



Report on the
Preliminary Planning Meeting
for Exercise BULGARIA 2025

16-18 September 2024
Sofia, Bulgaria

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this Preliminary Planning Meeting was to have a mutual understanding between the co-organisers, Bulgaria and NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), on the planning, conduct and evaluation of an emergency response field and command post exercise in Bulgaria.

The participants touched upon all the facets of the planning and conduct of an emergency management exercise. It is expected that the exercise could attract ca. 2000+ participants and 18-25 international teams.

During the meeting, the participants visited potential bases of operations and an exercise site near the city of Montana.

Deliverables

- Exercise name and logo – met.
- Tentative exercise objectives – met.
- Agreement on the planning, conduct and evaluation of a NATO EADRCC Emergency Management Field and Command Post Exercise – met.
- Tentative agenda for the Main Planning Conference - postponed to Initial Visit of the Core Planning Team.

Meeting agenda

The agenda below was slightly amended during the meeting as to ensure maximum availability of the participants. Yet, the whole agenda was addressed.

Start	End	Topic
16 Sep 09:00:00	09:30:00	Opening remarks & introduction
09:30:00	09:40:00	Administrative arrangements
09:40:00	10:40:00	Overview of the EADRCC
10:40:00	11:00:00	Coffee break
11:00:00	11:30:00	Overview of the EADRCC (continued)
11:30:00	12:30:00	Emergency Management Structure of the Republic of Bulgaria
12:30:00	14:00:00	Lunch break
14:00:00	15:00:00	Exercise guidelines
15:00:00	15:30:00	Support facilitated by the EADRCC
15:30:00	16:00:00	Exercise name and logo
16:00:00	16:30:00	Exercise objectives

17 Sep 09:00:00	11:00:00	Travel to City of Montana
11:00:00	11:20:00	Training centre (presentation)
11:20:00	12:30:00	Training centre and potential working sites (tour)
12:30:00	14:00:00	Lunch break
14:00:00	14:30:00	Exercise elements
14:30:00	15:00:00	Lead-in scenario
15:00:00	15:30:00	Base of Operations and exercise sites
15:30:00	17:30:00	Travel back to Sofia

18 Sep 09:00:00	09:30:00	Memorandum of Understanding, financial arrangements, budget
09:30:00	10:00:00	Anticipated participation: IOs, NGOs, ...
10:00:00	10:30:00	Coffee break
10:30:00	11:30:00	Timeline and events sequence
11:30:00	12:30:00	Exercise logistics
12:30:00	14:00:00	Lunch break
14:00:00	14:30:00	VIP event / observer programme
14:30:00	14:45:00	Real media
14:45:00	15:45:00	Exercise instructions (introduction)
15:45:00	16:00:00	Main Planning Conference
16:00:00	16:15:00	Blind spots
16:15:00	16:30:00	Any other business

Exercise timeline

- 16-18 September 2024: Preliminary Planning Meeting (Sofia, Bulgaria)
- 25 September: signature of the Declaration of Intent (NATO HQ, Belgium)
- 4-8 November: Initial Visit of the Core Planning Team (Montana, Bulgaria)
- 14-16 January 2025: Main Planning Conference (Sofia, Bulgaria)
- 11-13 February: Intermediate Visit of the Core Planning Team (tbc, Montana, Bulgaria)
- 20-22 May: Final Planning Conference (Sofia, Bulgaria)
- 25 July: Release of the exercise instructions (on-line)
- 19-21 August: Final Visit of the Core Planning Team (Montana, Bulgaria)
- 8-12 September: Exercise conduct (Montana, Bulgaria)
- February 2026: Lessons Identified Conference (tbc, CMDR CoE, Bulgaria)

Exercise name and logo

The English name of the exercise is “BULGARIA 2025”. Where appropriate, the following expression will be used: “България 2025 BULGARIA”.

The exercise logo was also agreed:



Exercise objectives

The hosts tabled the following tentative exercise objectives for the Republic of Bulgaria:

1. Build resilience through improved disaster preparedness, planning, prevention and response, and strengthen the Republic of Bulgaria its capability to manage complex emergencies.
2. Test host nation support procedures and capacity of Bulgaria and outline the way to improve it.
3. Exchange of knowledge and good practices on the coordination and response capacities of the participating states and organizations.

Bulgaria will reword objective (2) as to clarify it is host nation support both to international civil and military responders in an emergency.

Objectives for NATO:

1. Help Bulgaria, other Allies and partners improve their preparedness, ability and interoperability to manage emergencies.
2. Help Bulgaria, other Allies build up their national and collective resilience in tangible ways, in line with the seven Baseline Requirements.
3. Build up cooperation between civilian and military actors in responding to a range of crises.
4. Encourage regional cooperation between Allies and partners, and with NATO, including by practicing the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Facilitation of Vital Civil Cross Border Transport.
5. Contribute to NATO's defence capacity-building support to partners, especially those who have participation in EADRCC exercises as ITPP goals (Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Egypt, Georgia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Tunisia, and Mongolia).
6. Familiarise NATO Civil Experts with the EADRCC and explore new ways that Civil Experts can support NATO through the EADRCC.
7. Send a public signal to audiences in Allied and partner countries about the value of cooperation through NATO.

The objectives shall be finalised during the Initial Visit of the Core Planning Team.

