

eNOTICE - European Network Of CBRN Training Centers

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eNOTICE Position Paper: Policy implications and key lessons

1. An overview of the overall value and impact of the eNOTICE network at the policy level

While the impact of eNOTICE at the institutional level will be discussed and detailed further below by the consortium's partners, we would like to emphasize the overall impact of the eNOTICE network.

At the conclusion of this project, it is clear that eNOTICE has matured to the point where it can contribute to capacity and capability building in the field of institutional and collective preparedness and response to CBRN cross-border events. Having mapped and labelled the capabilities of European training centres (TC), they are now categorised based on their expertise, training and testing capabilities, training infrastructure and specificities, and linked together via a continuously updated online information and communication platform, the so called eNOTICE Community Center (ECC). From now on, this highly visible cooperative network is in a position to develop cross-disciplinary activities that bring together CBRN and safety stakeholders while striving for practitioner interoperability and procedure harmonisation.

The network is open to end users and training professionals, e.g. police, firefighters, civil protection, as well as policy makers and technology suppliers (SME and industries). Furthermore, the network welcomes technology suppliers, innovation providers and researchers to participate in eNOTICE joint activities, especially when the development of their CBRN R&D projects or technology requires a training centre site for demonstrations and trials. This has resulted in eNOTICE establishing fruitful relationships with national industrial trade associations in several European Member States, including Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Military experts (e.g. the NATO Joint CBRN defence COE, Vyškov, Czech Republic, the CBRN Defence Training centre at the War Studies University, Warsaw, Poland, and the Italian NBC Defence School in Rieti, Italy) are actively involved in the project, giving it a unique and highly strategic civil-military dimension. The perspective of such active and very practical civil-military cooperation is to lead to better structured interaction between civil and military actors with clearly defined and equally distributed roles and responsibilities, from within the consortium to an EU, EU-NATO dimension. One example is the opportunity offered to eNOTICE to interact now with the Training and Exercise Panel (TEP) of JCBRND Capability Development Group. Another benefit of this civil-military cooperation example is the current discussion between eNOTICE and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

(OPCW) to investigate the benefits of collaborative efforts in chemical risk assessment and management. The objective will be the exchange of trainees and instructors as well as the sharing of training procedures in order to develop a certified training workflow on a European and international scale.

Given this strategic civil-military positioning and primary focus on CBRN training, eNOTICE has initiated interactions with other large international organisations, such as IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) for radiological training. Regarding the biological threats, whether linked to natural or intentional events, they are constantly increasing. The two joint eNOTICE exercises targeting biological risks (BioGarden-Brussels in June 2018, and Campus Vesta-Ranst in May 2023) have confirmed the complexity of this type of threat. Accordingly, eNOTICE has started collaborating with the GOARN (Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network), the WHO (World Health Organisation), and the ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) to promote mutual exchanges on best practices, as biological training necessitates high-quality, specific training for first responders to provide an appropriate response.

In more specific terms, eNOTICE has evolved into a "dynamic and synergistic interdisciplinary network" that actively seeks cross-border collaboration and interoperability through the coordination of inter-institutional multidisciplinary and multiagency exercises, with the goal of supporting a wide range of complex and diverse training scenarios, such as hybrid threats, emerging threats, combined chemical, biological, and radiological threats, as well as exchanging knowledge, and testing cutting-edge technology at various levels of maturity.

This type of collaborative activity is made possible by the network's diverse range of interconnected expertise and synergies. eNOTICE thus significantly contributes to improving collective and individual preparedness for a cross-border response to CBRN threats, as well as increasing the safety, security and resilience of responders and the population. By focusing training and teaching activities on a standardised cross-border approach, eNOTICE aims to assist in the legal, administrative, and organisational requirements as well as the protocols and standards of neighbouring countries. These objectives support European policies in the field of security, particularly those defined by DG HOME, DG ECHO and DG INTPA. In a similar way, eNOTICE is an excellent source of recommendations for the European Union's R&D programmes, based on regular feedback from CBRN training professionals and practitioners, as well as lessons learned from joint activities.

The high strategic value of eNOTICE is now better perceived by national, European, and extra-European authorities, as well as all other networks of first responder practitioners, at the end of this project and in light of growing political and economic instability, which significantly increases the level of risk. This is demonstrated by the steady increase in collaboration within and outside Europe, invitations to interact and collaborate with other networks, and multiple colloquia with experience exchanges and joint action planning.

