

COVID-19

CENTRAL ASIA



Author: Bakhtiyor Gulyamov

Dear Reader,

The outbreak of coronavirus, which began to spread around the world back in 2019, created an emergency on an international scale. The unprecedented threat from COVID-19 has caused unimaginable changes around the world.

The Central-Asian region was affected as well. For the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear Centres of Excellence Initiative (hereinafter referred to as the EU CBRN CoE), which is led, funded and implemented by the European Union (EU) with the support of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the coronavirus pandemic has become yet another test of resilience and importance. The pandemic brought forward the need to evaluate the impact of the activities implemented by the Initiative in 61 countries around the world since 2010.

I am proud to acknowledge that since 2013, 12 projects of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative focused on strengthening capabilities of Partner Countries in mitigating CBRN risks were implemented in Central Asian region. The Regional CBRN CoE Secretariat for Central Asia has been established in Tashkent, the Republic of Uzbekistan, on 17 July 2015.

It provides a coherent and comprehensive approach in implementation of the activities covering legal, regulatory, enforcement and technical issues in CBRN risk prevention and mitigation. Currently, the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia covers six countries: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Tajikistan. The Republic of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are two additional countries in Central Asia, who are in the process of becoming members of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative.

Analysis of the Initiative's activity, recently conducted by the Joint Research Center of the EU, the European Commission and the UNICRI, once again demonstrated its positive impact on strengthening the capacity of the Partner Countries in countering CBRN threats, including coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the fight against the pandemic continues: the ongoing spread of coronavirus requires even greater involvement from governments and societies around the world. The Regional Secretariat for Central Asia, which I lead, continued to work tirelessly even during the most acute crisis. Moreover, we worked with an increased intensity, involving

Work of EU CBRN Centre of Excellence in Central Asia in the time of COVID-19

the National Focal Points of the Partner Countries in Central Asia and new partners, united in front of a common global threat – the pandemic. I invite you to familiarize yourself with the results and conclusions of such effort and what came out of this within the pages of this brochure. One of the results, as you will see, was an increase in EU assistance, namely, the allocation of more than 2 million euros to reflect on the lessons learned and raise the capacity for combating coronavirus in Central Asia, as well as in South East and Eastern Europe. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, the Central Asian region showed a surge of solidarity, which leads to the strengthening and increase of interregional cooperation and joint activities. I hope that together we will become even more united and effective to defeat the COVID-19 threat while also minimizing other CBRN risks!

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all colleagues in the EU CBRN CoE Initiative and especially to the members of the Regional Secretariat for joint fruitful work and companionship!

Sincerely yours,

Bakhtiyor Gulyamov

Head of the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia, Chairman of the State Committee of Industrial Safety of the Republic of Uzbekistan



Members of the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia and the National Focal Point of Uzbekistan discuss and plan CoE activities at the regular meeting, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, February 2020

The EU CBRN CoE Regional Secretariat for Central Asia, based in Tashkent and headed by the Chairman of the State Committee of Industrial Safety of the Republic of Uzbekistan Mr. Bakhtiyor Gulyamov, in cooperation with the European Commission's (EC), United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the EC Joint Research Centre, prepared outreach materials which highlight the work done in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, under the umbrella of the EU CBRN CoE. The Infosheet, circulated among Partner Countries of the Initiative, featured how the Initiative in practice responds to the crisis and how previous measures, including trainings, built the capacities of the Partner Countries.

Several National Focal Points (NFPs) in Central Asia are in the frontline in dealing with the current COVID-19 crisis. Countries include the Republic of Uzbekistan (regional host), the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Kazakhstan (observer).

The Regional Secretariat for Central Asia organized an exchange of experience between experts from Partner Countries by disseminating important information,

including the latest recommendations from the WHO and other international guidelines.

Partner Countries of Central Asia have been participating and received access to (February to June 2020):

weekly

situational updates on COVID-19 response in Partner Countries of Central Asia

13

COVID-19 related webinars and on-line expert meetings

18

information materials, including reports and guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic and how to best tackle it

>20

links to WHO guidelines and other materials

How ongoing EU CBRN CoE projects have been strengthening Central Asian Partner Countries?

