



Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence

HISTORY BOOK

Commemorating Years of
Achievements and Transformation





VISION & MISSION

The CMDR COE seeks to reinforce its position as an internationally recognised and respected hub that significantly contributes to the research, development, and strengthening of the crisis management and disaster response capabilities of NATO, Allied, and Partner Nations.

We aim to serve as a catalyst for enhancing the crisis and disaster response capabilities of NATO, Allied, and Partner Nations by fostering collaborative partnerships, delivering innovative solutions, and sharing expertise across the Alliance and with Partners.

Our goal is to provide ongoing support for interoperability and effectiveness, while enhancing standardisation in line with a comprehensive approach to crisis management and disaster response.



ROLE

The CMDR COE supports decision-making, planning processes, and the assessment of emergency reaction and response plans. The Centre coordinates doctrine standardisation, curriculum development, and training synchronisation across NATO.

We provide tailored education and training within the Centre's domain expertise. We maintain the capability to deploy mobile training teams and subject matter experts to deliver training for national and multinational units involved in crisis management and disaster response. Our education and training opportunities serve both civilian and military audiences, from senior leadership to staff level, as well as units and teams.



COL Orlin NIKOLOV, PhD
Director, CMDR COE

Dear Reader,

It is with genuine pride that I welcome you to this History Book of the Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence (CMDR COE). This volume tells the story of a Centre born from a clear need: to strengthen the Alliance's readiness to anticipate, manage, and recover from crises and disasters through knowledge, interoperability, and trusted cooperation.

From its establishment in 2013 and its NATO accreditation in 2015, the CMDR COE has steadily grown into a recognised hub for expertise, education, and innovation in the crisis management and disaster response domain. Based in Sofia, Bulgaria, and supported by our Framework Nation, the Republic of Bulgaria, together with our Sponsoring Nations – Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Romania – our Centre reflects the power of multinational commitment and shared purpose.

The pages that follow capture more than dates and milestones. They document a living mission: to support and contribute to the enhancement of NATO's crisis management and disaster response capabilities, and by doing so, to improve Allied interoperability. Our work has always been shaped by practical demand and operational relevance. We train and educate senior civilian and military leaders; we provide subject-matter expertise; and we contribute to doctrine development, standardisation, concept development, experimentation, and lessons learned so that nations and institutions are better prepared when real crises test our systems and our resolve.

A hallmark of CMDR COE's development has been our emphasis on quality, credibility, and measurable impact. Through rigorous internal standards and NATO-aligned assurance processes, the Centre has positioned its education and training as an enabler of common approaches and shared understanding across the Alliance and partner community. The result is not merely a catalogue of courses, conferences, and exercises; it is a sustained investment in people and institutions, empowering them to plan, decide, coordinate, and act under pressure.

As the security environment becomes more complex – blending conventional threats with hybrid tactics, cascading disasters, technological disruption, and the growing strategic importance of resilience – our Centre has continued to evolve. NATO ACT has highlighted CMDR COE's expanding contribution to Alliance priorities, including leadership roles as Department Head for Business Continuity Management (2023) and Information and Knowledge Management (2025). These responsibilities reinforce what we have long stood for: continuity of critical functions, timely decision-making, coherent information flows, and the ability to coordinate civil-military responses across diverse stakeholders.

Innovation has also become central to our identity. The establishment of an operations laboratory and our ongoing work on tools and standards that support NATO, Allied, and Partner exercises and experimentation – including scenario development and validation – reflect our commitment to turning analysis into capability. In this sense, CMDR COE has served not only as a place of learning but also as a platform where ideas are tested, refined, and translated into practical solutions.

This history book is therefore both a record and a tribute: to the vision of those who founded the Centre; to the nations that sustain it; to the partners who strengthen its reach; and, above all, to the people – our staff, lecturers, mentors, trainees, and collaborators – whose dedication gives the institution its meaning. Every course delivered, every exercise supported, every workshop convened, and every contribution to doctrine or lessons learned represents the same underlying belief: resilience is built together, and it is built before the crisis arrives.

Thank you for your interest in CMDR COE and for taking the time to explore our journey. May this book offer insight, inspiration, and a renewed sense of shared commitment to preparedness and cooperative security. As we look ahead, we will remain focused on our core objective: supporting NATO and its nations in strengthening crisis management and disaster response capabilities, while continuing to meet challenges, seize opportunities, and anticipate the future.

Yours sincerely,



Message from the Hellenic Republic

Since its inception, the CMDR-COE has evolved into a distinguished hub of expertise, fostering innovation, advancing doctrine and enhancing civil-military cooperation in the areas of crisis management, disaster response and resilience. Through high-quality education, training and multinational engagement, the Centre has significantly improved collective preparedness and the ability to effectively respond to complex emergencies. Its steady growth reflects the vision, professionalism and collaborative spirit of all participating Nations, while its contribution to enhancing resilience, civil-military cooperation and the protection of critical infrastructure has proven particularly important in an increasingly complex security environment.

In this context, we particularly recognize the essential role of Bulgaria as a Framework and Host Nation, whose continued commitment and leadership have provided the foundation for the successful development and operational relevance of the Centre.

As a committed Sponsoring Nation, Greece consistently supports the mission and evolution of the CMDR-COE, recognizing its strategic importance in enhancing resilience and promoting interoperability among Allies and partners. The Hellenic Republic remains committed to contributing expertise, sharing experiences and supporting initiatives that further enhance the role of the Centre in the evolving security environment.

The achievements of the CMDR-COE are a testament to the power of multinational cooperation and collective expertise. Greece firmly believes that, through interoperability, collaborative initiatives and innovation, the Centre will remain a progressive pillar of excellence, serving collective security and resilience for years to come.

INTERNATIONAL STAFF



Colonel Panagiotis Aposporis



Colonel Vasileios Palaiologos



Captain (N) Georgios Tzavaras



Colonel Christos Sgouromallis



Captain (N) Theodoros Pachis



Colonel Anastasios Vasileiou



Colonel Efthymios Greventopoulos



Colonel Dimitrios Dalakouras



Message from Hungary

Hungary has appreciated the CMDR COE's valuable expertise in the crisis management and disaster response domain long before becoming a sponsoring nation. Furthermore, as an officially accredited NATO COE and NATO Military Body, the CMDR COE's scope of activities, research and education areas provided relevant and recent information even during the unfortunate time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In accordance with NATO's perspective on enhancing resilience, Hungary also recognized that it is essential to put the whole-of-government approach in practice, and improve the cooperation not only between the first responders but every possible national organization that could be considered as a stakeholder in case of a crisis or disaster. Thus, in hope of mutual benefit, Hungary joined the CMDR COE as a sponsoring nation in 2022 and has also delegated a permanent member to the COE.

