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Releasable to partners and international organizations

28 February 2025

CALLING NOTICE
OPS(EADRCC)(2025)0002

TO: : See Distribution
CC : Piers CAZALET, Director, Defence Security and Cooperation Directorate,
Operations Division
FROM : Irina NOVAKOVA, Head - Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre
(EADRCC), Operations Division
SUBJECT : Invitation to the Final Planning Conference for the EADRCC Emergency
Management Exercise "BULGARIA 2025"

1. NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and the Directorate General Fire Safety and Civil Protection (DG FSCP) of the Ministry of Interior, Republic of Bulgaria are organizing the 20th NATO EADRCC Emergency Management Exercise "BULGARIA 2025" ("the Exercise"). It will take place in Montana, Bulgaria from 7 to 12 September 2025, and will be accompanied by a facilitated strategic discussion in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 09 September 2025.

2. The purpose of this notice is to invite your Nation, Command, Organisation or emergency response entities to attend the Final Planning Conference for this exercise, and to request preliminary details of your intentions to participate in the exercise. This declaration of intent is not binding; it will inform host nation planning and ensure that all participants receive the necessary support during the exercise.

3. **To declare your nation or organisation's preliminary intent and logistical requirements to participate in the exercise, please fill in [this form](#) no later than 31 March 2025. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.**

FINAL PLANNING CONFERENCE

4. The Final Planning Conference for the exercise will take place from 20 to 22 May 2025, in Sofia, Bulgaria. It will be hosted at [Grand Hotel Astoria](#), 8 Totleben Blvd, Sofia. On 23 May 2025, participants can visit the exercise training ground in Montana. This visit is optional.

5. The Final Planning Conference aims to update participants on exercise preparations, understand their needs, develop the exercise scenario and instructions, and provide information on host nation support, border crossing procedures and other details.

6. **At the Final Planning Conference, NATO Allies, partners and international organisations will be invited to confirm their level of participation in Exercise BULGARIA**

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2025, specify their requirements, and discuss how best to meet their training objectives individually and collectively through this exercise. Following the Conference, participants will be asked to provide information of their intended participation in a detailed form.

7. **Unless you are applying for NATO funding (see below),** please register for the Final Planning Conference no later than **30 April 2025**, by using the following [link](#). Then, click “REGISTER NOW” at the end of the page. In your registration form, please indicate whether you are interested to visit the Exercise training ground in Montana following the Final Planning Conference (on 23 May 2025). After your registration is confirmed, and once this information is available, please add your arrival/departure dates and times via the ‘edit’ function in the platform. This will allow the organisers to arrange your transportation between the airport and the hotel.
8. The agenda for the Final Planning Conference is available in Annex 1.

INTERPRETATION:

9. The working language for the meeting is English. Interpretation is not available. Documents and presentations will not be translated.

VISA:

10. Participants must ensure they have a valid visa, if needed, and a corresponding entry document for the duration of the Conference. The EADRCC can provide a support letter to obtain the visa for those who need it. If you need a visa, please indicate it in the corresponding section in the registration form in the platform or send your request to nato.eadrcc@hq.nato.int, no later than 30 April 2025.
11. Bulgaria is a member of the Schengen Zone. An overview of the visa requirements to enter Schengen can be found on the website of the Bulgarian Government. A list of the nationalities requiring a visa can be found at this link.
12. The Bulgarian point of contact for visa issues is Mr Martin Nikolov, mpnikolov@mvr.bg, +359 883 492 805.

ACCOMMODATION:

13. Unless you are applying for NATO funding (see below), you are requested to arrange your own accommodation.
14. A favourable rate at Grand Hotel Astoria in Sofia (event venue, details above) is available for conference participants. If booking a room at that hotel, please use the reduction code **BULGARIA2025FPC**. Major credit and debit cards are accepted.

TRANSPORT:

15. The Host Nation (DG FSCP) will organize free transport between Vasil Levski Sofia Airport

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and Grand Hotel Astoria on Monday 19 May 2025 and Thursday/Friday afternoon 22/23 May 2025. Participants staying in other locations are invited to arrange their own transportation.

