Tajikistan Ministry Announces Establishment of Digitization Council to Build High-Tech Park

At an online platform organized by the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan, the University of Central Asia, and StrategEast, the Ministry announced its readiness to establish a Digitization Council, with the primary goal of setting up the first High-Tech Park in the country. Experts participating at the event shared their contextual experience of setting up high-tech parks in Eurasia, and its application to Tajikistan.

Speaking at the panel discussion on March 10, Farhod Bilolzoda, Deputy Minister of Industry and New Technologies, elaborated that the Digitization Council will be part of the Ministry, and would promote technological development in various areas, including making broadband more widely accessible in rural areas. He added, "In order to leverage these new opportunities, we need to create a new domain in the Government, private sector, and society in general – a domain that is able and willing to embrace new developments." The Ministry requested the assistance of the University of Central Asia (UCA), and invited development partners, private

Farhod Bilolzoda speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan.

sectors and NGOs in developing the composition and strategic objectives of the Digitization Council.

Among the distinguished panelists were Oleksandr Bornyakov, Deputy Minister at Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation; Konstantin Mikhel, VMP Partners Law Firm, who spoke about IT legislation in Belarus; Dmytro Yeriomin, Member of the Supervisory Board of UNIT, on Ukraine's experience with IT legislation; and Aytandil Kasradze, Chairman of Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency, on public-private partnerships in the creation of high-tech parks. The moderator was Shaukat Ali Khan, Chief Information Officer at the University of Central Asia.

In his remarks, the Rector of UCA, Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, spoke about the "centrality of people in a knowledge economy, and the need to provide the best educational opportunities and training. Once such a conducive environment is created, there is need for participation by entrepreneurs to expand opportunities through human ingenuity and innovation." Anatoly Motkin, President of StrategEast, gave examples of the development of the IT sector in Georgia, and its applicability to Tajikistan. Ozodkhon Davlatshoev, Director General of the mobile phone company Tcell, emphasized that since Tajikistan is a mountainous country, its uniform development depends on wide access to high speed internet.

See the full panel discussion at:
https://youtu.be/IKp2ZH5Zzxc

AKTC Workshop on Urban Planning Draws Praise

Masood Khan, of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, answering questions at the Workshop.

A three day exclusive Workshop on Urban Design was organized by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) from March 27. It was conducted by Masood Khan, senior planning and architecture consultant, and Francesco Siravo, sen-

ior consultant for conservation and planning, both representing AKTC. The Workshop was attended by senior officials from the districts and oblasts of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, including the Mayor and Chief Architect of Naryn, the acting Director and the Chief Architect of the Kyrgyz Union of Architects, the Chief Architects of Khorog and the Gorno Badakshan Autonomous Oblast. Also participating were Tojiniso Muborakshoeve of the Tajik Planning Agency, and Kanibek Kaepkulov from the Institute of Urban Planning and Architecture of Bishkek, who also made a presentation.

AKTC Workshop on Urban Planning

Kanibek Kaepkulov, of the Institute of Urban Planning and Architecture of Bishkek, delivering his presentation.

The Workshop included presentations on General Master Planning, the Planning Process at a Strategic Level, Strategic Considerations of Legislative Changes, the Functionally Efficient City, an analysis of Naryn's Geomorphological Assets, and the Impact of a Modern City on the Well-being of its Citizens.

The presentations resulted in lively discussions and debates, and the participants lauded the depth of knowledge shared by the AKTC trainers. The latter also appreciated the enthusiasm and dedication of the workshop participants, a measure of their deep links with the towns of Naryn and Khorog, and their desire to be instrumental in the social, economic, and urban betterment of their towns. Special attention was paid to the issues of preserving natural environmental assets and local cultural values, while advancing urban and economic development through the medium of town planning.

What Does COVID-19 Mean to Kyrgyz Citizens?

The University of Central Asia's Civil Society Initiative (CSI) has launched a project to record the experiences of people in Kyrgyzstan during the COVID pandemic. "COVID: Voices of Kyrgyzstani People" aims to not only record it's impact on the personal lives of people, but also the important role played by civil society organizations on a scale never seen before. All stories can be found on the project website: https://covidstories.kg.

