Initially a DEVCO contractor that was working on the development and implementation of two regional knowledge management systems in the CBRN risk management field, UNICRI was instrumental in developing the networking approach that provides the texture underlying the COE methodology. UNICRI was an important partner for the EU in the process of engaging with potential partner countries and setting up the Regional Secretariats. Its status as a UN organization gave it global access and a profile that the COE initiative could build on in finding ways into the political systems of potential partner countries. UNICRI also played a key role in programming COE activities at the start of the COE initiative, in particular with respect to the overall administration and evaluation of the initial batch of 19 COE projects. 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. In the context of its CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance Programme, UNICRI provides a regional coordinator to each of the Regional Secretariats and assists partner countries with the development of National Needs Assessments and NAPs. It also assists the Regional Secretariats with identifying needs, priorities and opportunities at the regional level. Further, UNICRI has developed a number of governance principles and tools that partner countries are invited to use, including associated indicators and associated metrics, covering such areas as interagency coordination, operations communications, collaboration with non-governmental actors, regional and international cooperation, planning, and standards at national, regional and international levels.

IV. THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE NETWORK

The CBRN COE network currently involves 54 partner countries across 8 regions. Another 23 countries are looking into the possibility of joining the COE initiative.[10] The network is structured around 8 Regional Secretariats located in the following regions.

1. *African Atlantic Façade*: the current partner countries in this group are Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Liberia, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo. The Regional Secretariat is located in Rabat, Morocco.
2. *Central Asia*: the current partner countries in this group are Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Regional Secretariat is located in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
3. *Eastern and Central Africa*: the current partner countries in this group are Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, the Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The Regional Secretariat is located in Nairobi, Kenya.
4. *Gulf Cooperation Council Countries*: the current partner countries in this group are Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Regional Secretariat is located in Abu Dhabi, UAE.
5. *Middle East*: the current partner countries in this group are Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The Regional Secretariat is located in Amman, Jordan.
6. *North Africa and Sahel*: the current partner countries are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger and Tunisia. The Regional Secretariat is located in Algiers, Algeria.
7. *South East Asia*: the current partner countries in this group are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The Regional Secretariat is located in Manila, Philippines.

[10] COE Portal (note 9), accessed 30 Sep. 2014.

8. *South East and Eastern Europe*: this largest of the regional COE groupings currently comprises Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine. The Regional Secretariat is situated in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The development of the COE network has posed a number of challenges. It was important to ensure that the National CBRN Teams and NFPs of the partner countries had adequate authority within their respective countries to collaborate with a range of ministries and agencies, and that they were properly embedded into the national systems. It was also important to avoid duplicating what had already been set up in response to other international initiatives and regimes, such as the different action plans and reporting systems put into place by, among others: the UN Security Council's 1540 Committee; the IAEA (with respect to nuclear/radiological security); the OPCW (in continuation of its action plan to improve national implementation of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention); the mechanisms of the BTWC, which also aimed at improving national implementation, among other issues; and the WHO (with respect to implementation of the 2005 International Health Regulations). In addition, there were issues surrounding how the National CBRN Teams and the NFPs could be adequately equipped with human and financial resources to respond to all the requirements built into the methodology of the COE system. NFP responsibilities needed to be structurally linked into the national systems of the partner countries if they were to be effective and adequately authorized.

It therefore took several years to establish National CBRN Teams, and to properly empower NFPs and integrate them into the existing domestic systems of their respective countries. After all, participation in the COE initiative was a voluntary undertaking of the partner countries, and their political, legal and administrative contexts and cultures had to be respected and taken as the starting point for setting up these national structures. The fact that so many countries have used the COE initiative to establish or strengthen interagency coordination and broad stakeholder involvement in CBRN risk mitigation at the national level has been a major success in itself of the COE initiative.

