EU key messages

Meeting of States Parties
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts (MX) reflecting their deliberations, including possible outcomes

Geneva, 4-7 December 2018

Mr. Chairman,

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

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Montenegro*, Serbia* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

**MX1 on Cooperation and Assistance**

I would like to start by commending Ambassador Maria Teresa Almojuela of the Philippines for her skillful chairmanship of MX1 on assistance and cooperation.

The EU and its Member States are supporting the concrete implementation of Article X of the BTWC through various assistance programmes which aim, in particular, at improving biosafety, biosecurity and infectious disease surveillance, detection and control through capacity building efforts.

We will continue to support the operation of the BTWC Cooperation and Assistance Database and seek ways to enhance its utility, in particular by better identifying and matching relevant needs and assistance offers, where appropriate.

Developing national action plans, involving all stakeholders in these efforts and enhancing coordination with relevant international, regional and sub-regional organisations is essential to achieve effective and sustainable outcomes.

* Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
Another important element that could be further developed is the promotion of South-South cooperation for detecting, reporting and responding to outbreaks of infectious disease, or biological weapons attacks.

Building upon recent positive experiences, such as the Regional Conference in Africa that was co-organised by the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative and the Italian Presidency of the G7 Global Partnership in Morocco in October 2017, we believe that further action should be considered within the BTWC framework to enhance international cooperation, assistance and exchange on promoting capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and containment of infectious diseases.

**MX2 on Science and Technology**

I would like to thank Mr. Pedro Luiz Dalcero of Brazil who agreed to assume the chairmanship of the MX on Science and Technology on a very short notice.

We are mindful of the rapid development of life sciences and biotechnology. Their potential impact on all aspects of the BTWC’s implementation needs to be carefully reviewed. Relevant science and technology advancements bring tangible benefits in the area of biosecurity and biosafety, and in responding to infectious disease outbreaks, whether naturally occurring, accidental or deliberate, but they also carry potential proliferation risks stemming from both State and non-State actors.

In order to be able to assess the risks and benefits and ensure a more coordinated approach, we need to better involve non-governmental experts, notably scientists, professional associations and industry in the BTWC implementation as well as in relevant discussions within its framework. The EU-funded stakeholder seminars, carried out by the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) have helped to raise awareness of the Convention among scientists and biosafety professionals, developed capacities for more effective national implementation of the BTWC, and facilitated international cooperation for peaceful purposes.

We agree with the conclusion of the MX2 Chair that potential areas which should inform our future work include the risks and benefits of modern biotechnologies such as synthetic biology, microbial forensics and genome editing as well as biological risk assessment and management.

We should also continue to promote awareness-raising programmes, voluntary codes of conduct and standards for biosafety and biosecurity. Voluntary codes of conduct are a useful tool to raise awareness among scientists about the risks of misuse, while the right balance needs to be struck between scientific freedom, which is also a major driver for economic development, and potential risks of research outcomes that could possibly be used maliciously by States or non-State actors. Existing codes can serve as an inspiration for further work in the BTWC context.

**MX3 on strengthening national implementation**
I would like to thank Ambassador Julio Herráiz of Spain for his solid stewardship of MX3 on strengthening national implementation and for his valuable recommendations for further work and the suggested way forward.

Drafting and adopting of appropriate legislation or administrative measures, including criminal law provisions; improving biosafety and biosecurity; dual use export control; CBM preparation and submission; training and awareness-raising; emergency response planning, etc. are key to ensure full and effective national implementation of the BTWC. The EU will continue to assist interested States to develop dedicated national action plans to address these challenges.

Transparency and confidence building measures serve as an important tool to strengthen national implementation and enhance confidence in compliance. We call on all States Parties to submit their annual CBM declarations on time and to revise and strengthen them. States Parties could demonstrate their commitment to complying with the Convention, inter alia, by exchanging information and sharing best practices on their CBM declarations, as well as increasing transparency about their capabilities, activities and actions, including through voluntary on-site and other measures.

