

# **EURO-MED-REACT**

# Civil protection beyond borders in practice

**Context and overall Objectives. Work Performed and Main Achievements. Results and Impacts**

EURO-MED-REACT project funded by the EU, provided for a series of civil protection exercises composed of Table Top Exercise (TTX) in Ukraine and In Moldova, in December 2022 (both in physical setting and via VTC) and full-scale field exercise (FSX) in Moldova in July 2023, as a main event.

These exercises, conducted in progressive approach, developed national civil protection against CBRN threats and natural disasters, with use of Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). They assisted Moldova and Ukraine to align with UCPM and Knowledge Network, develop their national civil protection and enhance critical infrastructure and societal resilience.

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# **Executive Summary:**

**I. EURO-MED-REACT Context and Overall Objectives:** EURO-MED-REACT addressed the urgent need for strengthened civil protection in the face of Russian military aggression against Ukraine. This situation heightened the risk of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) incidents, and natural disasters. The project aimed to enhance national civil protection in Ukraine and Moldova, through a series of exercises, trainings and best practices exchanges. Thus it assisted these countries with the UCPM and Knowledge Network, and fostered cooperation with the EU, neighbouring countries, and international organizations.

The project's overarching objectives were:

1. Strengthening national civil protection capacities in Ukraine and Moldova, improving responses to CBRN threats and natural disasters.
2. Aligning Ukraine and Moldova with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and Knowledge Network for effective international cooperation.
3. Fostering cooperation with EU countries, neighboring nations, and international organizations to enhance civil protection.
4. Elevating civil protection to a core element of national security, public health, and environmental safety.

**II. Work Performed and Main Achievements:** EURO-MED-REACT conducted comprehensive civil protection exercises, including a Table Top Exercise (TTX) in Ukraine in December 2022 and a full-scale field exercise (FSX) in Moldova in July 2023. These exercises aimed to test and refine national and international response plans for CBRN incidents and natural disasters.

Key EURO-MED-REACT achievements include:

1. Development and testing of national response plans aligned with UCPM and EU tools, ensuring effective crisis coordination.
2. Strengthening international cooperation, particularly with UCPM, enhancing the region's crisis readiness.
3. Improving CBRN emergency preparedness in Moldova and Ukraine, from response protocols to international assistance integration.
4. Alignment with international obligations, including UNSC Resolution 1540, CWC, and WHO IHR, ensuring adherence to global standards.
5. Implementing the ICCSS approach, enhancing CBRN risk management through regulatory frameworks and innovative training.
6. Involvement of diverse stakeholders, including local communities, governments, businesses, industries, and academia, for comprehensive civil protection.
7. Establishing partnerships with EU countries, Eastern European neighbors, and international organizations like OPCW, WHO, UN OCHA, and INTERPOL.

**III. Results and impacts:** EURO-MED-REACT's impacts span various levels:

1. National Level: Enhanced civil protection capacities in Moldova and Ukraine, aligning them with UCPM standards for improved crisis response.
2. Regional Level: Strengthened cooperation among Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries in civil protection, addressing growing needs and reducing CBRN threats.
3. International Level: Promotion and implementation of UCPM and Knowledge Network outside the EU, fostering international cooperation, and aligning with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
4. Future Impact: A model for future initiatives, expandable to other regions, raising awareness of chemical threats and improving crisis management.
5. Socio-Economic Impact: Emphasis on preparedness and coordination mitigating economic and social consequences of CBRN incidents and natural disasters.

**In conclusion**, EURO-MED-REACT has effectively addressed the challenges of civil protection in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. By enhancing national capacities and fostering international cooperation, the project facilitated resilient responses to future emergencies.

# **I) Context and overall objectives:**

EURO-MED-REACT, titled "Civil protection beyond borders in practice," was initiated against the backdrop of critical national and regional challenges. The project's context was significantly influenced by the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, resulting in substantial humanitarian and environmental crises. This aggression had a profound impact on Ukraine, leading to increased threats related to chemical, biological, nuclear, radiological (CBRN) incidents, and environmental safety and security.

