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Subject:	Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' special report No 14/2018 entitled "The EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Centres of Excellence: more progress needed" - Council Conclusions (20 December 2018)

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on the European Court of Auditors Published Special Report No 14/2018 entitled "The EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Centres of Excellence: More Progress Needed", adopted by the Council at its 3666th meeting held on 20 December 2018.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS
PUBLISHED SPECIAL REPORT NO 14/2018 ENTITLED "THE EU CHEMICAL,
BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE:
MORE PROGRESS NEEDED"**

1. The Council welcomes the European Court of Auditors (ECA) Special Report No 14/2018 entitled "The EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Centres of Excellence: more progress needed" and its conclusions, according to which the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative is one of the main tools to mitigate CBRN threats and risks from outside the EU.
2. The Council notes that one of the main objectives of this performance audit of the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative was to follow up on the actions taken by the EEAS and the Commission to implement the Recommendations contained in Special Report No 17/2014 ("Can the EU's Centres of Excellence Initiative contribute effectively to mitigating chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks from outside the EU?"), which dealt with the setting-up of the Initiative.
3. The Council takes note of the Recommendations of the Special Report, which are designed to address the shortcomings arising from the performance audit and aim to further strengthen and sustain the Initiative.
4. The Council welcomes that the Commission and the EEAS have fully implemented three out of six of the recommendations, contained in the earlier Special Report No 17/2014, and partially implemented two of them. As a result, Partner countries are now more involved in initiating and implementing projects, the organisation at regional level has been strengthened and cooperation between decision-makers and implementing bodies has improved.

5. Notwithstanding progress achieved, the Council acknowledges the conclusion of the Special Report that many challenges remain. Namely, according to the Special Report, a risk-based prioritisation is still to be implemented; CBRN governance and regional cooperation have increased but important obstacles still remain; and monitoring and evaluation needs to be reinforced. According to the ECA, further progress on the engagement of EU Delegations and on the speed of project implementation was also necessary.
6. Accordingly, the Council calls upon the Commission and the EEAS to implement the ECA recommendations, in particular to:
 - prioritise activities on the basis of a systemic risk assessment;
 - strengthen the Initiative's regional dimension;
 - further strengthen the EU Delegations' role in the Initiative;
 - identify potential synergies and other available funding sources;
 - increase accountability and visibility of activities and results through improved monitoring and evaluation;
 - overhaul the web-based portal to allow easy access to all the information concerning the Initiative's activities.
7. Finally, the Council is looking forward to receiving further updates on the implementation and on the outcome of projects supported by the EU CBRN CoE Initiative.