Exchanging know-how and experiences gained through executing crisis management tasks should be a priority to all nations, since the implementation of lessons learnt and best practices contribute to the enhancement of national resilience. Therefore, it is an honour that Hungary was also given the opportunity to delegate an adequate member to the Academic Advisory Board.

Although facilitating the cooperation on a professional level is admittedly important, beyond the researches, the CMDR COE also provides an educational environment where experts with various backgrounds could broaden their horizons and share their own views and experiences. Therefore, when the Ministry of Defence of Hungary revived a national project which aims to provide opportunities to the civilian experts of the other ministries and governmental stakeholders to participate in different NATO courses, the courses of the CMDR COE proved to be truly beneficial.

All the achievements of the CMDR COE throughout the years demonstrate its importance as a COE in the NATO community, thus Hungary is committed to support its mission as a sponsoring nation in the long term and ready to continue working in close cooperation, ensuring the exchange of professional experience on a mutual base.

INTERNATIONAL STAFF

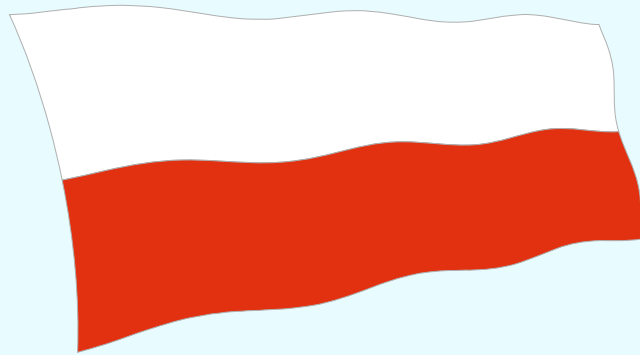


Colonel Laszlo Juhasz



Colonel Laszlo Fekete





Message from the Republic of Poland

Poland, as a sponsoring nation, has supported the mission and development of CMDR COE Sofia from its very beginning. This early and continuous engagement reflects Poland's strong commitment to allied cooperation, solidarity, and shared responsibility within NATO. Through sustained political, institutional, and expert-level involvement, Poland has actively contributed to shaping the Centre's strategic orientation, strengthening its institutional foundations, and enhancing its effectiveness and credibility within the NATO framework. It should be emphasized that over the years of its operation, CMDR COE has continuously developed its capabilities and expanded the scope of its activities. This dynamic development, supported by close cooperation with Poland, other sponsoring nations and partners, has been formally recognized by NATO by entrusting the Centre with the role of Department Head for two key disciplines: Business Continuity Management and Information and Knowledge Management.

As a result, CMDR COE has evolved into a recognized hub of expertise in the field of crisis management and disaster response, delivering analytical products, lessons learned, and practical solutions to NATO, the European Union, and partner nations. This cooperation generates clear benefits for the Alliance by strengthening collective knowledge, fostering a common strategic culture, and enhancing institutional resilience across NATO structures.

CMDR COE derives significant benefits from Polish experience shaped by regional security challenges, comprehensive national crisis management systems, and Poland's active participation in NATO and multinational operations. Polish experts contribute operational perspectives, practical insights, and lessons learned, which directly enrich the Centre's capabilities.

At the same time, Poland has achieved substantial benefits from its cooperation with CMDR COE. Participation in the Centre provides Poland with direct access to multinational expertise, advanced research, proven best practices, and education and training opportunities in the field of crisis management and resilience.

Poland makes extensive use of the Centre's educational, training, and analytical portfolio, and the knowledge gained is effectively transferred into national structures and crisis management mechanisms. This contributes to improved interagency coordination, more effective decision-making processes, and enhanced national preparedness and resilience. Furthermore, the cooperation with CMDR COE supports the ongoing development and modernization of the Polish Armed Forces by strengthening competencies related to continuity planning, and comprehensive crisis response, fully aligned with NATO standards and procedures.

There is strong confidence that CMDR COE will continue to grow and evolve through close cooperation with Poland and other sponsoring nations, bringing further benefits to NATO and its partners, while making a lasting contribution to strengthening international security, collective resilience, and crisis preparedness.

INTERNATIONAL STAFF



Colonel Jaroslaw Kubisz



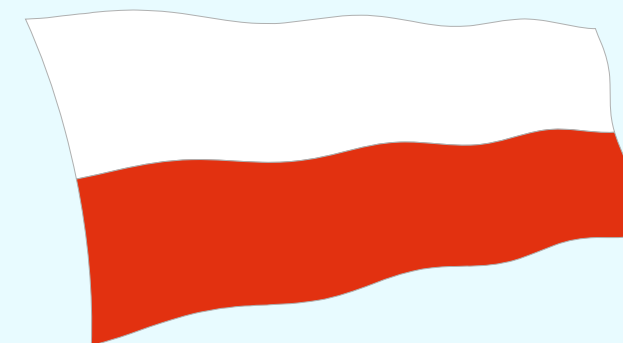
Colonel Dariusz Dobron



Colonel Robert Jurski



Colonel Grzegorz Czekaj





Message from Romania

Over time, the Centre has proven to be a true pillar of excellence, successfully advancing its vital mission in enhancing resilience and emergency preparedness. The unwavering dedication of your team has significantly contributed to strengthening our collective capabilities in mitigating and responding to complex crises.

When Romania, represented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, joined the CMDR COE in 2021, it did so with a clear understanding that crises are no longer distant or isolated events, but rather complex and fast-moving shared challenges. In such an environment, cooperation is not optional, but essential.

Romania is deeply proud to be an active, reliable partner in this crucial endeavour. The Centre represents more than just an institutional framework. It is a community of professionals dedicated to learning from experience, refining concepts and enhancing our preparedness and response to emergencies.

In this context, our country consistently contributes to the Centre's objectives by sharing our extensive operational expertise in civil protection, actively participating in joint international exercises, and supporting the development of interoperable crisis response procedures. By providing seasoned experts and sharing practical insights from complex real-world missions, Romania actively helps strengthen our collective capabilities.