The overarching objectives of EURO-MED-REACT were shaped by this complex context and included:

1. **Enhancing national civil protection capacities:** EURO-MED-REACT undertook the formidable task of fortifying the civil protection capabilities of Ukraine and Moldova. This encompassed a holistic approach, involving enhancements in response strategies, the streamlining of coordination mechanisms, and the optimization of crisis management procedures. The ultimate aim was to empower these nations to respond adeptly to a spectrum of pressing challenges, ranging from CBRN threats to natural disasters.
2. **Aligning with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and Knowledge Network:** Recognizing the paramount importance of international cooperation in crisis response, EURO-MED-REACT was steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the seamless integration of Ukraine and Moldova into the UCPM and Knowledge Network. This alignment was not merely a procedural formality; it was a strategic imperative that facilitated the rapid mobilization of international cooperation and assistance during times of crisis. Such alignment was fundamental to the project's mission of enabling a more agile and effective response.
3. **Fostering international cooperation and coordination:** EURO-MED-REACT bore witness to the undeniable complexity of contemporary crises. To address these multifaceted challenges, the project placed a premium on collaborative efforts with EU member states, neighboring nations, and esteemed international organizations. By forging robust bonds of cooperation, EURO-MED-REACT sought to create a resilient and interconnected network dedicated to enhancing civil protection and disaster response. The project recognized that collective action was paramount in confronting the evolving landscape of risks.
4. **Elevating civil protection to a core element of national security:** EURO-MED-REACT left no room for doubt regarding the centrality of civil protection in the realm of national security, public health, and environmental preservation. It advocated for a paradigm shift wherein civil protection would be recognized as not just a peripheral concern but as a vital pillar of safeguarding the welfare of the population. This elevation was aimed at fostering a comprehensive approach to addressing the risks posed by CBRN incidents and natural disasters.

**In summary**, EURO-MED-REACT was a vital response to the urgent requirement for improved civil protection in a region characterized by conflict and environmental challenges. Its carefully designed objectives aimed at bolstering national capabilities, fostering international partnerships, promoting cooperation, and emphasizing civil protection as a crucial component of national security. The project's approach was underpinned by a deep understanding of the intricate and continually changing risks facing Ukraine and Moldova.

# **II) Holistic stakeholder engagement and whole-government approach**

The EURO-MED-REACT project brought together a diverse group of members to address civil protection challenges effectively. This consortium included government and emergency response entities: the General Directorate of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic (HZSCZ), the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova (DSMD), host of the Full Scale Field Exercise (FSX), the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations of Romania (GIES), and the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic Section of Crisis Management.

Academic insights were provided by the Lviv State University of Life Safety, Ukraine (LSULS), host of table Top Exercise (TTX), enriching the project with research and educational expertise, training and exercise capacities. The Fire Safety Works and Services Association in Lithuania (PDPA) contributed practical industry solutions and resources. From the Middle East, ASEZA – Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, Jordan, played a crucial role, offering a unique regional perspective.

An active engagement of Volunteer Fire Service Brigades of Poland enabled testing and development of volunteer civil protection within UCPM.

The consortium was expertly led by the International Centre for Chemical Safety and Security (ICCSS) in Warsaw, Poland, ensuring a cohesive and effective approach.

# **III) Work Performed and Main Achievements:**

EURO-MED-REACT conducted an extensive and rigorous program of civil protection exercises with a primary goal of enhancing the region's readiness and response capabilities, based on UCPM. The project's proactive approach included a Table Top Exercise (TTX) held in Ukraine in December 2022, followed by a Full-Scale Field Exercise (FSX) conducted in Moldova in July 2023.

These exercises served as crucial platforms for evaluating and refining both national and international response strategies, covering a spectrum of scenarios, including CBRN incidents and natural disasters.

The project achieved significant milestones and notable achievements, with a core emphasis on effective testing and alignment with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM):

1. **Development and Rigorous Testing of National Response Plans:** EURO-MED-REACT played an important role in the development and rigorous testing of national response plans. These plans were designed to align with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and other vital EU tools. This alignment ensured a coordinated and highly efficient response to a wide range of crises, encompassing CBRN emergencies and natural disasters.
2. **Facilitation of International and Transborder Cooperation:** The project fostered international collaboration, notably through its close coordination with the UCPM. This cooperation significantly elevated the region's readiness and capacity to respond to a natural and made-made emergencies. By strengthening ties with the UCPM, EURO-MED-REACT facilitated the rapid and efficient exchange of essential resources and expertise during critical moments.
3. **Significant Enhancement of Preparedness for CBRN Emergencies:** EURO-MED-REACT played a transformative role in enhancing the preparedness levels of both Moldova and Ukraine to effectively address CBRN emergencies. This encompassed a wide spectrum of improvements, ranging from response protocols to the integration of international assistance mechanisms. The project acted as a catalyst for creating better-equipped and well-trained response teams, ready to confront the challenges of CBRN incidents.
4. **Alignment with Crucial International Obligations:** The project executed its activities with adherence to essential international agreements, including UNSC Resolution 1540, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the WHO International Health Regulations (IHR). This commitment to alignment ensured that responses to CBRN incidents adhered to the highest international standards and obligations, thus safeguarding the region from potential hazards.
5. **Effective Implementation of the EU and ICCSS Approaches:** EURO-MED-REACT successfully implemented the exercise system as developed by the DG ECHO and an innovative approaches towards societal resilience pioneered by the International Centre for Chemical Safety and Security (ICCSS). These approaches focused on establishing regulatory frameworks for managing CBRN incidents and introduced training methodologies and practices. These efforts collectively enhanced the region's ability to assess and mitigate CBRN risks.
6. **Active engagement of Volunteer Fire Service capacities**:

The active participation of Volunteer Fire Service Units in EURO-MED-REACT's Full-Scale Exercise highlighted their pivotal role in civil protection. They demonstrated rapid response capabilities, specialized expertise in firefighting and medical support, local knowledge, and resource augmentation, enriching the disaster response toolkit. Recognizing their effectiveness, it is essential to consider their integration into broader civil protection frameworks like the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and and the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP). This inclusion could enhance local response, fill skill gaps, ensure community-centered disaster management, and expand the pool of available resources.

1. **Establishment of Vital Stakeholder Partnerships:** EURO-MED-REACT strategically forged pivotal partnerships with an extensive array of stakeholders. These valuable connections encompassed European Union member states, neighboring Eastern European countries, and esteemed international organizations such as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), and INTERPOL. These broad-based partnerships significantly expanded the project's reach and impact, culminating in the creation of an expansive network of expertise and resources.
2. **Innovation and Technological Advancements: Enhancing Crisis Response:** EURO-MED-REACT embraced innovation and cutting-edge technologies to elevate crisis response capabilities, fostering a paradigm shift in civil protection efforts. The project's strategic integration of innovative tools, notably drones and thermovision cameras paired with advanced communication systems, proved to be a game-changer in assessing and managing critical situations on-site. These technological advancements empowered decision-makers with real-time information and greatly improved response effectiveness.

**Drones: Aerial Insights for Informed Decision-Making**

Drones played a pivotal role in EURO-MED-REACT's innovative approach. These unmanned aerial vehicles soared above crisis zones, providing invaluable aerial insights. The use of drones served several critical purposes:

**Rapid Assessment**: Drones facilitated swift and comprehensive assessments of disaster-affected areas, including those impacted by CBRN incidents. This rapid data collection was essential for understanding the extent of damage and the immediate needs of affected communities.

**Situational Awareness**: Equipped with high-resolution cameras, drones delivered real-time imagery and videos from the ground, allowing responders to gain a clear understanding of the situation's dynamics. This situational awareness was instrumental in making informed decisions.

**Safety**: Drones also enhanced safety by reducing the need for personnel to enter hazardous zones. They could access hard-to-reach or dangerous areas, ensuring that responders did not face unnecessary risks.

**Thermovision Cameras and Advanced Communication Tools: Enhancing Precision**

Thermovision cameras integrated with advanced communication tools were another technological leap in EURO-MED-REACT's arsenal. These tools combined thermal imaging with real-time communication capabilities, offering several advantages:

**Enhanced Assessment**: Thermovision cameras allowed responders to detect heat signatures, even in low visibility conditions. This was particularly useful for locating survivors in disaster-stricken areas or identifying potential chemical or radiological hotspots.

**Improved Decision-Making**: The integration of communication tools ensured that the information captured by thermovision cameras was swiftly transmitted to decision-makers. This real-time data was instrumental in making precise and timely decisions, including resource allocation and evacuation plans.

**Coordination**: These tools facilitated seamless coordination among response teams, enabling them to work cohesively in challenging environments. The ability to share real-time data enhanced overall situational awareness and response coordination.

**In conclusion**, EURO-MED-REACT's commitment to conducting comprehensive exercises and its focus on effective testing of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) stand as major achievement. The project not only supported the alignment of Ukraine and Moldova with the UCPM but also implemented the UCPM in full during the project exercises. These accomplishments have left a lasting and transformative impact, establishing a foundation for better responses to the challenges presented by CBRN incidents and natural disasters. The project significantly enhanced the ability of Moldova and Ukraine to use effectively UCPM, transboundary and international cooperation. Thus the project enhanced national civil protection and safety and security of communities within Moldova and Ukraine.

Finally, the project implementation confirmed the importance of the DG ECHO civil protection exercises on UCPM and Knowledge Network for national and regional cooperation. The preparatory, conduct and lessons learned process for the exercises, enable an integrated and comprehensive analysis, testing and improvement of the whole cycle of national civil protection, and use of transboundary and international tools.