The Regional Secretariats set up in the eight regions are at different levels of maturity. Their role is one of coordination both within the region, and between the regional states and the EC's headquarters in Brussels. They facilitate information sharing among the partner countries in their respective regional centre and act as a platform for sharing experiences regarding the creation of National CBRN Teams and the development of National Needs Assessments and NAPs. The Regional Secretariats also assist countries in the development of regional or trans-regional project proposals. Much of this work is done in regional workshops and roundtables. The regional roundtables have become an important tool for organizing collaboration and for developing well-coordinated project proposals that reflect regional priorities. The regional roundtable meetings are supported by DEVCO, UNICRI, the JRC and now also the OSA team. In the longer term, these processes are expected to lead to the agreement of regional CBRN risk mitigation strategies and action plans.

V. THE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE SYSTEM AS A PLATFORM FOR PROJECT DELIVERY

The project delivery through the COE initiative began in 2011 with two pilot projects in South East Asia. The first was on countering illicit trafficking of nuclear and radiological materials. The second was to reinforce legislation and regulations in biosafety/biosecurity, and strengthen laboratory management systems. Based on the success of these 2 pilots, 23 more projects were proposed for the Middle East; South East Asia; South East and Eastern Europe, Ukraine and the Caucasus; North and West Africa; Central Asia; and sub-Saharan Africa.[11] These projects covered illicit trafficking, biosafety/biosecurity, first response to CBRN incidents, the misuse of biotechnology, strengthening CBRN national legal frameworks, e-learning on CBRN risk mitigation, public and infrastructure protection, awareness raising on CBRN threats, chemical/biological waste management, border controls, and CBRN import/export controls. By the end of 2011, 19 tailored assistance packages in 5 regions had been approved. These initial projects were managed by UNICRI, which also took on the responsibility for evaluating the project results. The first batch of these new projects started in January 2013.[12]

[11] These are the regional designations used at the time when the respective projects were approved.

[12] For more details see UNICRI website, <http://www.unicri.it>.

Many of the early COE projects were multi-regional in nature, involving partner countries from two or three different regional settings. There were also a few regional initiatives, and a small number of projects that involved only one or two partner countries. The project budgets tended to be fairly modest (in particular when the number of participating countries was taken into account), and many of these projects emphasized issues related to awareness raising, sharing best practices, establishing networks and promoting educational tools such as remote learning. Looking back at these early projects, the impression is that they laid the ground for deeper capacity building projects in subsequent years, and helped to foster political support and goodwill in the participating countries and regions. They are also perceived to have helped bridge a time period when the methodology of the COE initiative was still evolving and adapting to the conditions and requirements of the partner countries. The projects thereby complemented the efforts made by DEVCO and others to establish and expand the geographical scope of the COE initiative, and to enhance the administrative and programming tools that were needed to ensure that the system would work effectively and efficiently. Together with efforts to support the formation of National CBRN Teams and to strengthen good governance in the CBRN arena in partner countries, these early projects helped to create ownership and buy-in by the partner countries and regions.

The ICSP entered into force in 2014 to become the EU's main instrument supporting security initiatives and peace-building activities in partner countries. It thus replaced the IFS and several earlier instruments that had focused on drugs, landmines, migration and internal displacement, crisis management, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The ICSP provides support in two contexts. Its first component—Situations of Crisis (short-term component)—aims to respond to or prevent conflict, support post-conflict political stabilization and ensure early recovery after a natural disaster. It can only be triggered in a situation of crisis or emerging crisis in order to re-establish the conditions necessary to the implementation of the EU's development assistance under other long-term instruments. Essentially, this component is not programmable but establishes a flexible and swift ad hoc emergency response mechanism.

The second component—Stable Situations (long-term component)—aims to assist in addressing global and trans-regional threats and emerging threats by building capacity in countries not in crisis. Among the thematic areas covered by this ICSP component is CBRN risk mitigation with related cooperation projects continuing to be delivered principally—but not exclusively—through the CBRN COE system that the ICSP inherited from the IFS.