16. The Host Nation will also organize an optional visit and transport from Grand Hotel Astoria to the Exercise training area in Montana and back, on 23 May 2025. Participants interested to visit the exercise site should specify this clearly in their registration for the Final Planning Conference, no later than 30 April 2025.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

17. All costs for participation in the Final Planning Conference will be borne by the participants of the sending nations.

18. Limited NATO funds are available to subsidise the costs for visa, air travel, accommodation and lunches for up to two participants from each partner country eligible for NATO financial support (see eligibility criteria in AC/98(EAPC)N(2012)0010-MULTIREF). No other expenses will be reimbursed.

19. Requests for financial assistance must be addressed by email to nato.eadrcc@hq.nato.int not later than **1 April 2025**.

20. These requests should contain dates and times of departure and return travel, as well as the anticipated travel costs. Following written agreement by the EADRCC, participants who are being covered through NATO funds will not need to register online, nor book their tickets or hotel rooms. This will all be arranged through NATO.

BACKGROUND:

21. The exercise BULGARIA 2025 will be NATO's 20th civilian emergency management exercise. It will take place in the state-of-the art Professional Training Centre for first responders in Montana (some 110km from Bulgaria's capital Sofia).

22. The lead-in scenario is included at Annex 2.

23. The exercise will focus on enhancing resilience, improving preparedness, and fostering civil-military cooperation in emergency response. It will bring together participants from NATO Allies, partner nations, and international organizations, to enhance their ability to respond effectively to a large-scale, complex emergency.

24. **The primary objectives** of NATO EADRCC Emergency Management Exercise "BULGARIA 2025" are:

24.1. Build resilience and interoperability through improved emergency preparedness, planning, prevention and response, and strengthen the capability of NATO Allies and partners to manage complex crises and respond to security challenges, including climate change and hybrid threats.

24.2. Exchange of knowledge and good practices on the coordination and response capacities of the participating states and organizations.

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- 24.3. Build up cooperation between civilian and military actors in responding to a range of crises.
 - 24.4. Encourage cooperation between Allies and partners, and with NATO, including on facilitation of cross-border transport.
 - 24.5. Contribute to NATO's defence capacity-building support to partners.
 - 24.6. Test and improve Bulgaria's host nation support capacities.
 - 24.7. Send a public signal to audiences in Allied and partner countries about the value of cooperation through NATO.
25. The Main Planning Conference for the exercise took place from 14-17 January 2025 in Sofia, Bulgaria. It had more than 170 participants from 54 entities.
26. On the basis of participants' feedback at the Main Planning Conference, the exercise will feature a range of emergency response disciplines, including:
- 26.1. Civil-Military Cooperation
 - 26.2. Host nation support
 - 26.3. Urban search and rescue (USAR), including cultural heritage preservation, and rope rescue
 - 26.4. Water search and rescue (WSAR)
 - 26.5. Chemical, radiological and nuclear incident management
 - 26.6. Emergency medical response, including EMT-1 (fixed and rolling) and EMT-2 capabilities
 - 26.7. Information threats and media relations
27. The Final Planning Conference is essential for potential participants to share their needs and priorities.
28. The upcoming exercise planning milestones are:
- 28.1. Final Planning Conference: 20-22 May 2025 in Sofia, Bulgaria;
 - 28.2. NATO EADRCC Emergency Management Exercise "BULGARIA 2025": 7-12 September 2025 in Montana, Bulgaria (accompanied by a facilitated strategic discussion in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 09 September 2025)
 - 28.3. Lessons Identified Conference: early 2026 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

(Signed) Irina NOVAKOVA
Head, EADRCC
Operations Division

2 Annexes:
Annex 1: Agenda of the Final Planning Conference
Annex 2: Lead-in scenario for "BULGARIA 2025"

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Original: English

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AGENDA
FINAL PLANNING CONFERENCE
NATO EADRCC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EXERCISE
“BULGARIA 2025”,
20-22 MAY 2025, SOFIA, BULGARIA

MONDAY 19 MAY 2025

-	Arrival day
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TUESDAY 20 MAY 2025