2. What were the most important lessons that the eNOTICE learned from its collaborative activities?

Taking part in joint activities such as field exercises, table tops, simulations, serious games, CBRN risk courses and workshops, and observing the CBRN intervention exercises organised by our consortium partners, enabled to identify best practices for preparing and organising stand-alone exercises and exercises combined with tests, validations or demonstrations. eNOTICE has developed a standardised efficient method to facilitate and improve the organisation, evaluation and follow up of these joint activities. One of the achievements was to improve the communication between observers and participants in order to help them in making the different phases of a CBRN exercise more audible and understandable during its execution (e.g. by including narrators familiar with the procedures tested during the exercise). eNOTICE has developed a methodology for the planning, preparation, organisation, and reporting of joint activities, with templates and checklists made available to network members. According to expectations, future CBRN exercise scenarios, whether conducted by eNOTICE or not, are expected to benefit from these methodological improvements.

One of the major outcomes of this project is the pooling-sharing strategy to save resources while maximising results, and the fact that it is bearing fruit. One of the best examples, among others, was the inclusion for the first time of vulnerable people (people with various disabilities such as blindness, paralysis of limbs, children or the elderly thanks to the PROACTIVE project's contribution) in exercises organised by the Fire Department Dortmund Germany, the University of Rome Tor Vergata and the Italian Joint NBC Defence School, and Campus Vesta Belgium in their respective training grounds. It provided a better understanding of the needs of first responders in terms of training and procedures for addressing this specific population group.

Another added value of multidisciplinary field exercises and demonstrations was the incorporation of emerging technologies such as virtual (VR) and augmented reality (AR) into joint CBRN activities. Relayed by the Middle East Technical University of Ankara, Turkey, this is one of the major eNOTICE's areas of interest as AR and VR are increasingly used to safely train first responders to efficiently respond to very dangerous situations. This led eNOTICE to collaborate with VERTIgO and SHOTPROS projects.

Overall, the participation of innovation providers and researchers together with SME and larger business organisations has enabled participants in eNOTICE collaborative activities to evaluate, test, and integrate emerging technologies as part of the global “innovation push dynamic”. The joint activities of eNOTICE provided indeed opportunities for industries and academic innovation to be presented and explained to practitioners. Some eNOTICE-driven innovations have made their way directly into practitioners' workflows. This was highlighted by the most recent joint activity at the Vesta Campus in May 2023, when new toxin and

pathogen identification methods were successfully tested for the first time in the B-LiFE mobile field laboratory and are now part of the laboratory's capacity and capability.

Another significant outcome of this project is the role of eNOTICE as a catalyst for multidisciplinary exchange on CBRN risk management. This is evidenced by the increasing participation of other European projects in eNOTICE activities and objectives, such as H2020-ENCIRCLE, ISF-MELODY, and TRANSTUN, European Space Agency IAP/ARTES-20 B-LiFE, networks of practitioners such as FIRE-IN and NO-FEAR, and other networks part of the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network (UCPKN), or clusters such as RESIST and INCLUDING.

The emergence and global spread of COVID-19 pandemic crisis has caused unprecedented obstacles with far-reaching effects on how people worked and direct implications on the progress of European projects such as eNOTICE. National lockdowns and travel bans have compelled projects participants to use information and communication technologies to ensure business continuity while working remotely. This was a significant obstacle for eNOTICE, as the core of this project is the participation of network participants in joint activities which were primarily ground exercises organised by training centres. However, the eNOTICE consortium took advantage of these general travel bans to organise online round tables on just-in-time training (JiTT) in time in response to emerging crises. These round tables, prompted by the pandemic, revealed the enormous potential offered by eNOTICE in terms of the rapid exchange of vital information, procedures and guidelines, resulting in practical and concrete response to atypical acute crisis situations. The eNOTICE network of multidisciplinary partners and experts expresses this potential, amplified by each of their individual contacts and personal networks. In this regard, eNOTICE has proven to be an exceptional tool for fostering multinational and multidisciplinary exchanges on the most efficient and fastest ways to prepare for and respond to emerging threats and delivers threats-specific JiTT, making it ideal for rapidly adapting training procedures to a changing world with new threats.

3. eNOTICE way ahead

The eNOTICE plan to create a "sustainability model" will evaluate the problems and needs identified throughout the project and propose improvements and tailored solutions.