As a Sponsoring Nation, we wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm our steadfast support and robust engagement with the Centre's ongoing activities. Our national commitment to the strategic goals of the CMDR COE remains resolute, and we are prepared to continue contributing our expertise and resources to ensure the success of our joint crisis response initiatives.

We congratulate you once again on your remarkable milestones and look forward to a future of continued shared success.

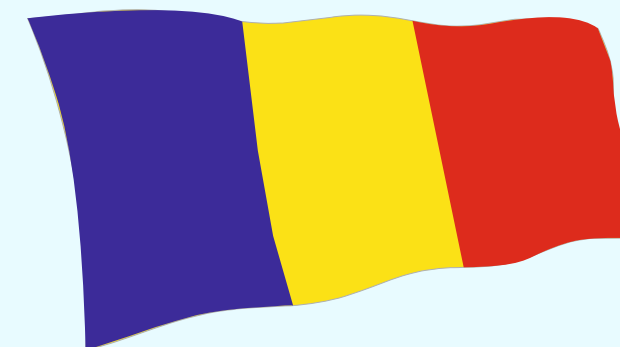
INTERNATIONAL STAFF



Police Chief Commissioner
Nicoleta Primavarus



Lieutenant Colonel
Mihai Ilie



The very beginning

Why the Centre was needed?

Centres of Excellence (COEs) are internationally sponsored military organisations that strengthen NATO's transformation by delivering education and training, doctrine and concept development, lessons learned, and experimentation – all in support of interoperability and improved defence capabilities. In the years leading to the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, NATO's drive for Smart Defence accelerated the establishment of specialised expert entities designed to deliver tangible capability outputs while avoiding duplication of national efforts and resources. Against this strategic background, Bulgaria positioned itself to contribute with a distinct niche: crisis management and disaster response.

2011 – From Concept to National Commitment and NATO-ready project

In early 2011, aligned with the Bulgarian Armed Forces' mission “Contribution to National Security in Peace Time,” the Ministry of Defence launched a project to create a high-level expert entity capable of supporting both national institutions and NATO nations in crisis management and disaster response.

Initiated by a formal report from Col Prof Mitko Stoykov, DrSc (Reg. No. 30-01-85/22.03.2011), a MoD working group defined the functional area and name of the Centre, and produced its Concept, development plan, and financial assessment. By late 2011, national coordination was completed and international promotion began.

2012 – NATO alignment and national legal foundation

In March 2012, Bulgaria completed deconfliction of the Concept and subject area with member states, NATO COEs, and national stakeholders. On 22 March 2012, the Minister of Defence established a project implementation team. The Concept was sent to Allied Command Transformation (ACT) on 20 June 2012 and received a positive coordination response in early July. In parallel, Bulgaria implemented a Pilot Programme of Work and prepared temporary premises in the Shipka Hotel.

2013 – Sponsorship secured and MOUs signed in Norfolk

Operational establishment accelerated in 2013: staffing and administrative systems were created and two construction conferences advanced the Operational and Functional MOUs. Greece and Poland confirmed sponsorship.

A landmark achievement came on 28 August 2013, when the Operational and Functional Memoranda of Understanding were officially signed by the Ministries of Defence of: Republic of Bulgaria, Hellenic Republic and Republic of Poland. The signing took place at ACT, Norfolk, Virginia, with SACT HQ as a party to the Functional MoU – confirming the Centre's functional relationship with NATO's transformation command and bringing it close to NAC accreditation as an International Military Organization.

Establishment and Cornerstones



Norfolk 2013 — Official Signing Ceremony

“The CMDR COE was built to be a catalyst for improvement of NATO, Nations and Partners capabilities in crisis and disaster response operations.”

28 August 2013: Operational and Functional MOUs signed at ACT, Norfolk, Virginia by Bulgaria, Greece and Poland. SACT HQ is party to the Functional MoU. National ratification followed, with NAC accreditation pursued next

Establishment and Cornerstones



The CMDR COE is not an operational entity and has the mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the crisis and disaster response capabilities of NATO Nations and Partners. In support of the Alliance, especially in transformation, the CMDR COE is part of NATO's COE Network, while remaining outside the NATO Command Structure (NCS) and NATO Forces Structure (NFS). At the same time, it forms part of the wider NATO Command Arrangements (NCA).

Trough the years the CMDR COE enlarged with the accession on Romania in 2021 and Hungary in 2022. Currently the Centre has one Framework Nation – the Republic of Bulgaria – and four Sponsoring Nations: the Hellenic Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland, and Romania.

The CMDR COE was accredited as the 21st NATO COE on 31 March 2015, following a NAC silence procedure. The Centre was activated as a NATO Military Body with international status under Article 14 of the Paris Protocol. After receiving unconditional accreditation, the CMDR COE is subject to periodic assessment every three years.

In 2019, the Centre also received Quality Assurance accreditation from NATO. This is renewed every six years, provided the requirements are met, to ensure the highest possible quality of the CMDR COE's products.



