2025/529

18.3.2025

COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2025/529

of 17 March 2025

on Union support for the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research project 'Science and Technology Watchtower: Monitoring Innovation for Disarmament'

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on European Union, and in particular Article 28(1) and Article 31(1) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,

Whereas:

(1) The 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy emphasises that the Union will step up its contribution to collective security.

(2) The 2018 EU Strategy against illicit firearms, small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition, entitled 'Securing Arms, Protecting Citizens', noted that the Union will make use of relevant instruments to support research and development in the field of reliable and cost effective technology to secure SALW and their ammunition and mitigate the risk of diversion. Furthermore, the Council, in its conclusions accompanying its adoption of that Strategy, noted the evolved security context, including developments in SALW design and technology affecting the capacity of governments to address security threats.

(3) The United Nations Secretary-General noted in the 2023 report 'Current developments in science and technology' and their potential impact on international security and disarmament efforts' the growing concerns that developments in science and technology of relevance to security and disarmament are outpacing the capacity of normative and governance frameworks to understand and manage the risks.

(4) The Union wishes to contribute to collective security and the potential to benefit from the opportunities new technologies present, as well as to address the challenges such technologies present, in particular for the multilateral disarmament and arms control system.

(5) The Union has already supported, through Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/2320 ([1]), a previous project of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), entitled 'Unlocking Innovation: Enabling Technologies and International Security' and implemented by UNIDIR in 2023 to 2024. The Union wishes to continue to explore this area in order to contribute to a more systematic identification and analysis of scientific and technological developments and their impact within specific disarmament contexts. The Union should therefore support the implementation of a further UNIDIR project entitled 'Science and Technology Watchtower: Monitoring Innovation for Disarmament',

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

1. With a view to the implementation of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, and taking into account the Union's Strategy against illicit firearms, small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, entitled 'Securing Arms, Protecting Citizens', as well as the EU Strategy against proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Union shall support the implementation of a project of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) entitled 'Science and Technology Watchtower: Monitoring Innovation for Disarmament'.

([1]) Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/2320 of 25 November 2022 on Union support for the implementation of a project 'Unlocking Innovation: Enabling Technologies and International Security' (OJ L 307, 28.11.2022, p. 142, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2320/oj).

2. The project activities to be supported by the Union shall have the following specific objectives:

(a) to provide evidence-based research and analysis to support and inform policy-making and decision-making by proactively monitoring science and technology innovation;

(b) to facilitate knowledge-building and transfer of knowledge on scientific and technological aspects of international security and disarmament;

(c) to bridge relevant communities to enable the transfer of knowledge from a geographically and disciplinarily diverse range of experts and Member States engaged in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

3. The project activities shall include, in particular:

(a) enabling the set-up of a continuous technology horizon-scanning function to ensure that the most relevant science and technology advancements are detected, screened and analysed at early stages of development application;

(b) research into the most relevant trends in science and technology as they pertain to each disarmament area being studied, feeding into multilateral and international processes on emerging technologies and arms control;

(c) increasing dialogue, knowledge-building and transfer of knowledge, including the establishment of a global network of experts that is able to contribute to the sustained impact of the project beyond the funding period.

4. A detailed description of the project referred to in paragraph 1 is set out in the Annex.

Article 2

1. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (the 'High Representative') shall be responsible for the implementation of this Decision.

2. The technical implementation of the project referred to in Article 1 shall be carried out by UNIDIR.

3. UNIDIR shall perform its task under the responsibility of the High Representative. For that purpose, the High Representative shall enter into the necessary arrangements with UNIDIR.

Article 3

1. The financial reference amount for the implementation of the project financed by the Union referred to in Article 1 shall be EUR 1 671 615.

2. The expenditure financed by the reference amount set out in paragraph 1 shall be managed in accordance with the procedures and rules applicable to the Union budget.

3. The Commission shall supervise the proper management of the expenditure financed by the amount set out in paragraph 1. For that purpose, it shall conclude a contribution agreement with UNIDIR. That contribution agreement shall stipulate that UNIDIR is to ensure the visibility of the Union's contribution, appropriate to its size.

4. The Commission shall endeavour to conclude the contribution agreement referred to in paragraph 3 as soon as possible after the entry into force of this Decision. It shall inform the Council of any difficulties in that process and of the date of the conclusion of that agreement.

Article 4

1. The High Representative shall report to the Council on the implementation of this Decision on the basis of regular quarterly reports by UNIDIR. Those reports shall form the basis for the evaluation carried out by the Council.

2. The Commission shall provide information on the financial aspects of the implementation of the project referred to in Article 1.

Article 5

1. This Decision shall enter into force on the date of its adoption.

2. This Decision shall expire 36 months after the conclusion of the contribution agreement referred to in Article 3(3). However, it shall expire six months after the date of its entry into force if no such agreement has been concluded within that period.

Done at Brussels, 17 March 2025.

For the Council

The President

K. KALLAS

ANNEX

PROJECT DOCUMENT

Project in support of the work conducted by The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in the field of security and emerging technologies

'UNIDIR's Science and Technology Watchtower: Monitoring Innovation for Disarmament'

Introduction

Advancements in science and technology are key enablers of economic and social development and prosperity. However, as indicated by the UN Secretary-General in the 2023 report on *Current developments in science and technology and their potential impact on international security and disarmament efforts* there are continuing concerns that 'developments in science and technology of relevance to security and disarmament are outpacing the capacity of normative and governance frameworks to manage the risks. The benefits of new and emerging technologies cannot come at the expense of global security'. On the other hand, there is a growing literature that explores the potential benefits of science and technology for disarmament and arms control, for example to enhance monitoring and verification of compliance.

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) is an autonomous institution within the United Nations that conducts independent research on disarmament and related problems, particularly international security issues. The Institute carries out its role through four key areas of activity: promoting knowledge, generating ideas, facilitating dialogue and providing advice to support Member States, the United Nations, regional organizations and policy and research communities in identifying practical solutions and promoting multilateral progress on disarmament and arms control that contribute to a more sustainable and peaceful world.

UNIDIR plays a leading role in supporting efforts to understand and respond to the security implications of rapid and transformative technological advances. But recent years have seen an unprecedented spike in the pace of technology development, which led many member states to flag, in the context of most disarmament processes, the need for a more systematic identification and analysis of scientific and technological developments and their impact within specific disarmament contexts.

Building on the success of the EU-funded project *'Unlocking innovation: Emerging Technologies and International Security'* implemented by UNIDIR between 2023 and 2024, and on other successful research projects such as Exploring Science and Technology Review Mechanisms Under the Biological Weapons Convention, the proposed 3-year project entitled *'UNIDIR's Science and Technology Watchtower: Monitoring Innovation for Disarmament'* would expand the scope of investigation to include a broader set of science and technology areas and provide expert insights to all disarmament bodies as required and applicable.

The proposed project is intended to build upon, and further support, the work of the different disarmament processes, their respective operational bodies (e.g. Secretariats, Implementation Support Units), membership and Chairpersons. As every process has dealt with the issue of Science and Technology in different ways, coordination and de-confliction will be tailored to address specific needs of States in different regimes and processes. Particular attention will be given to avoid interference with ongoing negotiations regarding the establishment of formal science and technology review mechanisms (or equivalent bodies) in the context of specific disarmament treaties or processes and prevent duplication of existing work in established bodies (e.g. OPCW SAB). In addition, this project will aim to complement and supplement the work already conducted by the UN Secretariat in relation to the annual Secretary General Report on current developments in science and technology and their potential impact on international security and disarmament efforts. Moreover, the project will seek to coordinate and collaborate with relevant activities carried out by the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium (EU NPDC), including its associated network, and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) to ensure not only complementarity with existing activities, but also increasing returns on visibility and profile for the EU on the subject of science and technology as applied to international peace and security.

In this context, the project has three key objectives, which are closely aligned with the core mandate of the Institute. ([1])

Objective 1: Provide evidence-based research and analysis to support and inform policy and decision-making. By proactively monitoring science and technology innovation across multiple disciplines and technology areas of interest to a wide range of disarmament processes, this project will help inform policy discussions by highlighting new or emerging risks and opportunities.

Objective 2: Facilitate knowledge building and transfer on scientific and technological aspects of international security and disarmament. This project aims at reducing, or contribute to reducing, the significant information asymmetries that exists in the area of science and technology across all disarmament processes. This will, in turn, enhance the meaningful participation in multilateral discussions on this topic and improve the overall preparedness of states to engage in discussions rooted in scientific and technical knowledge.

Objective 3: Bridge communities. At a time of increasing global instability and distrust, with an expansion of actors, an increased distribution of knowledge and expertise, and more limited options for traditional forms of regulation, there is an urgent need for different communities to come together and share insights to inform respective agendas. This project will leverage UNIDIR's unique position to enable this knowledge transfer from a geographically- and disciplinary- diverse range of experts and member states engaged in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

In line with UNIDIR's mandate, the core objective of the project will be to provide the disarmament and international security community with independent, objective and evidence-based research in support of on-going and potential future negotiations. To achieve this goal, in addition to leading directly research projects, UNIDIR will establish and facilitate dialogue between a geographically diverse, multi-disciplinary network of experts, as further outlined below, to complement and supplement resident expertise. Close cooperation with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs will be implemented as required throughout the project.

PROJECT

Responding to challenges and leveraging the opportunities presented by scientific and technological advancements in the context of disarmament, peace and security is a complex task. In general terms, it requires being able to detect emerging science and technology developments and understand as early as possible what implications, positive or negative, such developments may have for the current international peace and security architecture and disarmament machinery.

The project will deploy multi- and cross-disciplinary methodologies to the study of different scientific and technological innovations. The project will also enable the exploration and analysis of the increasingly relevant issue of technological convergence, defined as the phenomenon by which technologies that were originally unrelated, become more closely integrated and even unified as they develop and advance, as well as of domain convergence, defined as the increasing entanglement between different domains of application of technology (e.g. bio and AI, space and cyber, etc.).

The scope of the project will include the following disarmament and international security domains: Conventional, WMD (Chemical, Biological, Nuclear) and the domain of information and communication technologies as relevant. Within these domains, examples of specific science and technology areas that will be monitored include, but are not limited to: Artificial Intelligence, materials science and engineering, life sciences, robotics and autonomous systems. Application areas that will be monitored include: research and experimentation, platform development and performance, command and control systems, detection, monitoring and verification.

All project activities will be grouped under two main workstreams as further described below.

([1]) See UNIDIR's mandate: https://unidir.org/unidir-statute/.

1. Workstream 1: Monitoring trends and increasing understanding of Science and Technology developments and their impacts on disarmament and arms control

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this workstream is to identify new and emerging technologies, as well as novel applications of more established ones, to better understand their potential positive and negative impacts on disarmament and arms control. Work under this workstream will be primarily dedicated to providing policy and decision-makers with accessible knowledge on the technology areas under examination, built on technically and scientifically sound evidence.

1.2. Expected results:

(a) Improved understanding of the links and convergences among different technologies, including of their potential risks and benefits.

(b) Increased preparedness of policy makers and diplomats from different regions of the world to meaningfully engage in science and technology-related discussions within relevant disarmament processes.

1.3. Workstream description

This workstream will encompass three main activities. First, it will enable the set-up of a continuous technology horizon scanning function to ensure that the most relevant science and technology advancements are detected, screened and analysed at early stages of development or application. This activity will result in up to two compendiums of the most relevant trends in science and technology as they pertain to each disarmament area being studied (eight compendiums in total for the duration of the project). The findings of this activity will be complementary to, and not duplicative of, the work conducted in official multilateral processes and will be used to contribute to the wider set of relevant multilateral activities such as the annual UN SG report on the role of science and technology in the context of international peace and security, the Common Agenda, including the new agenda for peace, as well as other international initiatives such as future iterations of the Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAIM) Summit.

The second activity under this workstream will include the conduct of specific, targeted, research projects providing deep dives on selected topics considered relevant, timely and impactful for each disarmament area and identified with the support of the relevant expert network (further details provided below). This activity will produce one research paper per year, per disarmament area. Executive summaries will be made available in all UN official languages to support greater reach and accessibility (translation of full reports will be conducted based on time and resource availability).

The third activity will include the organization of up to 2 virtual technology briefings per year, per disarmament area designed to offer the opportunity to the diplomatic community in Geneva and New York to learn and discuss, in an informal setting and through a direct engagement with experts, specific enabling technologies relevant to international peace and security. The presentation part of each event will be recorded and made available on UNIDIR's YouTube channel, while the Q&A segment of each event will not be included in the recording to ensure a more open discussion among participants.

2. Workstream 2: Increasing dialogue, knowledge building and transfer

2.1. Purpose

In line with objectives 2 and 3 of the project, the purpose of this workstream is to facilitate knowledge building and transfer on scientific and technological aspects of international security and disarmament by connecting a geographically- and disciplinary- diverse range of experts with member states engaged in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

2.2. Expected results:

(a) Increased contribution from a regional and disciplinary diverse group of experts to science and technology discussions within disarmament processes.

(b) Establishment of global network of experts that can contribute to the sustained impact of the project beyond the funding period.

(c) Development or reinforcement of connections and collaborations between member states and regional experts from the science and technology community.

2.3. Workstream description

This workstream will include three main activities. First, the project will seek to create sub-networks of science and technology experts pertinent to each disarmament area within the scope of this project. Building on UNIDIR's model of the Global Disarmament Research Networks, each sub-network will be managed by a UNIDIR researcher specialised in the relevant disarmament area. Particular attention in the creation of sub-networks will be given to gender and geographic diversity. Independent experts will be identified combining the extensive network of UNIDIR's collaborators and fellows with targeted experts research (e.g. leading academics identified through review of most relevant and recent research) and an open call as necessary and appropriate. These sub-networks will be leveraged to support both the identification and prioritisation of specific issues to be addressed via research projects and/or events, based on the assessment of the most relevant and urgent needs in each disarmament forum. In addition, experts part of these sub-networks will be used as quality assurance reviewers of research conducted by UNIDIR and, where relevant, may be contracted as principal investigator for specific projects.

A second activity under this workstream will include the organization of one hybrid multi-stakeholder dialogues per year, per disarmament area complementing the research activities to foster exchange of views and transfer of knowledge among different communities of stakeholders. As appropriate, these dialogues could be organized as events in preparation for/in support of scheduled meetings and conferences of relevant processes. Transcripts of the multi-stakeholder dialogues will be edited and made available in English and at least two additional official UN Languages.

A third activity for this workstream will focus mostly on increasing the visibility of the project and the dissemination of its findings. As such, it will include the organization of one event per year during the UN General Assembly's First Committee in New York to support negotiations during the relevant thematic discussions as well as one event per year in Brussels for the EU diplomatic and policy community. Based on opportunity, this series of annual events could be used to launch the collection of annual compendiums or conduct deep dives on specific themes, technologies or disarmament areas. Finally, this workstream will include the participation in up to two events per year led by other entities or organizations which would provide a relevant platform to disseminate the findings of the work and increase the visibility of the project itself and of the EU. An example of such platform could be the future editions of the REAIM Summit.

Engagement with the EU

This project is designed to both leverage potential synergies with other EU-led initiatives or projects (e.g. EUNPDC, EUISS, or specific projects funded by the EU), and provide opportunities for the EU to further consolidate its public profile and leadership in this field. In particular, in addition to producing written material following the branding guidelines, during the course of the project the EU will be given the opportunity to engage in all events organised. Examples of engagements could include: opening and/or closing remarks, moderation, expert contribution, and hosting. While all of these options will be available of all events, and realising the difficulty of staffing the number of engagements planned as part of this project, we recommend the annual event organised during the First Committee to be considered as the 'flagship' opportunity to promote EU's leading role in the field of science and technology as relevant to international peace and security.

Duration of the project

The project is intended to last for three years, with implementation starting in early 2025.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Monitoring and Evaluation of the proposed project will be conducted in accordance with the Institute-level '*Policy on Monitoring and Evaluation of UNIDIR's Knowledge Outputs*', which was endorsed by UNIDIR's Board of Trustees in June 2018. ([2]).

([2]) Document can be provided upon request.