Pain, loss of loved ones or acquaintances, worry and patience, will and hope... the list goes on and on. Kyrgyzstan has lived through 2020, a year of relentless fight against the coronavirus, searching for solutions during this difficult crisis in which the country has found itself as a result of the pandemic. Much has already been erased from memories, but no one will forget "Black July" and people's desperate attempts to save themselves from mass infection. To know and remember how the country fought COVID-19 a year ago, the Civil Society Initiative of UCA's Graduate School of Development launched a project "Covid: Voices of Kyrgyzstani People" to provide a record of society's experiences during the pandemic and to track the role played by civil society organizations. This resource includes the views of key decision-makers in the fight against the pandemic; true stories of all participants, including volunteers, doctors, health workers, media representatives, economists, education officials, ministers of health, deputy prime ministers, members of the Anti-COVID-19 Headquarters, city mayors, regional governors, local Kenesh and Jogorku Kenesh deputies, community leaders and experts. The resource is based on real stories, as an interview genre, and is open to adding new stories.
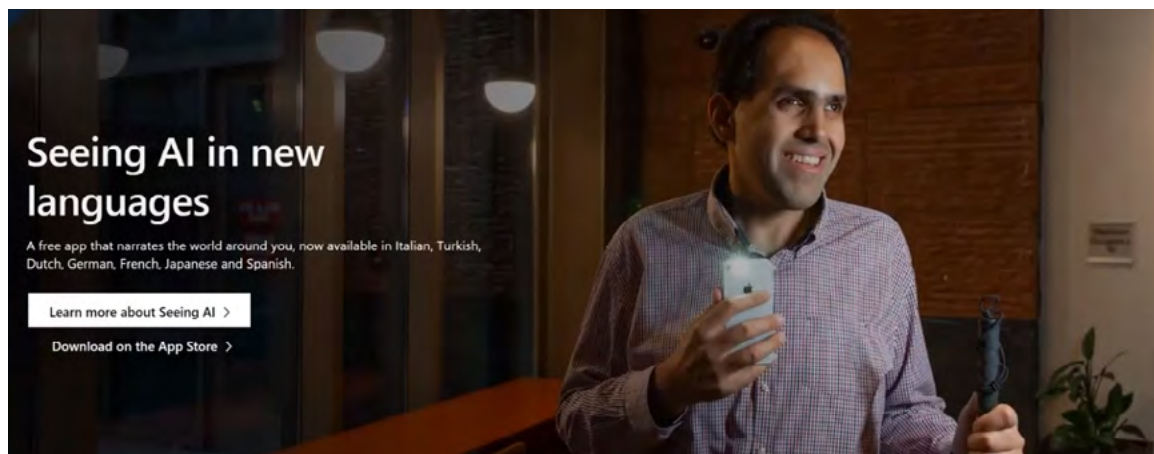
CSI was established in 2017 to foster a more enabling policy and administrative environment for civil society's develop-

Nurses Mayram Karmysheva and Adylbek kyzy Dilbara helped save lives by setting up a free day hospital for Covid patients in the village of Kuntuu, Chui Oblast.

ment and help build the organization capacity of civil society groups. This website is a part of project "Increasing access to comprehensive and reliable information on Coronavirus for journalists in Kyrgyzstan", supported by the British Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic.

"Everyone Has a Role to Play in Addressing AI Bias"

Seeing AI in new languages

A free app that narrates the world around you, now available in Italian, Turkish, Dutch, German, French, Japanese and Spanish.

Learn more about Seeing AI >

Download on the App Store >

Shaikh, one of Microsoft's lead engineers behind Seeing AI, uses the app himself since he is blind.

As more societies move up the curve of digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence (AI), people need to pay attention "to what they see and what they don't see so that any hidden bias can be addressed," said Steve Crown, Vice President and Deputy General Counsel for Human Rights at Microsoft.

