Opening remarks

By Dr Kamen Velichkov, acting Head of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan

Let me start by congratulating all participants in the Regional Workshop for Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Astana and wish you fruitful discussions in view of a successful outcome of the upcoming Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the host country Kazakhstan and the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) for your support and hard work in organising this important regional event and making it a success.

The European Union (EU), building upon the positive outcome of its previous programme in support of the BTWC has started the implementation of new projects in order to continue its tangible support to the better implementation and universalisation of the BTWC. As detailed presentation of the new EU Council Decision in support to the BTWC by my colleague from the EEAS Dr Emil Kazakov will follow later today, let me focus now on EU's priorities and activities towards the Eighth Review Conference to be held on 7-25 November 2016 in Geneva.

As it is well-known, the EU considers the BTWC as a key component of the international non-proliferation and disarmament framework and the cornerstone of efforts to prevent biological agents and toxins from ever being developed and used as weapons.

In line with our consistent support to the full implementation and strengthening of the BTWC the EU adopted a Council Decision laying down our common position relating to the Eighth Review Conference. We have submitted a Working Paper to the first session of the Preparatory Committee in April this year that reflects the Decision’s content.

In the run up to and during the Review Conference we are working to ensure that the States Parties address the following priorities: building and sustaining confidence in compliance; supporting national implementation; supporting the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of biological weapons and agents, and promoting the universality of the Convention.
The EU’s objective is to contribute to a full review of the operations of the BTWC at the Eighth Review Conference, to support a new substantive work programme as well as to support a Ninth Review Conference of the BTWC to be held no later than 2021. In particular, we will continue supporting all efforts aimed at reinforcing the decisional power of the Intersessional Process by exploring a range of options in that regard.

With a view to building consensus for a successful outcome of the Review Conference, we are promoting the following key issues.

While recognising that there is no consensus regarding verification at this stage, that remains a central element of a complete and effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime, we will work towards identifying options that contribute to an increase in confidence in compliance and to the effective implementation of the object and purpose of the BTWC.

In particular, we continue our efforts to enhance transparency and build confidence in compliance, including through necessary and achievable revisions to the current CBMs.

Furthermore, we support voluntary measures to increase transparency between States Parties to enhance confidence in compliance with the BTWC and strengthen national implementation. In this regard, we continue to support a voluntary peer review process as a valuable tool.

We support national implementation measures, including administrative, judicial and criminal legislation, and control over pathogenic microorganisms and toxins in the framework of the BTWC.

We continue promoting universal adherence to the Convention, including by calling on all States not party to the Convention to adhere thereto without further delay and to commit legally to disarmament with regard to, and non-proliferation of, biological and toxin weapons. Pending adherence of such States to the BTWC, we encourage them to participate as observers in the meetings of the States Parties to the Convention and to implement, on a voluntary basis, its provisions.

We support strengthening operational capabilities of the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons, including through expanding the cadre of trained experts, training, and the conduct of table-top and field exercises.

With respect to Article VII, we advocate taking decisions on the provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organisations upon request by any State Party in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons, including improving national capabilities for disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems as the first line of defence.
We remain committed to enhancing transparency about cooperation and assistance related to Article X, taking into account the mandates, work and the expertise of other international organisations. We will continue to support the concrete implementation of Article X of the BTWC through various national and international assistance programmes.

We will continue supporting efforts towards more frequent and focused assessments of relevant scientific and technological developments, which may have implications for the BTWC.

In addition, the EU remains in favour of strengthening the role of the ISU, including prolongation of its mandate, inclusion of further activities to support the implementation of a revised and strengthened intersessional work programme and adequate expansion of its current staff to assist effective delivery of core responsibilities and meet new objectives.

Concluding, let me assure you that the European Union and its Member States have a vested interest in a well-prepared and successful Eighth Review Conference and that they stand ready to cooperate with all State Parties to this effect.

Astana, 15 June 2016