Exercise elements

The Directorate General Fire Safety and Civil Protection (DG FSCP) wishes to practice the following exercise elements:

- Urban Search and Rescue;
- Rope rescue;
- Host Nation Support;
- CBRN;
- Public Information, media and countering disinformation campaigns (incl. fake media messages);
- Water search and rescue (night-time operations);
- Emergency Medical Teams, also with the Balkan Medical Task Force (tbc);
- Work with cultural heritage sites;
- Activation of EADRCC;

The DG FSCP does not want to exercise:

- Illegal migration;
- Counter-terrorism;
- Mine evacuation; and
- MedEvac

Bulgaria will also consider additional exercise elements brought forward by the participants to the Main Planning Conference.

Memorandum of Understanding

On Wednesday 25 September, DG FSCD and DASG OPS (strategic leader for the EADRCC) will sign a declaration of intent committing to jointly organise the exercise.

Way ahead:

- EADRCC meets with the Office of the Legal Advisor and the Office of the Financial Controller to revise the draft Memorandum of Understanding. This revised MoU is then shared with Bulgaria for their comments. The MoU should reflect modalities through which the EADRCC could reimburse Bulgaria for eligible costs incurred for the preparation and organisation of the exercise, through the CMDR CoE, including an advance payment in 2024 to the CMDR CoE.
- These modalities will be further specified in a separate project document / contract between NATO and the CMDR CoE.
- Before end of October, the Memorandum of Understanding is ready for signature.

Main Planning Conference

The Main Planning Conference is rescheduled for 14-16 January 2025 due to expected government formation period following the national elections on 27 October 2024.

Two venues for this conference were discussed: the Astoria Grand Hotel in Sofia, Bulgaria, and the Boyana Residence. Confirmation of the venue will be made by the Bulgarian side, and the venue will be booked through the CMDR CoE.

The meeting (as well as the Final Planning Conference) will be conducted in English, with simultaneous interpretation into Bulgarian. Those participants who do not speak English or Bulgarian will be advised to bring their own interpreters (at their expense).

The co-hosts can count on the CMDR CoE for organisational support. Registrations will be done through the CMDR CoE collaborative platform, which will also host a website dedicated to the exercise.

The organizers expect 100-120 international participants to this conference.

The invite for the Main Planning Conference will be issued by the EADRCC on 12 November 2024. Bulgaria will share the invitation with national and regional participants.

Base of Operations and exercise sites

The meeting participants gathered at the National Training Centre of the DG FSCP in Montana.

Commissioner Raykov provided introductory remarks, after which the participants were briefed on the capabilities of the Training Centre. The centre is very well equipped to host the exercise management modules, such as LEMA, OSOCC, PIC, DISTAFF, evaluators, role players, media students, ...

The centre is also capable of hosting CBRN, USAR, WSAR and rope rescue operations. Wild-water rescue operations can be simulated with pumps.

The second exercise site will be the "international hotel" (not visited). It consists of a multi-floor hotel building, a summer restaurant and two-floor parking.

The proposed locations for the Base of Operations seem too small. Bulgaria and EADRCC will work together on the issue at the Initial Visit of the Core Planning Team.

Bulgaria will prepare additional exercise sites by the Initial Visit of the Core Planning Team. Additional exercise sites could be a tunnel (at 14km of BoO), a museum (22km), a plant (Montana) and water tower at the dam (Montana).

Participants will not be escorted by the police when travelling between the Base of Operations and exercise sites. They will also not be allowed to use their siren and blue lights. This will be recorded in the exercise instructions.

Lead-in Scenario

The lead-in scenario will start with a 6.5 M_w magnitude approximately 140km north of Sofia (Montana).

There will be casualties, destroyed roads, interrupted telecommunications and fires. 30% of the buildings will be partially damaged, and 10% completely.

The Reception-Departure-Centre (RDC) will be located at 1.5km from the training centre. The “first INSARAG Classified? arriving team” should set up the RDC.

For its training objectives, the EADRCC will require scenario injects related to climate change, population movements, disinformation.

Media

During the exercise only selected media will be allowed: 3-4 persons identified by Bulgaria and a NATO TV team. PPI are mandatory for all “real media in the rubbles”.

Role-player media will be visually distinct from real media, as to ensure participants know whom they’re talking with.

VIP

It is important that VIPs get to see their teams at work.

Bulgaria will internally brainstorm on having a 2-day event with a visit to the exercise sites and eventually 1 or 2 panel discussions.

The VIP will be hosted in Sofia. Transfer to the exercise sites will be done with cars or buses. Some nations might provide their own transport.

VVIPs (President, Prime Minister, SecGen, Deputy SecGen) will be transported by air to the prospective exercise location.

Exercise instructions

The meeting agreed to keep the exercise instructions as short as possible. Participants will be further informed using “participant booklets”. Booklets will be made for participants, DISTAFF and evaluators, and VIPs. They will be concise in format (A5) and translated into Bulgarian.

The first draft of the Exercise Instructions will be created during the Initial Visit of the Core Planning Team. Bulgaria will prepare relevant information.

Blind spots

The meeting identified two potential sensitive participants: Israel and Kosovo.

Any other business

Bulgaria can use the hashtags #EADRCC and #NATO in their social media communications regarding the exercise. The EADRCC will provide further guidance on the use of NATO hashtags at the Initial Visit of the Core Planning Teams (we prefer #WeAreNATO rather than NATO).