EU CBRN CoE Project 53

EU CBRN CoE Project 53 "Strengthening the National Legal Framework and Provision of Specialised Training on Biosafety and Biosecurity in Central Asian Countries; 2018-2021" is being implemented in the region and is positively impacting the capacities against COVID-19. In total, 88 master-trainers received specialised trainings on bio-safety and bio-security in six Partner Countries of the Central Asia Regional Secretariat and in Kazakhstan (not yet a Partner Country of the CoE). Among the positive legislative developments, the Project helped Tajikistan to prepare a draft law on bio-safety and bio-security, which was approved by the Government in late June and is now submitted for the final approval to the Tajikistan's Parliament. The draft law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Biological Safety" is under consideration by the relevant ministries and agencies. Also, Uzbekistan has acceded to the Geneva Protocol banning the use of chemical and biological weapons in warfare, while Tajikistan has recently ratified the said Protocol. The national institutions such as the "M.



International participants and observers as well as organizers of the CBRN Jeyran Field Exercise in Uzbekistan gather in front of the building used for the exercise, 14 November 2019.

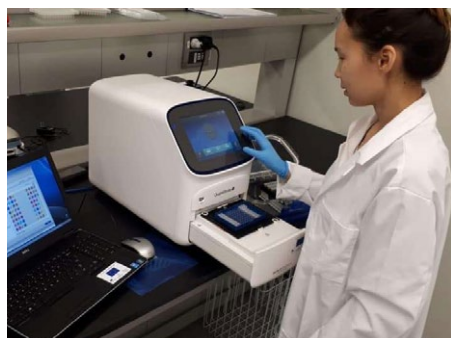
Aikimbayev's National Scientific Center For Especially Dangerous Infections" under the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan received laboratory equipment, which is currently being used for the detection of coronavirus within the population. The Head of the National Reference Laboratory, National TB Center under the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan has sent a letter of appreciation indicating that the training of P53 is being applied for training healthcare workers from hospitals that will be used as COVID-19 treatment units. The Republic of Uzbekistan expects

the delivery of two mobile laboratories within Project 53, which will be used by the institutions involved in curbing the COVID-19 crisis.

EU CBRN CoE Project 65

Within the ongoing EU CBRN CoE Project 65 "Strengthening chemical and biological waste management in Central Asia countries for improved security and safety risk mitigation" (implemented by CABICHEM consortium), experts have conducted a number of fact-finding missions (FFMs) to Partner Countries in

Central Asia. Such FFMs performed in 2018-2019 and the Regional Workshop in Tashkent in 2019 allowed to analyze the legislation and regulations related to chemical, biological and medical (CBM) waste management and to review the needs for procedural and technical improvements in specific types of facilities/sites/laboratories handling CBM waste. CABICHEM has also launched an information and awareness raising campaign to fight COVID-19, developed and introduced an e-learning platform. Work is underway to organize on-line trainings.



From left to right: 1. Kazakh biosafety specialists use the equipment donated in the frame of Project 53 to detect coronavirus, 2. The Regional Secretariat team at the prizes award ceremony for CBRN drawing competition for children in one of the schools of Uzbekistan, 3. Specialists in biological and chemical safety participate in the regional workshop for Central Asia, organized by Project 65 4. and 5. Some of the drawings submitted for CBRN drawing competition for schoolchildren in Uzbekistan



Central Asian Head of the Regional Secretariat Mr Gulyamov, EC Programme Manager Mr. Simonart with the Commander of the Jeyran CBRN exercise Colonel Botyrov, Deputy Commander of the National Guard

Innovative awareness-raising project for the young generation

Before coronavirus was officially registered in the Republic of Uzbekistan, at the end of February-beginning of March 2020 the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia organised a drawing competition for schoolchildren. In the framework of the 2020 Drawing Competition "Safe World Through Children's Eyes", approximately 200 schoolchildren, teachers and local officials of Namangan and Tashkent oblasts secondary schools participated in CBRN awareness raising workshops, boosting their appreciation of biorisks such as the looming coronavirus outbreak. Winners – the schoolchildren – were awarded prizes.

COVID-19 Reinforcement of Project 53 to support Central Asian Partner Countries

A 2 million euro reinforcement for the COVID-19 crisis responsiveness of existing Project 53 has been signed in mid-May 2020 to cover Central Asia but also Southeast and Eastern Europe. It will allow both regions to benefit quickly from complimentary on-line trainings, provision of consumables and equipment. A lessons-learned interregional post-COVID-19 conference will also be organized in cooperation with the Biosafety Association for Central Asia and the Caucasus (BACAC) for the countries of Central Asia and Southeast and Eastern Europe in early 2021, thus strengthening interregional cooperation.



Decontamination team operates after the seizure of "clandestine" laboratory at the Jeyran CBRN Field Exercise, November 2019



Demonstration of equipment used at the Jeyran CBRN Field Exercise, November 2019

PROCUREMENT OF SUPPLIES

Based on the needs in supplies and consumables expressed by the Partner Countries in Central Asia, the Regional Secretariat has prepared a consolidated list of needs.

The needs are to be satisfied in the framework of the EU CBRN CoE Project 53 and will be integrated in the overall COVID-19 response efforts in the respective countries.

TRAININGS

To strengthen the capacities of the countries in tackling biohazards such as coronavirus, blended (on-line and hands-on) specialised trainings and other capacity-building events will be provided within Project 53

To best meet countries' needs, Project 53 has started evaluating demands of countries in topics to be covered.

POST-COVID-19 CONFERENCE

An Interregional post-COVID-19 conference will be organised to draw lessons learned and reflect on the challenges posed by COVID-19.

It will consist of:

- 3-4 days of pre-conference trainings
- 2 days of conference sessions
- Fora for discussion
- Poster Session
- IFBA certification exam
- BACAC members meeting



Regional Secretariat for Central Asia is organizing on-line meetings during the pandemic

• In light of the COVID-19 outbreak and the associated restrictions on travel around the world, **the EU CBRN CoE Regional Secretariat for Central Asia organized the discussions in online mode on the topics of the agenda of the Twelfth Roundtable Meeting (hereinafter - RTM) for participating countries in Central Asia.** In particular, the Central Asian Regional Secretariat initiated discussions on the following topics presented in presentations, which were shared with Partner Countries in Central Asia:

1. **Overview and update by the Regional Secretariat on current and future CoE-related activities**
2. **Regional activity to mark the 10th anniversary of CoE**
3. **CBRN Regional Action Plan**
4. **COVID-19**
5. **Updating CoE Charter**
6. **Plans and priorities of the Regional Secretariat for 2020**
7. **Overview of Central Asian countries' presentations.**

The information included updates on Partner Countries as well as information on countries' needs with regard to the new regional project proposals (such as CBRN food safety and CBRN security during mass events).

Based on the discussions, the Regional Secretariat prepared (in English and Russian) and sent the report to the Partner Countries in Central Asia.

• **On 28th of May 2020, within the framework of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative, the CBRN Regional Secretariat for Central Asia held an interactive meeting for the National Focal Points of Central Asia.** The event was dedicated to the discussion of the current activities of the the CBRN CoE Regional Secretariat for Central Asia, aimed at supporting Partner Countries in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as familiarizing participants with the assistance program for the Central

Asian region, approved by the European Commission as part of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative. During the meeting, its participants, the National Focal Points of the Partner Countries of the region: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Head of the Regional Secretariat, the Regional Coordinator of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the on-site assistance (OSA) expert, as well as representatives of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission (DG DEVCO), the EU Delegation in Pakistan and the Joint Research Center (JRC) of the European Commission – also discussed the results of the previous and the current EU CBRN CoE activities in Central Asia, measures to respond to the pandemic and efforts to contain the outbreak.