The EU-funded assistance activities in particular the CBM guide have contributed to an increase in the rate of annual submissions of CBMs and improved the quality of the information submitted. There has also been an increase in the number of States Parties submitting their CBM returns electronically. We invite all States Parties to use the recently launched electronic CBM facility, which will facilitate further improvements to the quantity and quality of submissions through web-based forms along with additional features such as custom searches and visualization of select CBM report data.

The EU and its Member States actively support voluntary peer review exercises and other voluntary visits and transparency initiatives involving States Parties in the context of the BTWC. The objective of these initiatives is to enhance transparency, to improve exchanges of information and good practices on national implementation regarding, for instance, capabilities, activities and actions for implementation, and to provide reassurance on compliance.

We congratulate Georgia on successfully carrying out, with Germany’s support, a peer review transparency visit from 14 to 15 November 2018 to the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research of the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health in Tbilisi. We recall that the visiting team, composed of 22 experts and officials coming from 17 BTWC States Parties, concluded in its report that the facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities. The EU and several EU Member States were pleased to be associated with the visit, which again demonstrated the usefulness of peer reviews.

Following the visit to Georgia and other similar initiatives supported by the EU in Morocco, Latin America and EU Member States, we encourage all States Parties to consider conducting or participating in peer review exercises and other voluntary visits and transparency and
confidence-building initiatives. Their purpose is not to replace legally-binding verification measures, but to strengthen national implementation and thereby the BTWC. The EU remains ready to continue cooperation with States Parties in this regard.

We look forward to further discussion on how to better implement Article III in order to explore ways of reaching a common understanding on export controls, taking into account what is already agreed on this topic at the 8th Review Conference.

**MX4 on Assistance, Response and Preparedness**

We would like to thank Mr. Daniel Nord of Sweden for effectively chairing the MX4 on Assistance, Response and Preparedness and for putting to our consideration a set of concrete proposals.

We recall that a broad consensus has emerged on the need to operationalise the provisions of Article VII of the BTWC in order to enhance our preparedness to provide and coordinate assistance upon request by a State Party in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons. The growing interest in Article VII became evident at the Eighth Review Conference in 2016 and was again confirmed at the Meeting of Experts in August this year.

We support the proposal of the Chair to identify issues for further work during the intersessional process, pending formal approval by States Parties. Such issues should include, for example, the proposal by France and India to establish an Article VII database for assistance, as well as South Africa’s proposal on guidelines that would aid a State Party when submitting an application for assistance under Article VII of the BTWC.

We invite all States Parties to join consensus to allow such work to go ahead, which, we believe, is in the interest of all States Parties.

**MX5 on institutional strengthening**

We would like to thank Mr. Otakar Gorgol of the Czech Republic for his balanced and comprehensive approach when chairing the MX5 on institutional strengthening.

While recognising that there is no consensus regarding verification at this stage, which remains a central element of a complete and effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime, we will continue to promote options that contribute to an increase in confidence in compliance with the Convention and to the effective implementation of the object and purpose of the BTWC. We support the Chair's proposal to focus on non-legally binding measures at the next year's Meeting of Experts.

Despite the dire financial situation and scarce human resources, the ISU has continued to provide important support to States Parties for the implementation of their Treaty obligations and the intersessional work programme. We continue to advocate the strengthening of the ISU’s role and the inclusion of further activities in its mandate, such as a standing science and
technology advisory and liaison function, coordination of universalisation activities, and support to national points of contacts in compiling and submitting CBM forms.

Let me also take this opportunity to reiterate the EU’s support for the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons. Further improving the operational capabilities of this mechanism will contribute to the strengthening of international abilities to respond to biological weapons use thereby furthering the aims of the Convention and the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The EU has provided support to the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism through EU Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP helping to expand the roster of trained experts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman