

## GEORGIA *Brief*

# Cooperative Biological Engagement Program

## Collaboration with DTRA

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) established the biological threats reduction programs to operate with post-Soviet countries to prevent the proliferation of expertise, dangerous pathogens and technologies that could contribute to the development of biological weapons. One of the programs funded by DoD was created in **1991** under the Nunn-Lugar Act (authored by Senators Richard Lugar and Sam Nunn) - Cooperative Biological Engagement Program (**CBEP**) directly addressing to global health security threats by working with post-Soviet countries to improve biosafety, biosecurity, and disease surveillance.



Over the years, the program has made significant contributions to international and homeland security. Assistance to partners across the former Soviet Union has been provided to:

- **Consolidate and secure dangerous pathogen collections into central reference labs or repositories;**
- **Improve the safety and security of biological facilities;**
- **Enhance partner countries' capabilities to timely detect, and report bio-terror attacks and potential epidemics ;**
- **Engage scientists with biological weapon-related expertise in research that supports force protection, medical countermeasures, diagnostics, and modeling.**

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) is under the DoD and is the official Combat Support Agency for countering weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high- explosives). DTRA's main functions are threat reduction, threat control, combat support, and technology development.

In Georgia DTRA supports several U.S. Embassy objectives such as Euro-Atlantic Integration, International Cooperation, and Peace and Security measures. In terms of development of bio safety and security and promotion of public health in the Region; ensuring improvement of rapidly detect and report dangerous infections, enhance scientific potential in bio-medicine, and establish international research partnerships, DTRA, through the Cooperative Biological Engagement Program (CBEP) actively cooperates with Georgian governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Agriculture (Laboratory of Ministry of Agriculture; National Food Agency) and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) and the leading Public Health Institution - National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC).

In 90'es of the last century and in the framework of the DTRA and the Nunn-Lugar CTR program, partnership with Georgian Government was established.

In **1997**, the "Agreement between the United States of America and Georgia Concerning Cooperation in the Area of the Prevention of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Promotion of

Defense and Military Relations” was signed, defining areas of cooperation, including prevention of proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and related materials. In **2002** “Agreement between the Department of Defense of the USA and Ministry of Defense of Georgia Concerning Cooperation in the Area of Prevention of Proliferation of technology, Pathogens and Expertise Related to the Development of Biological Weapons” was signed.



The crowning achievements of this collaboration are the establishment of the Unified Laboratory System (ULS) based on the “One Health” Concept, representing by 22 human and animal surveillance labs throughout the country under the Ministries of Labour,

Health and Social Affairs and Agriculture, and the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research, a state-of-the-art biosafety level 3 research facility, unique in the Region, constructed and handed over to the NCDC for operation and ownership in 2013. The US investment in improving lab infrastructure, developing human resources, supporting research projects, amounts around 350 mln USD. Through the CBEP support the Electronic Integrated Disease Surveillance System (EIDSS) has been designed as an electronic tool of the ULS to strengthen and support monitoring and prevention of human and animal diseases and facilitates International Health Regulations (IHR) compliance in real time.

In **2014** bilateral agreement and ratified by the Parliament of Georgia JTA (Joint Transition Agreement) defined a number of obligations and actions between two Governments for further cooperation. From the beginning of 2018 the Government of Georgia will take full responsibilities over the maintenance of the Unified Laboratory System and the R. Lugar Center.



Due to this support, nowadays, Georgia is a leader country in the Region



with strong laboratory and epidemiological capacity; bio safety & security standards; with diagnostic and reporting systems; with academic and bio-medical scientific research potential. As a pilot project DTRA also supported the establishment of the electronic educational platform for Georgian medical doctors throughout the country in collaboration with British Medical Journal (BMJ). Together with CDC, DTRA supports and promotes Georgia in GHSA activities globally.

From the future perspective the DTRA, through the CBEP, is planning to support Georgia, and namely, NCDC to become a Regional Hub and cross-border lead for neighboring countries to share experience on epidemiological and laboratory surveillance; to provide bio-safety and bio-security training mentorship, to promote scientific diplomacy.



Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia  
144, A. Tsereteli avenue. Tbilisi, Georgia, 0119  
[www.moh.gov.ge](http://www.moh.gov.ge)



National Center for Disease Control and Public Health  
9, M. Asatiani street. Tbilisi, Georgia, 0177  
[www.ncdc.ge](http://www.ncdc.ge)