

10th International Meeting of the EU CBRN CoE National Focal Points

14-15 May 2025, Brussels, Belgium

Good morning to all.

First of all, please allow me to extend my apologies on behalf of my Director, Peter Wagner, who was scheduled to be with us today. Unfortunately, due to an urgent mission, he is out of town for the entire week.

That said, I am truly honoured to open the 10th International Meeting of the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence National Focal Points, together with the EEAS, JRC, UNICRI, and the Head of Secretariat for Eastern and Central Africa.

A heartfelt thank you to all of you who took the time to travel to Brussels. It is a pleasure to see so many familiar faces here. But to have the whole CoE family reunited here in person is something truly special. Welcome to BXL!

This year holds even more significance as we celebrate the 15th anniversary of our Initiative. We've chosen a very special venue to mark the occasion: the Egmont Palace. This building holds over 500 years of history and is now used by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I hope you will enjoy its beauty and symbolism as much as we do.

Fifteen years ago, the European Union launched the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative with a clear goal: to support our international partners in preventing, detecting, and responding to CBRN risks.

What began as a strategic vision has grown into the world's largest platform for voluntary cooperation on CBRN, bringing together 63

partner countries across eight regions. That is an achievement we can all be proud of.

Today, I can confidently say: the Initiative is delivering results. The publication in your conference kit showcases just a few of the many success stories gathered from across your countries and regions. The list is impressive, and it only scratches the surface.

Thanks to the valuable input you provided, our evaluation team concluded that CoE projects have delivered relevant, complementary, and impactful outcomes—strengthening legal frameworks, building institutional capacities, and enhancing regional cooperation.

Our bottom-up approach has proven effective in ensuring long-term benefits and the sustainability of results. Of course, alongside these achievements, the evaluation has also generated valuable recommendations to help us improve. These are outlined in the brochure provided in your conference kit, and I encourage you to take a close look.

In today's volatile global landscape, international cooperation and close collaboration with partner countries are more vital than ever to counter the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Strengthening these partnerships is essential to effectively address shared security challenges and build a safer, more resilient world. Initiatives such as the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction are to be valued and supported as key instruments of collective action.

To amplify our impact, we must also deepen ties with international organisations. And I take the opportunity to thank OPCW, INTERPOL, UNOCT, UNODC, UNODA, NATO, and IAEA for joining us and enriching these two days of exchange.

I look forward to hearing the best practices our National Focal Points and Heads of Secretariat will share in the next session. I'm also looking forward to the historical walk later today, It will offer a unique and engaging way to reflect on how far we've come—through concrete examples that showcase the depth and breadth of what we've achieved together over the past 15 years.

Tomorrow, we will turn our attention to the future—exploring new tools, ideas, and innovations that can make our common efforts even more effective and responsive to emerging challenges.

Let me close by expressing my deepest thanks to my amazing team: Silvia, Anne-Sophie, Alexandra, Sorin, Balazs, and Louis. I am truly lucky to work with such competent, committed colleagues who bring passion and dedication to CBRN issues every day. It is thanks to their tireless efforts—and their constant connection with all of you—that the Initiative continues to thrive.

Thank you, and I wish you all a productive and inspiring event.