"AI is a human creation and people determine what data is fed into it, which can betray some selection and skewing," said Crown, whose online Distinguished Lecture organized by UCA on March 16th 2021 focused on AI and Human Bias. This bias happens not necessarily because of intentional wrongdoing on the part of computer scientists who develop them, but oftentimes due to the numbers and quality of data they work with, said Crown. He cited the case of facial recognition technology, many of which are skewed towards those with lighter complexions, particularly men. There are more images of white men on mass media, "which then affects data sets for AI," said Crown; data training sets are also biased for images with good focus and lighting.
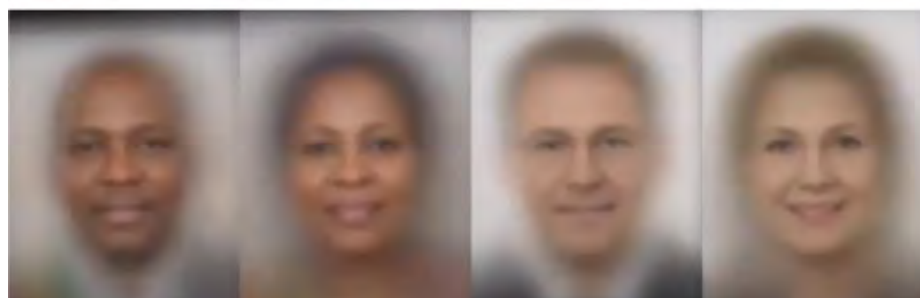
In every deployment of AI, it's important to know what perspectives, assumptions, and biases affect performance because it matters, said Crown. AI can play hidden roles in matters such as allocation and withholding of resources and opportunities, in risk analysis for loan decisions, in hiring decisions, among others. "AI is the most powerful technology humans have created," he said, adding that it is "exhilarating, but also humbling," because there are still many unanswered questions. "It's a challenge for the entire human community, and we all have a role to play."

Microsoft is tackling the challenge of bias "from a broader ethical and human rights perspective," by focusing on responsible and "human-centered AI," said Crown. Its foundational building blocks for AI are fairness, reliability and safety, privacy and security, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability.

Likening bias to gravity – which can be both useful and destructive – Crown said it can be harnessed by using AI to help solve the world's problems. He cited Microsoft's Seeing AI, a free app that helps the blind and low vision community navigate the world around them by describing people, objects and things they encounter. The app uses a smartphone's camera to capture what's happening around the user and narrates this through speech. Saqib Shaikh, one of Microsoft's lead engineers behind Seeing AI, uses the app himself since he is blind.

Gender Classifier	Darker Male	Darker Female	Lighter Male	Lighter Female	Largest Gap
Microsoft	94.0%	79.2%	100%	98.3%	20.8%
FACE⁺⁺	99.3%	65.5%	99.2%	94.0%	33.8%
IBM	88.0%	65.3%	99.7%	92.9%	34.4%

Facial recognition technology is often skewed towards those with lighter complexions, particularly men, because of an overabundance of data training sets of white men on mass media, said Steve Crown during his lecture.

Covid-19 Pandemic: UCA Students Reflect on Lessons Learned

Meeting friends, going out for walks, playing sports, and talking freely with others – it's the simple things in life that four UCA students from the Naryn and Khorog campuses are looking forward to the most – post-pandemic.

A year ago on March 11, 2020, along with the rest of the world, the lives of Rauf Alibakhshov, Aizada Berdibekova, Farzona Akhmedova and Ubaid Sayedi were disrupted when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic.

"These tough times have made us vigilant, and motivated young people to be strong and help each other."
— Aizada

The students had been looking forward to an active and exciting life on campus. Instead, like many others worldwide, they were sent home on March 20th and classes pivoted online as part of government efforts to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

While their generation may be digital natives, they soon realized that learning via an electronic device posed unanticipated challenges. When online classes began, it was "quite arduous to adapt," said Rauf. Being in front of her laptop nearly all day long had a negative impact on Farzona's well-being. She also had frequent issues with her Internet connection, adding to her frustration. Ubaid missed the interpersonal communication with his instructors and classmates the most, especially on a residential campus such as UCA. "Students always need each other's support both during and after classes," he said, adding that it was hard to have an exchange of ideas on a virtual platform.