09:00h - 09:30h	Registration
09:30h - 10:00h	Opening of the Conference in Plenary Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening remarks • Administrative arrangements • Family photo
10:00h - 10:30h	Coffee break
10:30h - 11:00h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda of the conference • Desired outcomes of the conference
11:00h - 12:00h	Plenary Session 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NATO EADRCC • Bulgaria’s Emergency Management System • Ministry of Defence - Role and capacities in disaster response • Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence
12:00h - 13:30h	Lunch break
13:30h - 14:30h	Tour de Table - introduction of the participants
14:30h - 15:30h	Plenary Session 2 NATO EADRCC Emergency Management Exercise “BULGARIA 2025” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept and objectives • Lead-in scenario • Exercise governance • Montana Professional Training Center, Exercise sites
15:30h - 16:00h	Coffee break
16:00h - 17:30h	Host Nation Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa requirements

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border Crossing Procedures • Customs • Escort and security • Real life medical care • Base of Operations
19:00h	Icebreaker reception

WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025	
09:30h - 10:00h	Opening and summary of Day 1
10:00h - 12:30h	Session 3 Working Groups (parallel tracks): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main DISTAFF Working Group (DISTAFF; Evaluation; Safety and Security; Logistics, Administration / Host Nation Exercise Support; Information and Communication Technologies (ICT); New technologies) • Civil-Military Cooperation and Host Nation Support • Chemical-Radiological-Nuclear response • Rescue operations • Urban Search and Rescue (including Rope Rescue and Cultural Heritage) • Water Search and Rescue • Emergency Medical Teams (including real-life support) • Information threats and media play
12:00h - 13:30h	Lunch break
13:30h - 15:30h	Session 3 (continued/second round)
15:30h - 16:00h	Coffee break
16:00h - 17:30h	Session 3 Outcomes and summary of the working groups
19:30h	Official dinner hosted by Bulgaria

THURSDAY 22 MAY 2025	
09:30h - 10:00h	VIP event planning. Resilience facilitated discussion seminar
10:00h - 10:30h	Real-life media presence
10:30h - 12:00h	Presentations by the participants on their participation in the exercise (including host nation exercise support requirements)
12:00h - 13:30h	Lunch break
13:30h - 14:30h	Summary of the conference and way ahead
14:30h - ...	Departure of participants

FRIDAY 23 MAY 2025 - OPTIONAL	
09:30h - 16:30h	Travel to Montana. Visit the exercise sites. Lunch boxes will be provided to the participants
17:00h - ...	Departure of the remaining participants

**LEAD-IN SCENARIO FOR THE
NATO EADRCC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
EXERCISE “BULGARIA 2025”**

AIM

To lead the participants into the exercise scenario by providing context and background, and illustrating some of the complex challenges they will need to respond to in Exercise BULGARIA 2025.

The scenario will continue to evolve until and during the exercise. The detailed scenario will be controlled by the DISTAFF and used for detailed injects into the exercise play.

OBJECTIVES

Increase participants' awareness of a complex hybrid emergency.

Challenge a variety of international responders at the strategic and operational levels to tackle a wide range of simultaneous, complex emergencies, in a coordinated way.

Promote discussions on NATO's role in supporting Allies and partners in countering complex threats over short and mid-term periods.

Demonstrate the need for close international cooperation on complex threats to civilian populations, and familiarize participants with different toolboxes available for response (possibilities and limits).

BACKGROUND¹

Bulgaria is situated in a region that is particularly vulnerable to temperature increase, extreme precipitation and to the increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods.

According to research conducted by the Department of Meteorology, National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (NIMH-BAS), annual air and water temperature is increasing; rainfall patterns are also changing, reducing overall precipitation and the total water reserves of the country. Furthermore, there is a trend toward increased frequency of extreme events and disasters, as demonstrated by frequent occurrences of heavy rainfalls, heat and cold waves, floods and droughts, windstorms, forest fires, and landslides.

The risks inflicted by these events lead to loss of human life or cause considerable damage, both nationally and transboundary. These changes affect society and its citizens as well as the economy as a whole. The risk is greater for the segments of the society that are poorer, less prepared and more vulnerable – like in the region of Montana, where the population includes sizeable vulnerable groups (older people, poorer people, smokers) who are in a less favourable position than the rest of the country. They are exposed to health effects, including heat-related health risks, cardiovascular diseases and strokes in summer (especially in urban heat islands), and emergency weather-related health effects.