New efforts are being made to deepen and strengthen the COE methodology based on the bottom-up approach, local ownership and regional cooperation. The effectiveness and impact of specific projects is being augmented through the regular organization of expert meetings that allow regional exchanges, coordination of activities and the definition of regional priorities leading into regional projects. In addition, the operation of the Regional Secretariats has been further enhanced, and the links between CBRN risk mitigation and related topics, such as counterterrorism, security and climate change, export control of dual-use items and other areas have been reinforced through the COE network and its project delivery system. The project delivery system has been extended to include approaches to additional potential partner countries, and more emphasis has been given to contributing to raising international awareness in the field of safety and security than in the past. This has also taken account of demands coming from the partner countries. As in the past, much emphasis has been placed on disseminating best practices, promoting internationally adopted standards, and providing technical guidance and expertise.

The current project portfolio shown on the COE Portal lists a total of 60 projects (this includes 28 projects plus 2 pilot projects that have been completed). As a general trend, current COE projects while maintaining the regional dimension of the COE initiative, have a stronger thematic focus reaching beyond awareness raising and education. Typically, they involve a smaller number of partner countries (many of the projects being regional rather than trans-regional in nature); they reach deeper in terms of capacity building; and they command larger budgets. As a rule, the new COE projects involve the participation of local experts/institutions from partner countries in the implementing consortia, thereby further strengthening local ownership, and at the same time increasing the relevance of the project deliverables to the regional and local context. The direct involvement of local experts should ensure that projects are developed and implemented in recognition of the requirements and conditions of the partner

countries, and these are increasingly identified in multi-stakeholder needs assessment exercises and NAPs developed by the partner countries themselves.

Another development has been that more recent COE projects put stronger emphasis on practical measures, including training, the conduct of exercises and the strengthening of infrastructure through the delivery of equipment. This also responds to requests from the partner countries to move beyond general awareness raising and address practical issues that would help them to enhance their technical and institutional capacity to deal with CBRN and associated security and safety risks. It mirrors proposals coming from the regions to establish or strengthen existing CBRN training centres as regional hubs under the COE system (accessible to the partner countries of the region), or to develop regional networks of research and training centres with expertise in CBRN preparedness and response.

Such calls for more practical work and, in particular, for using the COE system as a conduit for the delivery of much-needed equipment are not new. Past evaluations of the IFS Priority-1 measures (CBRN risk mitigation), which included the COE initiative, have made similar recommendations. But this may be stretching the ability of the ICSP further than it can deliver. The ICSP is one of the smaller external financing instruments of the EU, and most of its budget is earmarked to allow the EU to respond in a rapid and flexible manner to emerging crisis situations. The long-term component under Article 5 of the ICSP (which has been set at 21 per cent of the overall ICSP budget with only part of this amount earmarked for the financing of the COE initiative) is far too small by itself to allow deep capacity building, particularly when the number of partner countries is taken into account.[13] It will therefore be important for increasing the impact of the COE initiative, and for the sustainability of the results it delivers, to exploit synergies within the overall system of EU external financing instruments: to 'hand over' the results achieved under the ICSP long-term capacity building programmes, including the COE system, to other financing mechanisms that can build on these results and expand capacity beyond what the ICSP by itself can achieve. Also, there have been examples in the past where IFS and ICSP activities were combined with programmes offered by other donors. One such example is the coordination of actions in the field of dual-use export controls between the USA, the IAEA and the EU through the export and border control working group. In this way, technical assistance offers from different donors have been synchronized in some instances—for example by the EU providing training while the USA was installing equipment. The design of the COE initiative, in any event, is such that non-EU donors can use the COE system as a platform for synchronized collaborations and capacity building, if they (and the partner countries) so wish.

VI. HOW WELL IS THE SYSTEM WORKING?

A special report in 2014 by the European Court of Auditors on the EU's COE initiative identified a number of innovative features, including the following.[14]

1. Its comprehensive approach; it addresses CBRN risks regardless whether their origin was natural, accidental or resulting from criminal activity. It also includes risk mitigation measures ranging from prevention to detection, response and governance.
2. Its design, which builds on an explicit demands-driven (bottom-up) approach involving systematic expert needs assessment in partner countries (gap analysis, prioritization in NAPs, tailored projects etc).
3. Its distinct focus on regional cooperation between partner countries.