As time passed, they all became used to distance learning. "At this stage, I feel comfortable being engaged in it," said Rauf. He credits UCA's faculty and staff for helping him to adjust. "Even though classes were online, we still interacted with the professors via e-mail about concerns and questions, to which they responded quickly." Still, they all can't wait for things to go back to "normal."

Aizada Berdibekova.

Farzona Akhmedova.

"Restrictions imposed because of the pandemic has made me value freedom, health, and the lives of other people." *— Farzona*

With non-essential travel restricted, Ubaid, who is an Earth and Environmental Science student, was unable to work in a lab or go on field trips to fulfill the practical work required for class. He decided to use online resources, such as videos related to
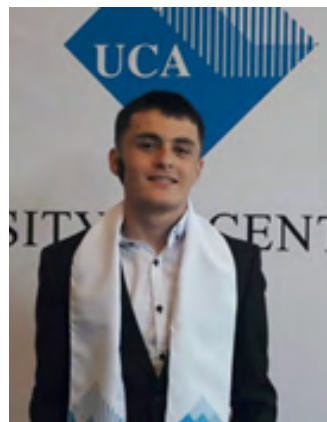
"Countries around the world helped one another to save lives during the pandemic, and that has been truly inspiring." — *Rauf*

Rauf Alibakhshov.

Ubaid Sayedi.

his topics "and visually learned how they used theories and applied it in practice." There was a time conflict with some of his instructors who were in other parts of the world, so he couldn't reach out fully. He decided to "change my style of learning" and basically became an independent learner.

There were life lessons learned along the way too. The pandemic has "changed our life," said Aizada, noting that people came to value family and friends, learned how to take care of themselves and others, and think about the consequences of their actions. "These tough times have made us vigilant…Watching every day how many people have died because of the pandemic has been very hard," she said. But it has motivated the young generation "to be strong and help people."

Farzona echoed the same sentiment, saying that the pandemic has taught "all humanity some important lessons," including the ability to adapt to new life situations. "It also taught people to care not only about themselves, but also about their surroundings; to be more responsible."

As for life after Covid, all four are wishing for an end to isolation and limitations, which they recognize has taken a toll on mental and physical wellbeing. Rauf wants to be able to socialize and stay fit with sports and "simply interact with others without fear of being infected." Ubaid can't wait go back to offline classes where "we can talk normally with each other, because we work better in groups, and think better together." Farzona, too, wants to go back to traditional education, which she said is "more interesting, effective and informative." She is also looking forward to "seeing and hugging my teachers, whom I have already come to love very much from our online lessons." And wants to be surrounded by her fellow students on campus. Aizada yearns for happy sunny days, and hopes that "people will not forget that the pandemic also taught us to value "our relatives, our health, our time, the pureness of ourselves, and our souls."

Ancient Wakhan at the Cross Roads of History

The ruins of Yamchun (left) and Namadgut (right) fortresses

The history of the ancient sites of Wakhan, which are connected to the Silk Road, are not well-documented, but the ruins of fortresses, artillery towers, caravanserai (large roadside hostels that lodged traveling merchants and their caravans) and temples tell their stories, said Dr. Abdulmamad Iloliev, a Research Associate in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in London.

Iloliev shared his paper: Between the Pamirs and the Hindukush: Ancient Wakhan at the Crossroads of History, during an online lecture hosted by UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) on March 11th 2021. These sites were important in the life of the Silk Road, he said, noting that geographic and geologic references in Chinese and Arabic sources point to merchants, monks and other travelers using the Wakhan route. At least 20 sites have been discovered since excavations began in the 1950s.