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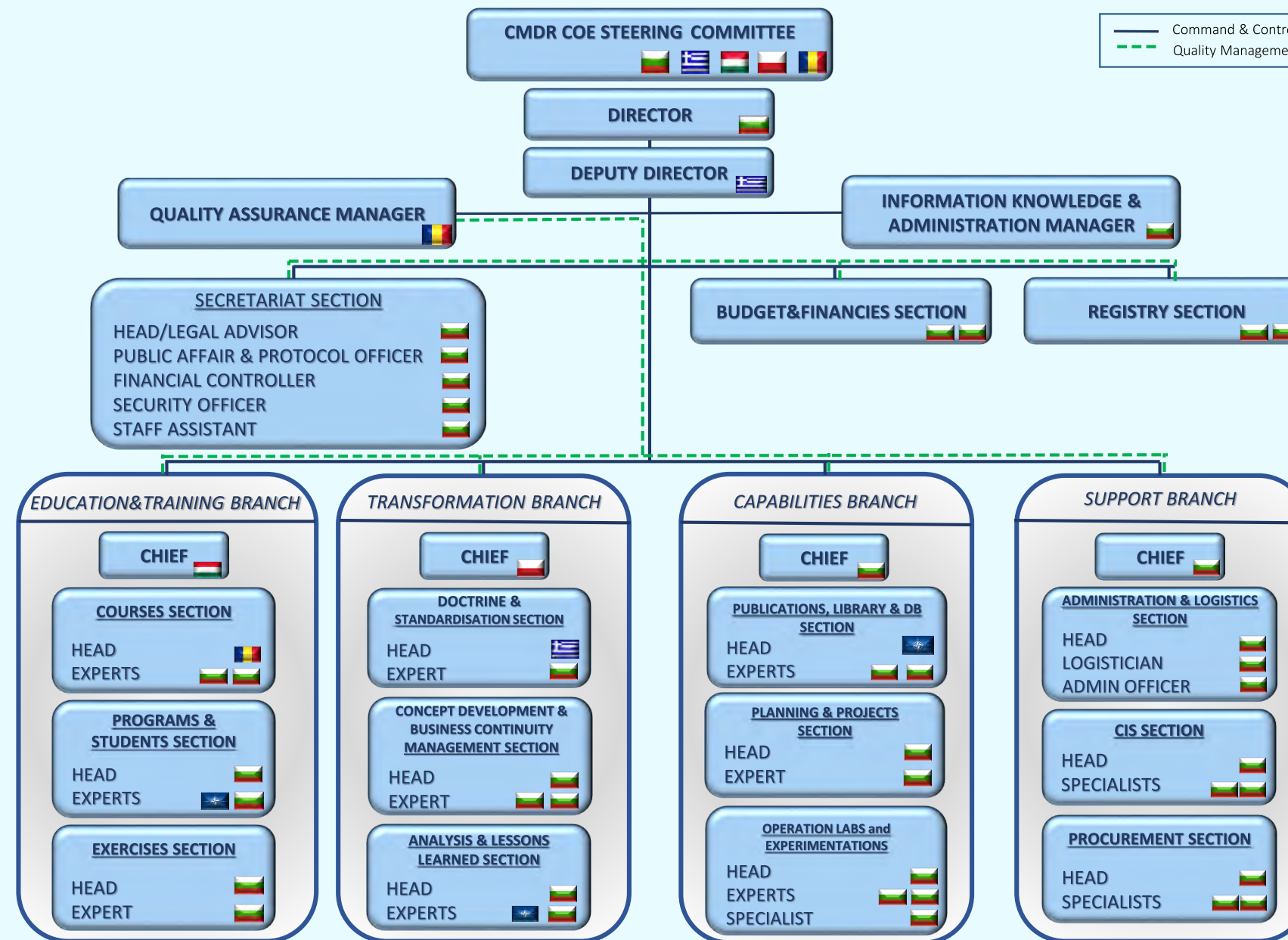
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Establishment and Cornerstones



CMDR COE Organisation Chart



Initially, 13 people were assigned to the CMDR COE. The staffing schedule was approved by an order of the Bulgarian Minister of Defence dated 03.12.2012. The total number of employees from the Ministry of Defence is 27, comprising 16 military personnel and 11 civilian employees. The Centre consists of four departments. Currently, our workforce consists of about 50 people, assigned to three types of positions. Over 80% of these positions are to be filled by the Framework Nation, with the remainder filled by the Sponsoring Nations. There are also three non-bid posts available to each NATO member state that declares its intent to join the Centre.

Leadership



The Centre has had the privilege of being directed by exceptional leaders since its establishment. The first director, **Colonel Prof Mitko Stoykov, DrSc (2013–2014)**, designed the concept of the Centre and laid its foundations.



The second director, **Colonel Vassil Roussinov (2014–2019)**, led the CMDR COE through its most difficult times and ensured the success of the Centre's accreditation process. Colonel Roussinov also set the direction for the future development of the CMDR COE.



The third and current director, **Colonel Orlin Nikolov, PhD (since 2019)**, has led the transformation of the Centre through turbulent times and the most demanding challenges the international environment has ever posed. With a steady hand and unwavering dedication, he inspires the team to give its best in the ongoing process of continuous improvement and resilience building within the broader NATO and national efforts to guarantee the security of every citizen and every centimetre of the Alliance during times of crisis and disaster.

Accreditation

We stay focused on our goal to provide a wide platform for information and knowledge exchange within the crisis management and disaster response community of interest. Because to anticipate the future means preparing to meet tomorrow's challenges today.

The CMDR COE acts upon Requests for Support (RFS). The gradual but steady increase through the years in the number of RFS from NATO and from the Centre's Sponsoring and Framework Nations bears testimony to the determination and capability to firmly cement our position at the forefront of research and development on crisis management and disaster response.

We deliver feasible solutions in the field of CMDR education and lessons identified (LI) aspects through independent thoughts and analyses in specific areas of Doctrine, Concept Development and Experimentation. It helps NATO, Nations and Partners to improve the collective and interagency measures.

Additionally we have leveraged on modern technology to transfer our annual established activities to an online environment. It enables us to organise and conduct online events live and ADL courses as we keep on providing quick routine rearrangements.



The Centre has earned an Unconditional Accreditation and NATO Quality Assurance Certificate (No. ACT/JFD/HCEIT/TT+1548/Ser: NU). Thus all certified courses delivered by CMDR COE maintain 'NATO Approved' status as they respond to the Alliance's requirements.

Partnerships

Given its specific position outside NATO Command and Force Structures, the CMDR COE has the freedom to partner with both national and international entities, whether governmental or non-governmental.

The CMDR COE maintains active and structured cooperation with ACT (Allied Command Transformation), ACO (Allied Command Operations), and the NATO COE network.

