

Verifying the Biological Weapons Convention: Interview with Sonia Drobysz



Sonia Drobysz is the Programme Director for VERTIC's National Implementation Measures programme where she works on the national implementation of international instruments related to nuclear security, UNSC Resolution 1540 and the Biological Weapons Convention. Sonia holds a PhD in international law from University Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne. Formerly, she was Associate Research Fellow at the French Centre for International Security and Arms Control Studies (CESIM) where she worked and published on the IAEA

VERTIC supports the development, implementation and verification of international agreements and related initiatives. What are VERTIC's main efforts in the framework of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, particularly with regard to biological weapons?

VERTIC's efforts in non-proliferation of biological weapons and biosecurity focus on both research and assistance as part of our wider interaction with governmental, diplomatic, technical, scientific and non-governmental communities. Our National Implementation Measures Programme advises states worldwide on the legislative implementation of their obligations from international instruments including the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWTC) and related provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1540. VERTIC's legislative assistance includes raising awareness on international obligations related to biological weapons and biosecurity, analysing national legislation and providing drafting advice. Last year, VERTIC's Verification and Monitoring Programme worked to strengthen the international community's capacity to investigate alleged uses of biological weapons, focusing on the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism. We developed a scenario-based tabletop exercise involving practitioners, public health experts and former field investigators. We also commissioned research on new technologies and lessons learned from recent international investigations.

The Meeting of States Parties to the BWTC, held in December 2019, witnessed the re-emergence of the debate on the establishment of a verification mechanism. In your view, what are the main obstacles to the creation of such a mechanism?

While verification was discussed during the latest Meeting of Experts and Meeting of

Parties, the debate remains divisive and creating a verification mechanism for the BWTC does not seem politically feasible today. However, constructive discussions should continue, drawing on the existing wealth of analyses and recommendations, as well as new research, on compliance assurances. VERTIC welcomes opportunities to contribute its verification expertise to such discussions and to initiatives that aim to achieve consensus on BWTC verification standards. In the meantime, the effectiveness of the core non-proliferation and biosecurity obligations of the Convention can be strengthened through existing transparency and confidence building mechanisms such as comprehensive reporting and the adoption of national laws and regulations to prohibit and prevent activities with biological weapons.

How do you assess the EU's position and what can the EU do to further contribute to this effort?

The EU acknowledges that verification remains a fundamental element of a complete and effective regime, but recognises that there is no consensus. While it is not a replacement for verification, we welcome the EU's support to enhance transparency and building confidence in BWTC effective implementation. The EU should continue to develop and contribute to training and assistance activities within and beyond its borders through its delegations and in coordination with relevant international, regional and national stakeholders. EU Council Decision 2019/97 of 21 January 2019 in support of the Convention is an example of such an important effort, as are the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence through their long-term and regional approach. VERTIC contributes to both initiatives in our role as legislative experts.

A DOWN-TO-EARTH APPROACH TO ARMS CONTROL IN OUTER SPACE

Recent arms control and disarmament debates have increasingly focused on outer space.

This should come as no surprise. The anti-satellite missile tests by China in 2007 and India in 2019 showed the ability of new actors to target a satellite. Both events also produced a significant amount of space debris, one of the main factors that threatens the long-term sustainability of the space environment. Coupled with fears that the next major conflict will begin in, or extend to, orbit, the arms control community has recognised the need to limit the development and use of anti-satellite capabilities.

Some experts and policy-makers have focused on what is perceived as the militarisation of space, and on efforts to prevent this scenario from happening. They argue that keeping space as sanctuary will somehow prevent conflict in orbit. This approach, however, is at odds with reality. Space has already been a military environment for decades and military establishments generally refer to it as a warfighting or operational domain. Space has already also been de-facto weaponised and is an integral part of the "kill chain".