Iloliev asserts that the expansion of trade and military campaigns led to the construction of massive strongholds at the crossroads of several Central Asia's mountain ranges including the Pamirs and the Hindukush alongside the upper Panj-River and the Wakhan-Darya in order to facilitate the traffic of people and goods on the road. He showed photographs of fortress ruins, identified by names of rulers, which stand on plateaus close to river sources, and were clearly for defense and security purposes. Watch the full lecture here: https://youtu.be/43fAp_wxvPc
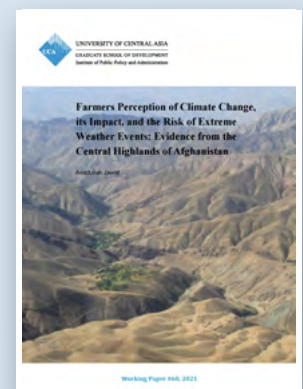
© Jonny Duncan / Lonely Planet

New IPPA Publication on Farmers' Perception of Climate Change

UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) has a new publication: Farmers' Perception of Climate Change, its Impact, and the Risk of Extreme Weather Events. Using data collected from 1,500 farmers in three central provinces of Afghanistan, namely, Bamiyan, Diakundi, and Ghazni as well as 34 years of daily weather information, the study concludes that all farmers have perceived changes in the climate, and a decrease in the amount of precipitation.

The vast majority of farmers expressed concern about how their farming is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, such as drought and flooding. The Central Highlands of Afghanistan has a long history of experiencing extreme weather events, but because of limited educational and economic means, they have not been able to develop robust adaptation strategies to increase their resilience in dealing with these events.

Read the full results of the research, including recommendations on what needs to be done to help farmers adapt to climate change here.

SPCE Graduate Expands Her Kindergarten Business in Naryn

Kenzhebubu Malayeva had already been running a kindergarten in Dobolu, Naryn District, for 14 years, but wanted to expand and improve her business.

She decided to take a short-term entrepreneurship course at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE), a decision that opened new doors for her. Aside from learning how to generate business ideas, marketing, IT for business planning, financial literacy, business communication skills and other modules, she not only learned how to develop her own business plan, but also had the opportunity to receive a loan. Later, she was able to secure a grant of 28 million soms from ARIS [Community Development and Investment Agency] to construct a new kindergarten. The new kindergarten has space for 100 children.

"I am very grateful for the knowledge that I gained at SPCE and for the contribution that I received," said Malayeva. But she is not about to rest on her laurels, and is planning to take a Small Business Management course at SPCE.

30 Bishkek Students Receive Cambridge English Certificates from SPCE

The collaboration between UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the International Primary School Seitek has borne fruit. As an authorised Cambridge Assessment English Centre, SPCE offers official examinations for students and teachers. Last March, 30 students from Seitek School officially received their Cambridge certificates confirming their levels of proficiency.

SPCE Graduate's Dreams Take Flight in Germany

Madina Gulomshoeva outside the hotel she manages in Munich, Germany.

Madina Gulomshoeva's diligence and eagerness to have a good command of the English language has taken her from the remote Murghab region of the Pamiri mountain range to Munich, Germany.

Gulomshoeva studied English for three years at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education in Khorog, Tajikistan. She started as a beginner-level student and moved on to higher levels of proficiency. She now works as a manager at the Landhotel Huber in Ambach am Starnberger See, Munich. She is also pursuing her education and upgrading her knowledge of English and German at a professional school there.

"I feel very fortunate to have studied at SPCE and am very grateful to my teacher Marhabo Kholmurodova, who guided me throughout my English language courses. In my free time, I work as an English tutor and in the future I plan to return to my homeland to contribute to the development of the remote regions where I grew up," says Madina.

SPCE Graduates Open Clothing Shop in Faizabad

Falzabad, Afghanistan

Six female students who recently completed a one-month entrepreneurship course at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education have created a cooperative and opened Queen Shopping Center, a clothing store in Faizabad, Badakhshan.

"I had an idea to open such a shop, but didn't know how to start, manage and promote my business. This short entrepreneurship course gave me the understanding and skills to open my own business," said Angiza Amani, one of the shop's founders.

SPCE's short-term entrepreneurship course is in high demand in Faizabad, and currently has 100 students enrolled.