- With ACT
 - o Participation in NATO Global Programming (GP) and NATO System Approach to Training.
 - o Contribution to NATO Concept Development & Experimentation (CD&E) activities.
 - o Participation in NATO Annual CD&E Conference and Community of Interest.
 - o Contribution to NATO Lessons Learned Process (uploading analyses to NLLP upon request of HQ SACT).
 - o Department Head role for:
 - Business Continuity Management (BCM) Discipline
 - Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) Discipline (MCM-0094-2025)
 - o Leading NATO-wide:
 - Training Needs Analysis (TNA)
 - Discipline Alignment Plans
 - Annual Discipline Conferences (BCM & IKM)
- With ACO / SHAPE / Operational Commands
 - o Support to operational exercises and validation events:
 - o Exercise Resolute Savior
 - o Exercise Ammon Sentinel
 - o Ex Seven Stars
 - o Ex SEESIM
 - o EADRCC-related activities
 - o Cooperation within NATO Working Groups, Committees, Agencies (POW distribution 2026)
 - o Operational analytical support through OpsLab (modelling, simulation, experimentation)
 - o Support to NATO doctrines (AJP-01, AJP-10, AJP-3.26, AJP-3.28, AJP-10.1)
- With Other NATO COEs
 - o Regular CD&E Pillar Meetings with NATO-Accredited COEs
 - o LL Pillar Meetings with COEs
 - o Collaboration in NATO Discipline Forums
 - o End-users of modelling projects (e.g., CIMIC COE)
 - o Joint participation in NATO standardization and doctrine development processes
 - o Shared working groups (e.g., Climate Change & Security, Resilience, LRC)



The CMDR COE acts as a catalyst within the NATO COE ecosystem, ensuring interoperability and coherence across domains.

Partnerships

The Centre also maintains strong relations with academia, industry, and international organisations. We have more than 40 formal agreements in total, and the latest framework collaboration agreements include:

- o Institute for Security Governance (USA)
- o CAROL I National Defense University (Romania)
- o University of National and World Economy and Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (Bulgaria)
- o University of the Bundeswehr Munich (Germany)



In addition, the CMDR COE maintains an internship programme, actively contributes to academic research in resilience, climate change, BCM, and CMDR studies, and organises joint seminars and workshops.

- Partnership with industry is pivotal for the Centre and includes:
 - o Cooperation within Programme of Work (POW) distribution (with industry explicitly listed)
 - o Modelling & Simulation technology development
 - o Development and integration of:
 - AI systems
 - C2 systems
 - M&S architectures
 - Disaster computing solutions
 - Hardware tracking systems

Of essential interest to the Centre, industry, and, above all, the capacity-building process within NATO, is our participation in various Modelling and Simulation Groups (MSG), such as MSG 147, 187, 195, 221, and 235.

At the international level, the CMDR COE maintains extensive cooperation across different levels.

- At NATO and European Union level:
 - o EU / ESDC (Military contribution to EU Disaster Response)
 - o NATO Standardization Of.ice
 - o NATO Climate Change & Security structures
 - o NATO Resilience and Layered Resilience Concept Working Groups
- The Capacity-building projects under the NATO DCB framework:
 - o Jordan
 - o Moldova
 - o Georgia
 - o Iraq
 - o Kuwait
 - o Morocco
 - o Ethiopia

Within the abovementioned framework and its primary domain, the CMDR COE operates as an international hub connecting NATO, the EU, partner nations, academia, and industry.



Internship Programme

The Internship Programme reflects the same philosophy. It is an opportunity for bright and motivated young people to join a multicultural team in an international organisation that serves as both a hub of expertise and an education and training facility in the crisis management and disaster response domain. The programme provides interns with practical experience through work assignments, research, studies, and participation in projects. Since 2021, successful candidates have also been eligible for an internship stipend.



For the Centre, this programme is more than a recruitment channel; it is an investment in the next generation of crisis management thinkers and practitioners, and a means of bringing fresh perspectives into the team's daily work. For the interns, it offers entry into an international, multidisciplinary environment where policy, analysis, education, and practical capability development converge. In this sense, the Internship Programme is fully consistent with CMDR COE's broader identity: a place where expertise is cultivated, shared, and transformed into value for NATO, Allies, and Partners.

Mission and Mandate

CMDR COE within the NATO COEs Network

The CMDR COE is part of NATO's wider network of accredited Centres of Excellence: nationally or multinationally funded institutions that provide recognised expertise in a defined field and support the Alliance's transformation. COEs are not part of the NATO Command Structure; instead, they complement it by delivering specialist education and training, supporting doctrine and concept development, collecting lessons learned, and helping NATO improve interoperability without duplicating existing capabilities. Overall coordination of the COE network rests with Allied Command Transformation (ACT), in coordination with Allied Command Operations.

CMDR COE's core objectives and focus areas

As stated in its Mission and Vision above, the CMDR COE's main objective is to support and contribute to the enhancement of NATO's crisis management and disaster response capabilities and, as a corollary, to improve Allied interoperability.

What makes the CMDR COE especially relevant is the breadth of its thematic portfolio. While its primary responsibility is crisis management and disaster response, the Centre also integrates cross-cutting topics that increasingly shape the operational environment: resilience, protection of civilians, gender mainstreaming, climate change, and cognitive warfare. This demonstrates an understanding that contemporary crises do not fit neatly into single categories; they are interconnected, multidomain, and often require civil-military, national-international, and preventive-reactive perspectives at the same time.

Integration within the international framework

CMDR COE is intentionally embedded within a broad international framework. As a NATO-accredited COE, it operates through NATO's Requests for Support mechanism and aligns its Programme of Work with Allied priorities under ACT oversight. Its work is multinational in sponsorship, staffing, and outreach.

However, the Centre's integration extends beyond formal accreditation. CMDR COE serves as a bridge between strategy and practice: between NATO standards and national implementation, between military preparedness and civilian resilience, and between doctrine development and field-oriented experimentation. Its involvement in training, exercises, lessons learned, and concept validation enables the Centre to translate broad Alliance priorities into applicable knowledge and practical capability. This is especially important in the CMDR field, where effective responses require coordination among armed forces, civil authorities, international organisations, academia, and specialised agencies.



CMDR COE's unique value lies in its combination of specialisation, relevance, and adaptability. It is one of the few institutions within the NATO ecosystem dedicated specifically to crisis management and disaster response as a coherent field of expertise. It addresses this field in a truly comprehensive manner, integrating education and training, research and analysis, doctrine and concepts, experimentation, and lessons learned. Additionally, it links traditional CMDR functions with emerging topics such as resilience, hybrid threats, and the protection of civilians, which are increasingly central to both military readiness and societal preparedness.

In practical terms, CMDR COE offers more than theory and covers more than a single operational niche. It is not an operational headquarters, and this is precisely its strength: it can look across institutions, compare experiences, identify gaps, and translate lessons into doctrine, courses, and support products that are transferable across the Alliance. Its mobile training teams, operational laboratory, and focus on collaborative partnerships further enhance its value. The Centre's recent unconditional quality-assurance re-accreditation also demonstrates its institutional maturity and credibility.



Evolution Through The Years



Education and Training Branch



Branch Chiefs through the years:

Colonel Milen Milkov (2014 - 2018:)

Colonel Dimitar Dimitrov (2018-2021)

Colonel Plamen Iliev (2021-2023)

Colonel Laszlo Fekete (Since 2024)

The Education and Training (E&T) Branch is the core branch of the CMDR COE. It leads the Centre's work in courses, programmes, students, and exercises, and plays a central role in translating the Centre's strategic agenda into practical outcomes. By developing and managing education and training activities, programmes, and course control documentation, the Branch directly supports the mission of the CMDR COE. Established alongside the formation of the core Centre team in 2011 and further developed after the Centre's accreditation in 2015, the E&T Branch has expanded its activities across several major areas.

NATO Education and Training

The Branch supports the education and training activities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and contributes to a systematic approach to NATO global programming in education and training. It also established the foundations of the CMDR COE quality assurance process and developed the Centre's education and training landscape, including the following courses:

- Crisis Management and Disaster Response Course
- Crisis Response Operations Planners Professional Development Course
- Crisis Management and Disaster Response Exercise Planners Training Course
- Strategic Decision-Making for Crisis Response Operations Course
- Disaster Management Course

In cooperation with Allied Command Transformation and the CIMIC Centre of Excellence, the Branch conducted Training Requirements Analysis (TRA) and Training Needs Analysis (TNA) related to civil preparedness and resilience, including:

- Crisis Management and Disaster Response Course related to civil preparedness and resilience (January 2018)
- TNA for the Gender Focal Point Course

Within the framework of the European Union, the E&T Branch serves as discipline leader for the military training discipline "Military contribution to EU disaster response, humanitarian assistance and civil protection."

A Training Requirements Analysis for this discipline was conducted from May 2015 to May 2016. From June to October 2016, CMDR COE and the European Union Military Training Group analysed the report, which was subsequently noted by the European Union Military Committee on 16 November 2016. Since 2016, CMDR COE has been part of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) network and participates in its Executive Academic Board.

Based on the completed TRA, three pilot courses were developed and later integrated into the ESDC curriculum:

- Disaster Response in CSDP Context (28 November – 1 December 2017)
- Climate Change and Defence & Security (April 2018)
- Crisis Management in Multilateral Frameworks (IGOs): The Role of Political, Civilian and Military Crisis Diplomacy (September 2025)

The Branch also provided subject-matter expert support to the 9th and 13th ESDC CSDP High-Level Courses (2012–2013 and 2017–2018). Additionally supports major NATO and national exercises. Among them are NATO CMX 2017 and 2018, EADRCC exercises in Montenegro (2016), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2017), Bulgaria (2025), Resolute Support training events (supported by the NATO Joint Force Training Centre), VIKING 2014, 2018 and 2022.

The Branch deployed Mobile Training Teams in support of the South-Eastern Europe Brigade in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2023. It has also delivered training activities in Ethiopia, Jordan, Morocco, Moldova

The E&T Branch provides crisis management exercise and training support to the Bulgarian Ministry of Defence. This includes training on procedures and rules for implementing crisis response measures for the national crisis management system and the NATO Crisis Response System in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2023.

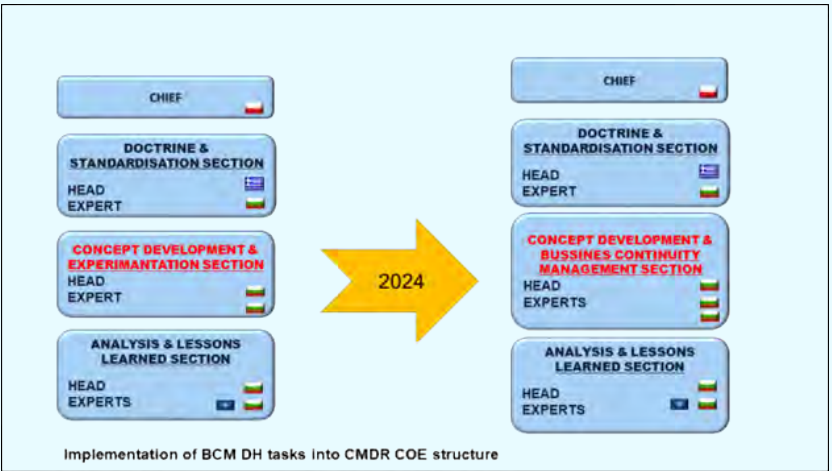


Academic Advisory Board

Following the annual meeting of the Steering Committee in October 2019, the Academic Advisory Board of CMDR COE was established. Since then, the E&T Branch has led the Board, which brings together military and civilian scholars from framework and sponsoring nations to support the Centre's activities.

The Board began its work in 2021 with its first annual meeting, chaired by Mitko Stoykov, and has since served as a trusted forum for academic dialogue and guidance. Today, under the leadership of Associate Professor Velizar Shalamanov, the Board continues to actively support the academic development of CMDR COE by contributing to the quality and relevance of course content, strengthening the internship programme, and providing academic supervision. In addition to the annual meeting, two regular online meetings are now held each year, ensuring continuous engagement and collaboration.

Transformation Branch



Since its establishment, the Transformation Branch (TB) has been an integral part of the Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence. Working in close coordination with the other branches of the Centre, it has continuously supported the achievement of CMDR COE's strategic objectives and its contribution to NATO and partner nations.

The mission of the Transformation Branch has been to generate and deliver ideas, concepts, credible proposals, and well-founded recommendations related to the development, enhancement, and transformation of crisis management and disaster relief capabilities within NATO and its partners. Through its work, the Branch has contributed to the development of adaptive, future-oriented solutions in response to evolving security challenges.

In line with NATO's comprehensive approach to transformation, the Branch has structured its activities around concept development, experimentation, doctrine and standardisation, and lessons learned. Within the Centre's area of responsibility, TB has applied the Concept Development process to support NATO's capability development and transformation efforts. This process focuses on identifying and recommending solutions to capability shortfalls and conceptual gaps, whether within NATO structures or in cooperation with individual nations. Emerging challenges across the full DOTMLPFI spectrum have often required the development of new concepts or the adaptation of existing ones. In this context, the Branch has been actively involved in both strategic and operational concept development, with particular emphasis on crisis management and disaster relief tasks.