# **III. Results and Impacts:**

EURO-MED-REACT has delivered resounding results and impactful outcomes across multiple levels, showcasing its pivotal role in elevating civil protection in Eastern Europe and the Middle East while enhancing and implementing UCPM and Knowledge Network:

1. **Advancements at the National Level**: Moldova and Ukraine have witnessed substantial progress in bolstering their national civil protection capacities, primarily due to EURO-MED-REACT's tireless efforts. These enhancements align these nations seamlessly with the rigorous standards embodied by the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). This alignment is not merely a procedural formality; it signifies that Moldova and Ukraine now possess the capability to respond with precision and speed to the intricate challenges posed by CBRN threats and natural disasters. These augmented national capacities form a bedrock of heightened national security and the safeguarding of public health. This project developed and implemented **Guidelines for Civil Protection Students and Teachers in Countries from Outside EU.** These guidelines focus on training related to UCPM and its activation in a testing environment, offering a valuable resource for those involved in civil protection education and exercises.
2. **Regional Cooperation and Coordination**: The project has played an instrumental role in fortifying cooperation and coordination among Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries in the realm of civil protection. This regional-specific focus has been paramount in addressing the urgent necessity for civil protection enhancement and the mitigation of CBRN threats. EURO-MED-REACT, through its dedication to these efforts, has significantly enhanced the collective resilience of the region, equipping it to confront potential crises with resolve and efficacy. The project assisted in the establishment of **the Regional Exercise and Training Network in Civil Protection and Societal Resilience.** This network aims to bolster disaster response capabilities and societal resilience in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. It promotes cooperation among various stakeholders, integrating societal resilience into every aspect of disaster management. The ICCSS plays a leading role in coordinating the network's activities.
3. **International Outreach**: EURO-MED-REACT's influence extends far beyond the confines of the European Union. The project extends its reach to neighboring countries in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, nurturing international cooperation. This inclusive approach aligns seamlessly with the principles enshrined in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, underlining a global commitment to disaster resilience. Importantly, the project's alignment with the UCPM has been a linchpin in facilitating this international outreach, as it ensures a common platform and language for collaboration.
4. **Blueprint for Future Initiatives**: EURO-MED-REACT's notable achievements serve as an invaluable blueprint for future endeavors. The developed methodologies and approaches, put to the test through practical implementation, offer a robust model that can be efficiently replicated and implemented in other countries and regions grappling with similar challenges. This not only addresses immediate needs but also contributes to a broader global awareness of chemical threats, ultimately strengthening the capacity for crisis management and response on a global scale. The UCPM's role in this process cannot be overstated, as it serves as the benchmark for harmonizing responses across borders.
5. **Socio-Economic Mitigation**: EURO-MED-REACT's focus on preparedness and coordination has the potential to mitigate the severe socio-economic consequences often associated with CBRN incidents and natural disasters. By streamlining response mechanisms and enhancing readiness, the project has laid a robust foundation for reducing the economic and social toll exacted by such events on affected communities. Once again, the UCPM serves as the linchpin in this process, ensuring that the region is well-prepared to respond collectively to crises that transcend borders.
6. **Expanding UCPM and ECPP with the Volunteer Fire Service and Medical capacities**: Expanding the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP) with the inclusion of Volunteer fire service units and medical capacities has been a pivotal outcome of EURO-MED-REACT. Their active and effective participation in the Full-Scale Exercise (FSX) conducted as part of the project emphasized their substantial relevance and applicability within these frameworks. These Volunteer fire service units demonstrated their ability to serve as a valuable asset in the civil protection toolbox, offering a responsive and skilled force capable of addressing a wide spectrum of emergencies, including natural disasters and man-made incidents. This experience underscores the imperative to integrate the capacities of Volunteer fire services into the UCPM and ECPP, recognizing their potential to significantly enhance emergency response capabilities. Their successful involvement serves as a testament to the diverse resources that can be leveraged through these mechanisms, ultimately strengthening the overall civil protection network.

**7.** **Enhancing innovation in civil protection**: EURO-MED-REACT placed a strong emphasis on enhancing innovation within the realm of civil protection. The project's commitment to promoting innovation has yielded significant results, particularly in crisis response. Notably, the integration of cutting-edge technologies such as drones and thermovision cameras, combined with advanced communication systems, has facilitated the assessment of crisis situations, decision-making processes, and response coordination. These technological advancements not only enhanced the project's overall effectiveness but also set a precedent for future civil protection initiatives. They underscore the critical importance of embracing innovation as a means to safeguard communities and elevate crisis management capabilities, ultimately contributing to more robust and efficient civil protection efforts.

**In summary**, EURO-MED-REACT emerges as an exemplary success story of UCPM promotion and implementation outside EU. EURO-MED-REACT effectively addressed, in training and exercise environment, the critical challenges of civil protection, CBRN threats, and natural disasters in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. EURO-MED-REACT influence resonates through augmented national capacities, the promotion of international cooperation, the establishment of a replicable framework for future initiatives, and the potential to alleviate the socio-economic repercussions of crises. Notably, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) stands as a central element in the project's achievements, as it provides the essential foundation for harmonizing responses, not only at the national level but also across borders, ensuring a unified and effective approach to crisis management.