



COVID-19

GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES

EU CBRN Centres of Excellence activities in GCC and the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Project 82: preparation against the COVID-19 crisis

Within the European Union (EU) Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (CoE) framework and under the leadership of the Head of Secretariat Brig. Hussein Al Harthi, the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries agreed in June 2019, during a Round-Table Meeting organised in La Hulpe, Belgium, to launch the activities targeting the biological area and in

particular the medical training capabilities on how to respond to a CBRN event.

Considering the current COVID-19 crisis and the role of the medical services in responding to it, we can easily assess that Partner Countries were on the right path. The GCC region took advantage of the experience made through Project 54 (P54) entitled "Capacity building for medical preparedness and response to CBRN incidents" previously implemented in the Middle East region (2016-2019).



Project 82 - First regional training in Kuwait. Photo made by the GCC Emergency Management Centre.



CoE Project 82, First coordination meeting, November 2019, Kuwait.



The new project for the GCC, identified as Project 82, is built on P54 but it has been implemented through the innovative approach of the Schools of Excellence: a joint venture between the European Union, the GCC countries, the GCC Emergency Management Centre supported by UNICRI and the OSA experts of the GCC and the Middle East. In line with that approach, P82 capitalised on both the training materials and the expertise developed through the P54. Furthermore, it reinforces the interregional approach between the Middle East (MIE) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries through the activation of trainers from the MIE.

The first concrete activity took place from 4th until 7th November 2019 when delegations from all five GCC Partner

Countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) gathered in Kuwait City to attend the launching and the first technical workshop of the Project 82. The event was attended by 80 participants from the GCC countries, the GCC Emergency Management Centre (regional organization of the GCC specialized in disaster and risk management), experts from the European Union and Lebanon (from P54), the EU Delegation in Kuwait and the United Nations.

This event was coordinated by the Regional Secretariat in Abu Dhabi and co-sponsored by the GCC Emergency Management Centre and hosted by the Kuwaiti National Guard with the fundamental support. The coordination meeting and the workshop were the first regional events, followed shortly by

specific needs assessment visits in each GCC Partner Country. In fact, a delegation of European experts was sent in late 2019 and early 2020 to the capitals of all the GCC Partner Countries to assess capacities in place and potential needs.

The assessment missions were to be followed by regional training to be held on 7-9 April 2020 in Kuwait but due to travel restrictions imposed in February-March in the region and around the world, the decision was taken to postpone the event and will resume as soon as possible. It is a common opinion that now is more important than ever to share experiences and help build effective and sustainable capacities towards crisis, whether biological in nature or from other CBRN risks.



President of GCC Emergency Management Centre, (Dr Wejdan Al-Qoab awards the GCC Regional Coordinator Adil Radoini.



CoE Project 82, Field visit in Qatar, November 2019.



Head GCC Regional Secretariat, Hussein Alharthei, and the representative of the EU DEL in Kuwait, Irina Gusacenko.



COVID-19 response

During the first wave of the pandemic, the Regional Secretariat was tasked with developing guidance documents and standard operating procedures for NCEMA (National Crisis & Emergency Management Authority, United Arab Emirates) covering areas such as resilience strategies, in the field management and organization, testing protocols, contact tracing and escalation strategies. Throughout the CoE international network, new data, guidelines and information relevant to the medical management of COVID-19 patients and general emergency response have been shared and the CoE Secretariat has also supported the EU Delegation in Abu Dhabi and member state embassies on COVID-19 management and developments.



Project 82, Bahrain field visit – January 2020.



CoE Project 82, field visit in Qatar, November 2019.



Project 82, field visit in Qatar – November 2019.



Project 82, field visit in Qatar – November 2019.



Project 82, Saudi Arabia field visit – November 2019.



Project 82, UAE field visit – January 2020.



Project 82, UAE Field visit – January 2020.



WEBINARS: a platform to exchange experiences among the experts of the CBRN CoE Network

The Regional Secretariat in Abu Dhabi together with NCEMA and Orbrix organised a series of webinars starting from June 2020 to exchange best practices on the management of COVID-19 and establish a weekly seminar series "International Experts Gathering: Preparing for A Second Wave and Lessons Learned during COVID-19" which started on the 17th of September. The webinar series has seen over 1000 participants and over 20 hours of thematic presentations and discussions

in areas such as incident management, physiological impacts and education.