In the assessment of the auditors, these features helped create ownership in the partner countries and contributed to sustainability. The auditors observed that the results of the COE initiative are not limited to project outcomes, but that

> neighbouring countries in sensitive geographical locations like North Africa and the Middle East meet to discuss and implement projects in the area of security represent[ed] an important added value, contributing, on its own, to a culture of cooperation and safety.[15]

[13] The financial envelope allocated to the ICSP for the period 2014–20 is €2338 million. Regulation (EU) no. 230/2014 (note 5), Article 13.

[14] European Court of Auditors (note 1), observation 20.

[15] European Court of Auditors (note 1), observation 20.

This analysis led the auditors to conclude that

> [the] EU CBRN Centres of Excellence initiative is a key response to the European security strategy and the European strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The concept behind the initiative is based on a sound analysis, particularly taking into account the ... deficiencies of the former TACIS programme.[16]

The auditors noted the complexity of the system, the large number of stakeholders involved, its decentralized structure and global reach. Furthermore, the participating countries and regions were, naturally, rather heterogeneous, and the activities and projects of the COE initiative needed to be adapted to their specific needs and conditions: 'no one size fits all' has become a standard principle when discussing technical assistance programmes, but it certainly reflects the conditions encountered by the COE initiative. Consequently, the methodology had to be flexible and tailored. But the auditors overall conclusion was that the COE initiative could contribute effectively to mitigating CBRN risks from outside the EU.

As was the case with evaluations of the COE initiative under the earlier IFS model, the 2014 Special Report of the European Court of Auditors pointed to certain areas where further improvements in the COE initiative can be made (and where DEVCO and its partners in the COE initiative are actively working on improving the system).

Improving the technical competence of the Regional Secretariats

The relative technical weakness of the Regional Secretariats was highlighted in the 2014 Special Report and in earlier evaluations as an area in need of improvement. Regional Secretariats are fairly small institutional settings with limited access to local technical expertise. They do have the support of staff made available to them by the EC, as well as by the EU delegations in country and by the regional coordinators from UNICRI. At the administrative and networking support level, these support structures appear to be adequate. However, they lack the technical competence to advise on the content of project proposals or to interact on specific technical issues with both national experts and project implementers. The JRC has taken on many of these responsibilities, but this technical support is inconsistent owing to the fact that the JRC does not have staff in the regions on a permanent basis. The JRC does support activities such as regional roundtable meetings where new project ideas are presented and their terms of reference discussed, but this support is not available in the region on a constant basis.

As mentioned above, the EC has now established an expert OSA team to assist three Regional Secretariats, and a second project for such an OSA team covering another three Regional Secretariats has been approved. It is perhaps too early to assess how effective these steps have been to boost the technical competence of the Regional Secretariats, but these steps clearly go a long way towards meeting a number of needs, including: (*a*) increasing the technical merits of the projects implemented under the COE initiative; (*b*) steering project content and deliverables to meet the specific needs and conditions of the partner countries; and (*c*) strengthening the role of the Regional Secretariats as regional centres of coordination and technical competence in the CBRN risk mitigation field.

Improving the mirroring of internal EU actions in the Centres of Excellence activities

A second area of improvement relates to the potential benefits of better mirroring of internal EU actions in the COE activities. Since the adoption of the EU CBRN Action Plan, the EC and EU member states have made efforts to strengthen the EU's internal preparedness and response capacity against the threats of a hostile use of CBRN materials and weapons by terrorists or criminals against member states, as well as to increase resilience to natural catastrophes involving such materials or resulting in their release.[17] The Sixth and Seventh EU Framework Programmes and Horizon 2020 (the current financial instrument of the EU to fund research and innovation programmes) have created funding streams for projects on a wide range of technical issues including in the field of CBRN risk mitigation, which have resulted in new

[16] European Court of Auditors (note 1), observation 16.

[17] European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Strengthening Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Security in the EU: An EU CBRN Action Plan, Document COM(2009) 273 final, 24 June 2009.

solutions, procedures, equipment, operational concepts and capacities. A number of Directorate-Generals have been actively pursuing programme lines that contribute to these objectives, including (but not limited to) the Directorate-Generals of Migration and Home Affairs (HOME) and Health and Food Safety (SANTE) and the JRC.