Focusing on stopping the militarization or weaponization of space takes effort away from more realistic discussions that could lead to, for instance, agreements to limit certain potentially dangerous technologies. There have been moves to produce new international agreements that would ban the placement of weapons in space and supplement the Outer Space Treaty. However, substantial political obstacles prevent the implementation of such plans, and importantly there is not enough recognition of the difficulty in defining a space weapon. A number of states possess not only kinetic weapons but also non-kinetic capabilities that can deny or degrade space assets as well as target up-and-down-links and ground infrastructure. Rather than overambitious attempts to prevent the militarisation or weaponization of space, arms control discussions must focus on specific capabilities that might threaten orbital stability.

Alexandra Stickings

Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) / EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Network



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Latest Network Publications

Can Nuclear Disarmament Strengthen Global Security? Building a Cycle of Trust, Lyndon Burford, King's College London, 2020

How U.S. Sanctions Affect Europe's Leverage in the Iran Deal Dispute Resolution Mechanism, Darya Dolzikova, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), 2020

The Destabilizing Danger of Cyberattacks on Missile Systems, Patricia Lewis, Chatham House, 2019

The Final Frontier: Prospects for Arms Control in Outer Space, Sergio Marchisio, European Leadership Network, 2019

Network Calls

CALL FOR INTERNSHIP

The Peace Research Center Prague is looking for an intern for its "Non-Proliferation and Disarmament" projects. The internship is offered within the framework of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Internship programme, an educational initiative by the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium.

The internship is open to junior diplomats, Master's students, PhD students and post-docs from EU Member States and non-European countries. The intern is expected to conduct research and produce a final essay on a topic related to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Duration: three months (13 weeks)
Starting date: September 2020
Location: Prague,
Financial support: € 500 a month
Application deadline: 30 March 2020
More info: krystof.kucmas@fsv.cuni.cz

EU INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

The European Union delivers statements during the first meeting of the IAEA's Board of Governors

During the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Board of Governors, held in Vienna on 9-13 March 2020, the EU delivered a set of statements reiterating its support for the agency's activities and praising the agency's efforts to ensure Member States' right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy while underscoring the importance of nuclear safety and security.

The [IAEA](#) was created in 1957 to develop cooperation between countries in the field of nuclear energy, promoting safe, secure and peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology, while guarding against its weaponization. The [Board of Governors](#), which meets five times a year, approves safeguards agreements and issues recommendations for the IAEA's General Conference, advising on financial statements, programme of work and budget.

The EU commended the IAEA for its work in reinforcing the [Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) through the verification of the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In this vein, the EU noted that nuclear science and technology constitute important drivers for improved health and prosperity, citing their contribution to the functioning of medical radioisotopes and research reactors. The EU stated that these properties enhance the prospect for Member States to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EU also welcomed the launching of the [IAEA Low Enriched Uranium \(LEU\) Bank in Kazakhstan](#) as an instrument to assure the supply of nuclear fuel for member states.

In light of the increasing global demand for nuclear energy, the EU also delivered a statement on the importance of strengthening nuclear safety and security, noting that the "EU's long-term commitment to nuclear safety" is demonstrated by its financial contribution through its Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC) towards third countries.

For more information: [EU Statements on the occasion of the IAEA Board of Governors](#)

NETWORK NEWS

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers Series

As part of its mandate, defined in Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/299 of 26 February 2018, the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium is publishing a new series of Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Policy Papers.

The latest paper is authored by Antoine Bondaz, Director of the Korea Programme and a Research Fellow at the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS).

From Critical Engagement to Credible Commitments: A Renewed Eu Strategy for The North Korean Proliferation Crisis

Summary:

The North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile programmes represent the most serious proliferation challenge facing the European Union (EU) and its member states. Despite the summits between US President Trump and North Korean leader Kim, the threat to the long-term economic and security interests of the EU persists. It is essential that the EU and its member states move towards implementing a proactive strategy of credible commitments in four areas: political engagement, non-proliferation, the implementation of restrictive measures and engagement with the North Korean people. Such a renewed strategy should be coordinated by a newly created post of a EU Special Representative for North Korea.

Read the full paper [here](#)
Previous papers can be found [here](#)