Example of a backdrop used for Webinars



Posters related to the webinars organized by the Regional Secretariat in the GCC region in 2020.



Shamil Field Exercises in Kuwait

Shamil is a large multi-sectoral exercise which is performed each year in Kuwait and entails joint drills and exercises with over 14 government entities from around the country.

Each year it focuses on a specific theme and the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative is committed to attend as an observer.

The exercise provides a wide range of realistic scenarios where both military and civilian agencies cooperate to manage exercises on the basis of realistic scenarios of natural, accidental or intentional CBRN events. Shamil also includes health and security personnel training for scenarios that may include a terrorist event or an emergency evacuation. Each Shamil exercise consists of a Table-Top simulation with all stakeholders, followed by a practical drill to test roles and responsibilities. During 2019, Shamil 5 was held in March with Hazmat as a general theme and presented multiple scenarios such as in the oil and gas industry with rescue services working together with Army CBRN troops. Representatives from the European Commission, UNICRI and the Regional Secretariat in Abu Dhabi were invited as observers by the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate.



Above: Field Exercise Shamil 5 (the CoE Team of observers), March 2019, Kuwait.

Below(various): Shamil 4 & 5 – joint exercise with multiple scenarios from 2018 and 2019 respectively.





A dynamic Initiative on CBRN risks mitigation, and the management of global threats like the COVID-19 pandemic

The European Union CBRN Centres of Excellence (EU CBRN CoE) Initiative was joined by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 2014, with the inauguration of the Regional Secretariat in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and the joining of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Since its launch, the Initiative has expanded to include Kuwait and Bahrain and talks are ongoing with the Sultanate of Oman which would cover the whole region. The EU CBRN CoE in the GCC region since 2017 has regularly cooperated with the GCC Emergency Management Centre and it is currently discussing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to regulate the

coordination and cooperation between the two entities. During this period constant dialogues are being held with the Partner Countries and their relevant stakeholders to align regional priorities in CBRN preparedness and response and identify areas of cooperation through regular round-table meetings and specific events.

Activities in the GCC

The first major event in the GCC was held in February 2016 through the Falcon Table-Top Exercise (TTX), the Inter-Arab Nuclear Detection and Response Exercise in Abu Dhabi. The event saw representatives from Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as from international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) as observers. The

meeting structure and exercises were organised by UNICRI and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) with leading Partner Countries in attendance as subject matter experts.

Chemical & Biological Threats Workshop

In December 2018, a joint training event was held in Kuwait on chemical and biological threats on the request of the GCC Emergency Management Center (GCC-EMC). The event marked the first joint activity in partnership with the GCC-EMC and saw representatives joining from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. The training was conducted by the CoE On-Site Assistance Experts as well as experts from the Joint Research Center (JRC) and an external expert from the UK to discuss the Salisbury Poisoning case. A training software for the



Falcon Exercise, February 2016, Abu Dhabi - UAE.



CoE-GCC EMC Chemical and Biological Threats Workshop, December 2018, Kuwait.



CoE-GCC EMC Chemical and Biological Threats Workshop (TTX), December 2018, Kuwait.

modelling of chemical accidents, internally developed by the JRC was presented. In attendance were national experts in emergency response, civil defense and civil protection from Kuwait as well as the US Army Chemical Corps.

Crisis & Emergency Management Conference (CEMC)

In March 2019, the UAE and the Federal Authority NCEMA (National Crisis and Emergency Management Authority) held the 6th Crisis & Emergency Management Conference in Abu Dhabi.

The objective of the Conference was to raise awareness for and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency responsiveness in the United Arab Emirates and its neighbours as well as to deepen their knowledge of national security and crisis and emergency management. Three experts from the CBRN CoE spoke at the event providing briefings on:

- 1) the European Union General Risk Management Strategy;
- 2) The Structure and Objective of the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence;
- 3) the European Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals Program (REACH). ▣



Crisis & Emergency Managements Conference(CEMC), March 2019, Abu Dhabi - UAE.



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