Despite all the sensitivities involved in security-related projects and programmes, there are many areas where the expertise of the EU and its member states as well as the practices and procedures developed in its internal context can be more effectively mirrored in the project content that the COE initiative is delivering in partner countries and regions. Such closer linkage can also help in developing two-way streams of exchanging information and expertise, and feed back into the knowledge base and response capacity of the EU itself.

Embedding the Centres of Excellence mechanisms into the mainstream of policymaking

A third area of improvement concerns linking the COE system more effectively to other global and regional initiatives and networks. International organizations (such as the IAEA, the OPCW, the BTWC's Implementation Support Unit and the WHO) as well as regimes and initiatives (such as the UN Security Council's 1540 Committee) all have their separate points of entry into countries, linked to the respective lead ministries in their sector. The NFPs designated under the COE initiative are yet another such entry point, and it is important for them to be effective and well connected with other mechanisms and structures. This is why a broad and representative composition of the National CBRN Teams and appropriate authorization of the NFP are important, combined with high-level political commitment by the partner countries to actively engage in the COE initiative. The formation of effective National CBRN Teams is not merely a technical and bureaucratic step to establish and sanction yet another network or interagency process—there is an authentic need to embed the COE mechanisms into the mainstream of policymaking and inter-ministerial coordination in the partner countries, which calls for political support from the top of government.

Making an impact

Despite the clear need for improvements to the COE initiative as outlined above, the COE methodology has clearly demonstrated the capability to deliver meaningful results in ways that are sustainable and achieve greater impact. One example is the deployment of mobile biological laboratories during the 2014–16 Ebola outbreak in Western Africa.

An IFS project to set up a collaborative network of EU and African institutions was established in 2012 (the EMLab project). Three mobile laboratory units at Biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) were acquired to this end, and the first lab was deployed to Guinea at the onset of the Ebola outbreak in March 2014. This deployment provided a capability for Ebola diagnostics within the outbreak region with up to 70 samples being processed in a single day and diagnostic results available within 4 hours. The other two laboratories were subsequently deployed to Liberia and Nigeria. Based on the positive experience with these deployments, the EU subsequently decided to start a new project in collaboration with the EMLab network, other EC services and EU member states called the EU West Africa Mobile Lab (EUWAM-Lab). This initiative trains additional specialists for African countries and the EU, and provides extra equipment to further strengthen diagnostic laboratory capacity in Africa. This new project has been using the COE initiative as its implementation platform.[18]

VII. WHAT NEXT?

In the six years of its existence, the COE initiative has evolved into a mature methodology that combines a systematic and well-structured approach to National Needs Assessments and priority setting with tools to enhance regional collaboration. It demonstrates a system of project delivery that can make a difference on the ground. Its main focus has been, and remains, on helping partner countries strengthen their preparedness and response capacity for natural as well as man-made (accidental or hostile) incidents involving CBRN materials. But the way this thematic scope has been interpreted in the past has left room for flexibility, and for developing interventions and projects on an all-hazard basis. While the traditional aspects of CBRN

[18] Longo, C., 'The COE supports the EU response to the Ebola outbreak', CBRN COE Newsletter, vol. 10 (Mar. 2015), pp. 4-5.

risk mitigation remain at the centre of COE projects, new areas such as food security, cybersecurity and the security impact of climate change have also been discussed as possible new thematic areas.

The main principles that underlie the design of the COE methodology (promoting effective multilateralism, creating ownership in partner countries through a bottom-up approach, and facilitating regional collaborations) remain unchanged. This approach may well be suitable for other thematic areas at the nexus of development and security, for example in the areas of export controls or the protection of critical infrastructure as well as with regard to building capacity to respond to threats emanating from terrorism and organized crime, and to prevent illicit trafficking (of people, drugs, falsified medicines and dual-use goods). The EU will continue with its centrally managed and ad hoc technical assistance projects in these and other fields. However, as a means to respond rapidly and effectively to needs as they arise, the COE system provides a platform to address long-term programmatic issues in a regional and trans-regional context, and to develop regional collaborations and priorities or action plans that can increase ownership and sustainability of results.