The Transformation Branch has also made a sustained contribution to NATO doctrine, standardisation, and policy. By providing expert analysis and recommendations related to crisis management operations, it has supported the evolution of NATO's doctrinal approach in this area. At the same time, the Branch has facilitated communication and cooperation among NATO member states and partners, fostering a network for the exchange of knowledge, experience, and best practices in crisis response and resilience.

Representatives of the Branch have regularly participated in Allied Joint Operational Doctrine Working Group meetings, contributing to the review and revision of NATO doctrines, the introduction of new NATO terminology, and guidance on standardisation processes. In addition, TB personnel have taken part in meetings of the Military Committee Standardization Board and other NATO forums dedicated to doctrine and standardisation.

In the field of Lessons Learned, the Transformation Branch has conducted independent analyses on critical operational and strategic issues, including studies related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in response to specific requests from the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC). TB staff have also played an active role within the NATO Lessons Learned Community of Interest, contributing to annual conferences, LL Spring Weeks, and specialised workshops.

While these analytical activities have remained important, the main focus of the Branch's Lessons Learned efforts has been on the training domain. The Branch has adopted a dynamic approach to ensuring that CMDR COE training programmes remain relevant and effective by systematically integrating operational lessons learned into their design and continuous improvement. This has been achieved through close cooperation with key stakeholders and subject-matter experts, as well as analysis of recent missions and exercises. As a result, training programmes have remained responsive to the evolving operational environment and have equipped participants with the skills and knowledge required for effective performance in crisis situations.

A distinctive development in the Branch's history occurred with the appointment of CMDR COE as the Department Head for the Business Continuity Management (BCM) Discipline. In November 2023, CMDR COE was formally designated as the Department Head for BCM within the NATO BCM Discipline Governance Structure. To fulfil these responsibilities, the CMDR COE Steering Committee approved changes to the Centre's organisational structure, including the transformation of the former Concept Development and Experimentation Section into the Concept Development and Business Continuity Management Section, staffed by a dedicated team of full-time BCM experts.

As Department Head for the BCM Discipline, CMDR COE has served as a solution provider for NATO BCM training requirements. As a member of the Business Continuity Advisory Group and the BCM Community of Interest, and in close cooperation with other elements of the BCM Training Governance Structure, the Centre has been responsible for identifying and developing both generic and NATO-specific BCM training solutions to address education and training gaps. In December 2024, the Business Continuity Management Office at NATO Headquarters, acting as the BCM Discipline Requirement Authority and implementing the BCM Strategic Training Plan, conducted a BCM Training Requirement Analysis and tasked CMDR COE with providing solutions to the identified gaps. In 2025, CMDR COE organised for the first time a BCM Training Needs Analysis Workshop, a BCM Annual Discipline Conference, and prepared the Discipline Alignment Plan. It is also important to note that CMDR COE has contributed to the development of NATO's Operational Concept on Climate Change and Security at SHAPE's request. In cooperation with the Climate Change and Security Military Task Force and the Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence, the Centre has worked on scientific reports and assessments of climate impacts on NATO missions, assets, domains, and readiness.

Throughout its history, the Transformation Branch has remained a cornerstone of CMDR COE, contributing decisively to the Centre's mission and to NATO's efforts to enhance crisis management, disaster response, resilience, and continuity of operations.



Branch Chiefs through the years:
Colonel Jarosław Kubisz (2014-2017)
Colonel Dariusz Dobroń (2018-2021)
Colonel Robert Jurski (2021-2024)
Colonel Grzegorz Czekał (Since 2024)

Capabilities Branch

The Capabilities Branch (CB) is an integral part of the CMDR COE organisation and serves as one of the Centre's principal engines for the practical execution of the annual Programme of Work, database collection, and innovation. By focusing on integration, the Branch directly contributes to the CMDR COE mission and translates the Centre's agenda into organisational utility. Since the Centre's accreditation in 2015, the Capabilities Branch has undergone significant evolution. Initially focussed on establishing foundational competencies in the disaster response domain and building a community of interest, the Branch has expanded its portfolio to address cross-cutting topics that redefine modern crisis management.

The Branch is tasked with identifying, developing, and validating the required capabilities and products to address the Programme of Work and the official Requests for Support received from the Centre's counterparts. Its responsibilities include supporting concept development and experimentation, facilitating lessons learned processes, and advancing modelling and simulation tools. In addition, the Capabilities Branch has been instrumental in shaping the recognisable image of CMDR COE since the earliest days of the organisation. The Branch is primarily responsible for the Centre's periodical literature, including annual proceedings and booklets, the customer catalogue of services, and all printed materials related to CMDR COE courses and daily routines. Among its distinguished initiatives are the database and bibliotheca projects, which serve as a central hub for the exchange of information, best practices, and research within the crisis management and disaster response domain.

By 2019, when CMDR COE received Unconditional Accreditation and a NATO Quality Assurance Certificate, the Branch had focussed its efforts on consolidating the Centre's role within the NATO COE network, establishing operational laboratories, and integrating into the NATO Exercise Planning Process. A notable achievement of the Capabilities Branch has been the development of advanced modelling and simulation (M&S) capabilities. The Branch has successfully used the Centre's Operational Laboratory to test and validate concepts related to crisis decision-making. In particular, it has contributed to the NATO Modelling and Simulation Group specialist teams, presenting research on "AI in Support of Crisis Decision Making" and "M&S Support for Building Resilience and Refugee Flows Management." These efforts have helped bridge the gap between technological innovation and practical crisis response.

