



**Press Release**  
**ECA/14/55**  
**For immediate release**  
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## **The EU's Centres of Excellence Initiative: this promising initiative to tackle safety threats should be carefully nurtured**

**The Centres of Excellence initiative refers to the establishment of regional platforms in different regions of the world to tackle chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) risks. It is the single biggest measure in the long term component of the Instrument for Stability and was allocated 100 million euro for the period 2010-2013.**

In its special report published today the European Court of Auditors is generally positive about the contribution that these Centres of Excellence can make to mitigate the CBRN risks.

*“Initiatives of this nature have a special significance, at this point in time, due to the increase in terrorist threats and the number of tense political situations worldwide. They provide the framework for close cooperation, as was recently evidenced during the EBOLA crisis in West Africa. As the partners to the initiative frequently face difficult challenges, maintaining their confidence and commitment is a key issue. The Commission should spread its resources carefully in order to maximise the impact of the initiative”, stated Mr Karel Pinxten, the ECA member responsible for this report.*

The initiative is in line with the priorities established in the European security strategy and the EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It provides for the involvement of all stakeholders in the partner countries, thus enhancing the prospects for the sustainability of the actions taken.

The organisational set-up is complex but is generally appropriate. This complexity, however, contributed to delays at the start of the initiative in getting projects up and running. Some of the key elements in the implementation plan such as the “needs assessments” were slow to get off the ground.

The recommendations emanating from the report are intended to ensure that funds are allocated where they are most relevant for EU security and that cooperation and monitoring are improved, particularly at local level.

The Centres of Excellence, consisting of the partner countries in the regions, are supported by Regional Secretariats in the following locations: Algiers, Amman, Manila, Nairobi, Rabat and Tbilisi.

*The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on [www.eca.europa.eu](http://www.eca.europa.eu)*

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## Notes to editors

European Court of Auditors (ECA) Special Reports are published throughout the year, presenting the results of selected audits of specific EU budgetary areas or management topics. This Special Report (17/2014) is entitled “**Can the EU’s Centres of Excellence initiative contribute effectively to mitigating chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks (CBRN) from outside the EU?**”

The main objectives of the EU CBRN centres of excellence initiative are to strengthen the long term national and regional capabilities of the authorities responsible and their administrative infrastructure and to support and reinforce short-term response capabilities. The Centres of Excellence, established in seven different regions of the world, are supported by Regional Secretariats based in one of the partner countries in a region.

The EU auditors assessed whether:

- the initiative was based on a sound analysis of the situation prior to 2010;
- the organisational set-up of the initiative was appropriate to meet identified challenges;
- an appropriate management system was in place and operational.

The findings of the EU auditors are generally positive. The concept behind the initiative was based on sound analysis and fosters cooperation and ownership in the regions. The organisational structures are in general satisfactory, but are quite complex because of the number of different organisations involved.

Management systems have been set up but a number of difficulties were encountered, particularly in the early days of the initiative. It took longer than expected to set up structures in partner countries mainly due to the initiative’s inherent complexity. While elements such as needs assessments were envisaged in the implementation plan these were substantially delayed. As a result, projects were started before needs were assessed and national action plans were drafted.

In the early days the bottom-up approach, whereby projects were initiated by the partner countries, was not always followed. While progress has been made in this regard, great care should be taken not to jeopardise the partner countries’ ownership of the projects and thus hamper the development of the initiative. More involvement from partner countries in the implementation of the projects would also contribute to this ownership and the overall sustainability of the activities undertaken.

As regards support at local level, the auditors noted that there was a need for more technical capacity and involvement from the local delegation staff.

### **The report makes the following recommendations:**

With regard to the initiative’s structure as it is now, the EEAS and the Commission should:

- concentrate EU funding in the areas of most relevance to EU security so to get the most direct benefit;
- increase the capacities of the regional secretariats by adding technical expertise;
- increase the role of the EU delegations, particularly in the countries where a regional secretariat has been set up.

As regards the management of the projects, the Commission should:

- take measures not only to involve partner countries in the initiation of projects but also in their implementation. This would increase their ownership of the measures and ensure their sustainability;
- continue efforts to improve procedures in order to decrease the time gap between project proposals and project implementation;
- improve cooperation between decision-making and implementing bodies, for instance by reviving the coordination committee.