There remain areas that can be improved to further enhance the impact of the COE initiative. The links between National Needs Assessments, national priorities and NAPs adopted by the partner countries, and the direction and content of regional and trans-regional projects delivered through the COE system, remain often implicit. These links could be stronger and more transparent. In addition, because the COE methodology is constructed as a bottom-up approach that empowers the partner countries and gives them ownership over goals and priorities as well as project objectives, it is important to maintain the link to global and trans-regional security objectives and the EU's own strategic objectives in the domain of peace and security.

At the practical level, because it is based on National Needs Assessments and NAPs, the COE system should be able to offer a platform for other donors and international organizations to coordinate technical assistance programmes. Examples for such a wider collaboration do exist but more can certainly be done to link the multitude of technical assistance programmes and projects more effectively at the national and regional levels.

The logic of the COE methodology—to move from locally identified needs and a good understanding of local context to nationally and regionally agreed priorities and targets for action, and build collaborative regional projects against these needs and global norms and requirements—is compelling. The tools to administer this methodology have been developed and tested, and are working well overall. What is perhaps most important is that the political support and goodwill of the partner countries remains constant, with additional countries showing interest in joining the COE initiative.

ABBREVIATIONS

BTWC	Biological Weapons Convention
CBRN	Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear
COE	Centres of Excellence
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
EC	European Commission
EEAS	External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUWAM-Lab	EU West Africa Mobile Lab
G8	Group of Eight
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICSP	Instrument contributing to Peace and Security
IFS	Instrument for Stability
ISTC	International Science and Technology Center
JRC	Joint Research Centre
NAP	National CBRN Action Plan
NAQ	Needs Assessment Questionnaire
NFP	National Focal Point
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSA	On-site Technical Assistance
STCU	Science and Technology Center in Ukraine
TACIS	Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNICRI	UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
WHO	World Health Organization
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction

EU Non-Proliferation Consortium

The European network of independent non-proliferation think tanks

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A EUROPEAN NETWORK

In July 2010 the Council of the European Union decided to create a network bringing together foreign policy institutions and research centres from across the EU to encourage political and security-related dialogue and the long-term discussion of measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems.

STRUCTURE

The EU Non-Proliferation Consortium is managed jointly by four institutes entrusted with the project, in close cooperation with the representative of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The four institutes are the Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS) in Paris, the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt (PRIF), the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The Consortium began its work in January 2011 and forms the core of a wider network of European non-proliferation think tanks and research centres which will be closely associated with the activities of the Consortium.

MISSION

The main aim of the network of independent non-proliferation think tanks is to encourage discussion of measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems within civil society, particularly among experts, researchers and academics. The scope of activities shall also cover issues related to conventional weapons. The fruits of the network discussions can be submitted in the form of reports and recommendations to the responsible officials within the European Union.

It is expected that this network will support EU action to counter proliferation. To that end, the network can also establish cooperation with specialized institutions and research centres in third countries, in particular in those with which the EU is conducting specific non-proliferation dialogues.

http://www.nonproliferation.eu

FONDATION pour la RECHERCHE STRATÉGIQUE

FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC RESEARCH

FRS is an independent research centre and the leading French think tank on defence and security issues. Its team of experts in a variety of fields contributes to the strategic debate in France and abroad, and provides unique expertise across the board of defence and security studies.
http://www.frstrategie.org

PRIF Peace Research Institute Frankfurt — HSFK Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung

PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN FRANKFURT

PRIF is the largest as well as the oldest peace research institute in Germany. PRIF's work is directed towards carrying out research on peace and conflict, with a special emphasis on issues of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.
http://www.hsfk.de

IISS

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

IISS is an independent centre for research, information and debate on the problems of conflict, however caused, that have, or potentially have, an important military content. It aims to provide the best possible analysis on strategic trends and to facilitate contacts.
http://www.iiss.org/

sipri

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.
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