Regional Secretariat for Central Asia is leading the process of CoE Charter update during the pandemic

During the latest meeting of the Heads of Secretariats in Brussels on November 27-28, 2019, the Head of the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia Mr. Gulyamov took the initiative and proposed that the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia would organize the process of CoE Charter update. The Heads of the Regional Secretariats, the European Commission and the UNICRI, as well as other participants, welcomed and supported this proposal.

In May 2020, the Regional Secretariat for Central Asia invited members of the CoE Initiative network in eight regions of the world to participate in a survey it has developed to review the roles and responsibilities of the CBRN CoE Regional Secretariats and members of the CoE network. The next steps include conducting an analysis of responses received and preparation of the first draft of the updated Charter. It is a remarkable

effort that the Central Asian Regional Secretariat is spearheading the process of the CoE Charter update. The updated Charter will help ensuring sustainability of the Initiative, adjusting its flexibility to best tailor to countries' needs.

Strengthening intra- and interregional cooperation to better withstand the coronavirus pandemic and other CBRN threats

• Following the initiative of the EU CBRN CoE Partner Countries in Central Asia to develop a CBRN Regional Action Plan (RAP) in March 2020 the Regional Secretariat shared with the Partner-Countries as well as with international organizations, including the UNSCR 1540 Committee, the OSCE and the EU Delegation in the Kyrgyz Republic **the first draft of the CBRN Regional Action Plan (RAP)** for Central Asia, developed with the support of the EC Joint Research Centre. The purpose of the RAP is to provide the policy framework to guide the creation and maintenance of sustainable capabilities and common standards in CBRN policies, programmes, equipment and training. The draft RAP defines, at regional level, necessary measures related to material and infrastructure protection and CBRN risk mitigation and sets the priorities for enhancing capabilities across the main components of crisis management: prevention, detection, preparedness and response, and recovery.

• **The EU CBRN CoE Field Exercise Jeyran (attended by approximately 250 participants from 15 countries) held on 13-15 November 2019 in Uzbekistan increased capabilities in dealing with bio- and chemical attacks** and helped enhance collaboration between law enforcement and other agencies on emergency preparedness and response. This event boosted confidence of professionals when tackling the COVID-19 crisis and made a contribution to strengthen intra- and interregional cooperation.



• An extension of EU CBRN CoE Project 53 will enhance links between Central Asian and Southeast and Eastern European regions. The intention is to elaborate a tailor-made capacity building programme for the two neighbouring regions. It is not only the geographical proximity that dictates the necessity for inter-regional cooperation but also the elements of common history among countries that justify a common approach to reinforcement of capabilities through trainings and webinars. In addition to that, a lessons-learned inter-regional post-COVID-19 conference is also envisaged for the countries of Central Asia and Southeast and Eastern Europe in late 2020 or early 2021 in cooperation with the BACAC.

• A Cooperation Agreement between the CoE Regional Secretariat for Central Asia and the "M. Aikimbayev's National Scientific Center For Especially Dangerous Infections" of Kazakhstan was concluded on 12 March 2020, which is being operationalized for the exchange of practices and information, including those related to the coronavirus outbreak.

• To implement provisions of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1540 of the Republic of Tajikistan, the country has begun the construction of the CBRN Forensics Centre, a 4-story modern building that will accommodate 12 laboratories. Symbolically, the NFP of Tajikistan has laid the first stone of the Centre on 7 March 2020.

• In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, some countries of Central Asia have also offered humanitarian aid to their regional neighbours in addition to the aid provided by the international organisations. This included food supplies, such as wheat flour, medical protective equipment, including disinfectants, medical gowns, disposable medical gloves, medical eyeglasses, face masks, disposable medical shoe covers, and medical equipment, including lung ventilators and medical containers. ▣



Contact Central Asia CBRN Regional Secretariat (UNICRI)
– iryna.iarema@un.org

Contact European Commission
– tristan.simonart@ec.europa.eu