Good to Know

Steering Committee Announced for 2022 Architecture Prize

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture has announced the members of the Steering Committee for the 2020-2022 cycle. Chaired by His Highness the Aga Khan, other members of the Steering Committee are:

- Sheikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, President, Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, Manama.
- Emre Arolat, Founder, EAA - Emre Arolat Architecture, Istanbul.
- Meisa Batayneh, Principal Architect, Founder, Maisam Architects and Engineers, Amman.
- Sir David Chipperfield, Principal, David Chipperfield Architects, London.
- Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Director, Institute of African Studies, Columbia University, New York.
- Nasser Rabbat, the Aga Khan Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.
- Marina Tabassum, Principal, Marina Tabassum Architects, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- Sarah M. Whiting, Dean, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- Farrokh Derakhshani is the Director of the Award.

Clockwise from the top: Emre Arolat, Marina Tabassum, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Sarah M. Whiting, Nasser Rabbat, Meisa Batayneh, Sir David Chipperfield, Sheikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, and His Highness the Aga Khan.

The Steering Committee is the governing body of the Award. One of its most important tasks is to select an independent Master Jury which, in turn, selects the award recipients from the nominated projects. More information on the Steering Committee at https://bit.ly/3uybFsA.

Arata Isozaki, the renowned Japanese architect, and designer of the University of Central Asia, served on the Master Jury of the Award in 2001.

Established in 1977, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture is given every three years to projects that set new standards of excellence in architecture, planning practices, historic preservation and landscape architecture. Projects can be anywhere in the world but must successfully address the needs and aspirations of societies in which Muslims have a significant presence. Over 9,000 projects have been documented.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture prize funds US$ 1,000,000 to the winners. The rigour of its nomination and selection process has made it, in the eyes of many cultural experts, one of the world's most important architectural prizes.

Join SPCE Khorog's Free English Speaking Clubs

Every Saturday, UCA's SPCE has been hosting free English Speaking Clubs in Khorog, Tajikistan. There are group discussions, debates, and talks on a variety of topics, which allow participants to practice their English. Each meeting has a moderator who points out common mistakes, takes part in the chats, and asks questions to engage everyone. Check out the spring schedule of the clubs to find out when you can join.

Address: 190 Shirinsho Shotemur Str., Khorog, Tajikistan.

Tel.: +992 (3522) 22 277

Date		Topic	Instructor
April	3	Leisure Activities	Bakhmal Fazlonshoeva
	10	The importance of Culture	Mehrigul Saradova
	17	Unusual Traditions	Zamira Sitqinushova
	24	Festivals	Mavluda Zulfova
May	8	Reading and its Benefits	Shoista Khayolbekova
	15	Money	Latofat Kushbegieva
	22	Bullying	Khairini Gulmaidarovaso
	29	Giving Presentations	Marhabo Kholmuradova
June	5	Environment	Abror Inomshoev
	12	Culture Shock	Nozukmo Rustambekova
	19	Fame and Popularity	Donista Solijonova
	26	Studying Abroad	Kobila Bakhtuljamolova
July	3	The Role of Women in Society	Madina Fayzakova
	10	Music	Uvaido Pulodov
	17	The Philosophy of Life	Sino Saidgulov

Playing with Lives: Cyberattacks on Healthcare are Attacks on People. A research study from the CyberPeace Institute.

April 13th 2021, 5:00 PM (KGT, GMT+6)

The CyberPeace Institute has analyzed the impacts of these attacks on people and society. The Institute has demonstrated the complexity, magnitude, and range of the threat to healthcare, from ransomware to disinformation about COVID-19. The lecture will cover key findings, recommendations, and necessary actions to ensure a more secure cyberspace that is protective of the healthcare sector and society. The event will be streamed online in English with a simultaneous Russian translation through Zoom and Facebook Live.
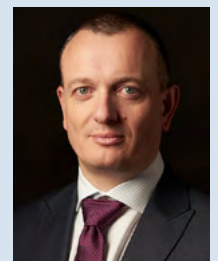
Learn more on UCA's website.

Bruno Halopeau, Chief Technology Officer, CyberPeace Institute

Seasoned professional with more than twenty years of experience as managing consultant leading secure digital transformation projects in various industries; spent several years as CISO for a EU body; acted as a team lead expert in the fight against cybercrime and terrorism on topics such as critical infrastructure protection, exploitation of emerging technologies for criminal gains, forensics and investigative techniques in cyberspace; led development of innovation strategy programme for law enforcement.