The Branch has consistently demonstrated its value through direct support to key events in which the Centre has been involved. It has provided experts and essential support to notable CMDR COE contributions such as:

- SEESIM (South-Eastern Europe Simulation) Exercises, enhancing the interoperability of Emergency Operation Centres within the South-Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial framework
- The Urbanisation Project, commissioned by SACT NATO and concerning the realization of a city model in both 2D and 3D, supporting analysis of the potential impact of urbanisation on NATO activities in urban territory
- NATO EADRCC Emergency Management Exercises in Montenegro 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019, North Macedonia 2022 and Bulgaria 2025
- Scripting scenarios for exercises such as "Seven Stars" of the South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG), CASTLE by the Hellenic National Defence General Staff, "Saber Guardian" led by U.S. Army Europe, and exercises of NATO's Joint Warfare Centre (Stavanger) and Joint Force Training Centre (Bydgoszcz)
- NATO Computer Assisted Analysis, Exercise, Experimentation Forum, where military users, industry and academia meet to discuss Modelling and Simulation, Exercises, Experimentation, Wargaming, Analysis, and Interoperability
- The Defence Capacity Building project, providing tailor-made courses in Ethiopia, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Moldova, and Qatar
- MSG 147 – Technical Architecture for CMDR
- MSG 187 – Space Weather Environmental Modelling (SWEM)
- MSG 235 – Space Weather Data Processing for Improving Resilience Models
- MSG 221 – M&S in support of Building Resilience and Management of People Mass Movement – End Users: CIMIC COE, CMDR COE, NATO HQ
- MSG 195 – Modelling and Simulation as a Service Experiment

As part of the Branch, the CMDR COE Operational Laboratory supports the Centre's operational and strategic aims and perspectives. To achieve these objectives, the Ops Lab has been developed in both software and hardware, along with the relevant regulations and standard operating procedures for its use and maintenance. Currently, the Ops Lab supports the Centre's daily work, with additional activities in capability generation also possible. Due to its innovative nature, it remains under continuous development.

The Ops Lab supports the Centre's main strategic perspectives by providing capabilities and services at the operational and tactical levels, including:

Modelling various disasters and events that impact human society, forces, and objects. This is achieved using mathematical models, with results that are objective and realistic, subject to the accuracy and adequacy of the input data. The output is dynamic and includes all relevant and important parameters for the specific event (crisis or disaster).

Visualisation, analysis, and assessment of the impact of such events in a virtual environment through simulations.

Potential wargaming, including crisis and disaster events, with manual or automatic (brute-force computation) selection of the best course of action (CoA).

Support for the decision-making process through dynamically generated response plans based on implemented response measures, target lists, predicted event evolution, and available forces and resources.

Assessment of the adequacy of National Emergency Management Authority and Local Emergency Management Authority (NEMA/LEMA) plans for reaction and response, and support for planning development.

Assessment of the preparedness of NEMA and LEMA staff and provision of realistic, objective, effective, and efficient training.

Improvement of standard operating procedures where possible.

Assessment of current technology against established response capabilities and comparison with the latest technologies on the market.



Branch Chiefs through the years:
Colonel Orlin Nikolov (2013–2019)
Colonel Plamen Milanov (2019–2022)
Current: Colonel Desislav Zmeev (since 2023)

Support Branch

Since the establishment of the Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence in 2015, the Support Branch (SB) has been one of the Centre's fundamental pillars, ensuring operational continuity, institutional stability, and sustainable growth. From its earliest days, the Branch has provided essential support in logistics, transportation, personnel management and administration, CIS and IT services, procurement, and asset management.

The mission of the Support Branch has always been to guarantee the effective functioning of the Centre's supply chain through careful planning, execution, and control of all necessary resources and services. In close coordination with the other branches, SB has overseen the provision of shipments, goods, and services essential for the successful conduct of CMDR COE events, and education and training activities.

The early years of the Centre were marked by adaptation and gradual development. For an extended period, CMDR COE operated from temporary premises on the second floor of the “Shipka” Hotel. Although challenging, this phase laid the groundwork for institutional consolidation. After two years of renovation, the Centre was accommodated on the first three floors of the building, comprising 2,483 m², together with 1,908 m² of parking and garden areas. This marked a significant milestone in the Centre's organizational history. Today, the Centre's infrastructure reflects its growth and expanding role. The facility comprises four fully equipped halls, one Video Teleconference (VTC) room, thirty-six offices, two recreation rooms, a registry, two storage rooms, and two dedicated CIS rooms.

The building is functionally organised across three levels:

- The ground floor serves as the Centre's conference and training hub, hosting seminars, workshops, courses, and official events.
- The second floor is designated as an Administrative Security Zone Class II, ensuring protected operations.
- The third floor accommodates administrative offices for unclassified activities.

This structural development symbolises the Centre's transition from a provisional entity to a mature and fully established institution.

A defining moment in the Centre's recent history occurred with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Global lockdowns and the rapid shift to remote work presented an unprecedented challenge. The Support Branch responded decisively, ensuring uninterrupted access to information systems and continuity of operations.

Among the most significant achievements during this period were:

- The construction of a virtual TV studio and virtual classrooms, completed after the implementation of the Content-Based Education and Learning System (CBELS) project in 2020.
- The establishment of secure VPN connectivity, enabling remote access from almost any location worldwide.
- The implementation of cyber defence measures against Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks.
- The development and administration of comprehensive security control systems.

Through these efforts, the Support Branch safeguarded the Centre's operational capability and advanced its digital transformation.

Beyond crisis response, the Support Branch has played a sustained role in improving the Centre's working environment and administrative efficiency. Since 2019, the Branch has continuously developed and administered the SharePoint intranet portal, strengthening internal communication and information management. In 2020, it launched and has since maintained the Community of Interest, fostering professional exchange and collaboration. The administration of the official CMDR COE website has further ensured the Centre's visibility and outreach.

Throughout its development, the Support Branch has been structured into three principal sections:

- The Administration and Logistics Section is responsible for personnel administration, logistical support to daily activities, and transportation of personnel and goods in accordance with the Programme of Work.
- The CIS Section is responsible for the implementation, operation, and maintenance of communication and information systems, supporting both daily activities and the Centre's education and training processes.
- The Procurement Section conducts contracting activities and ensures effective resource and service management through procurement planning within the budget approved by the Steering Committee.

Over the years, the structure of the Support Branch has been changed twice, evolving from its initial organisational chart, through intermediate structural adjustments, to the structure planned for 2026. In retrospect, the history of the Support Branch reflects the evolution of CMDR COE itself – from modest beginnings in temporary premises to a modern, digitally enabled Centre of Excellence. Through steady development, adaptability in times of crisis, and continuous modernisation, the Support Branch has remained an essential force behind the Centre's operational resilience and institutional progress.

Branch Chiefs through the years:

Colonel Gavril Gavrilov † (2013-2017)

Colonel Nikolay Nikolov (2018-2021)

Colonel Svilen Hristov (2021-2025)

Colonel Lyudmil Metodiev (Since March 2025)

CMDR COE Teams