¹ Source: [National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan](#)

The impacts of extreme weather events are exacerbated by the region's infrastructure, which is not adapted to temperature extremes and cannot withstand extreme weather, notably floods and landslides. The most vulnerable infrastructure is the national road network, including roads and engineering structures such as bridges. Railway infrastructure in the Montana region is also vulnerable, especially in summer, when extreme heat can cause rain buckling and disruption of operations. These challenges may cause sudden and long-lasting disruptions of operation and restricted accessibility to the population and emergency responders.

Bulgarian citizens indicate high trust in the national authorities' capacities to respond to emergencies². However, natural disasters and complex emergencies are increasingly exploited by adversaries as part of a hybrid toolbox to influence public opinion in Bulgaria and other NATO Allies and European Union Member States. This aims to destroy unity among Allies, test nations' resolve to support each other, destabilise the domestic situation in Allied nations and nurture a feeling of insecurity, divide public opinion and destroy citizens' trust in the national institutions' capacity to cope with security challenges.

LEAD-IN

The region of Montana (and most of Bulgaria) is affected by an extreme prolonged heatwave since mid-July (E-60), with temperatures exceeding 40°C (104°F).

The power grid is overloaded due to the widespread use of air-conditioning to cope with the heat. At the same time, low levels of water in the Danube River have reduced the output of Bulgaria's power plants in Kozloduy to 60%, as there is not enough cooling water for full power.

Hospitals in the region are treating a lot of people with heat-related complaints, including heat stroke, dehydration, hypertension. Most of these are elderly and children.

As of 5 September (E-3), a low-pressure area is developing over the region of Vidin and western parts of the region of Montana. The national Met Office issued severe weather (heavy rain) warnings for Vidin and the western part of Montana.

On 6 September (E-2) at 06:19 local time (CET+1), an earthquake of 7.2 Moment Magnitude scale (M_w) occurred in Bulgaria.

This has caused severe damage to the Municipality of Montana (110km north of Sofia) and the region. Strong aftershocks have been recorded and are causing subsequent damage and chaos. There are unconfirmed reports that the earthquake has damaged the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant (75km from the epicentre), which is leaking radiation.

REQUEST FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Following the devastating earthquake on September 6th 2025 0619 UTC with a magnitude of 7.2 on the Moment Magnitude scale (M_w) in Montana, and in anticipation of extreme precipitation in the region in the day ahead, Bulgaria is requesting international assistance through international mechanisms, including NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) as well as the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

² Source: [Eurobarometer](#), September 2024

In their request, the Bulgarian authorities are reporting the following situation:

A significant number of buildings have been damaged, including several hospitals / medical centres. The number of victims is not yet known, but up to 12000 persons may be affected. Roads and train tracks have been severely damaged, and the population trying to leave the zone are stuck on various roads.

Many aftershocks still cause subsequent damage, and the population is afraid to reenter their houses.

Water supply, electricity and communication means are severely affected and for the most part not operational. A suspended airport in the area may have been damaged, it is unclear if there is a possibility of reopening the airfield and use it as a possible entry for assistance.

The national Met Office issued severe weather (heavy rain) warnings for the region; flash floods can be expected.

Requested assistance :

- USAR teams
- CBRN teams
- Medical teams
- Water rescue teams
- Water purification and distribution
- Communications equipment to reestablish a radio backbone communication network
- Mobile generators
- Possibility for cooling zones next to hospitals or elderly people's homes.
- Shelter for displaced victims
- Assessment capabilities to inspect a dam underwater
- Assessment to advise on stabilization of cultural heritage as Roman ruins and old excavations
- Capabilities for aerial and underwater video assessment (drones)
- Airfield and forward air traffic controller capabilities (if BG agrees)
- Mobile air conditioning units to establish cool zones in shelters, hospitals and homes for elderly.

The NATO EADRCC is in close contact with the Bulgarian authorities to obtain further updates. Bulgaria will suggest points of entry following further assessment of road conditions leading into the stricken area.