

Regaining trust online

*Article written by Mauro Abela – Executive, MEUSAC
Published on The Malta Independent – 08.03.17*

Digital technology, free Wi-Fi connections and an ever-increasing dependence on the Internet has transformed the way we conduct business transactions. As a result, more than ever before, it is important that one feels safe when paying online.

The increased use of technology has also given rise to issues relating to cybercrime, that is, criminal activity that involves the Internet, a computer system, or computer technology.

Cyber threats are borderless problems that have a negative impact on the economy, on the fundamental rights of citizens and on society at large. The growing number of offences such as data interference, online payment fraud and identity theft are leading to significant economic losses. Such actions also result in the disruption of services, violations of fundamental rights while also undermining the consumers' trust in online activities.

The EU Member States and institutions have long acknowledged the need to protect our networks and the digital infrastructure to be able to respond effectively to cyber threats. Both national and EU-level cyber security strategies and regulations exist for such purpose.

The EU cyber-security strategy, adopted in 2013, presents the EU's comprehensive vision on how countries may be best prepared for such eventualities as well as on how to respond to cyber disruptions and attacks.

The main aims of this strategy are: the capacity to withstand cyber threats and reduce cyber crimes; being able to develop both cyber defence mechanisms and an international cyberspace policy; and developing additional industrial and technological resources.

Since the launch of the Strategy, the European Commission has stepped up its efforts to provide better protection to Europeans online by adopting different legislative proposals that have led to the setting up of a European Cybercrime Centre in 2013. The Commission has also proposed legislation to counter attacks on information systems.

In 2015, the European Commission's e-Government Benchmark Report re-confirmed Malta as the leader in the delivery and performance of e-Government services amongst 33 countries. To address the need to protect our country's interests, the Maltese authorities issued the first National Cyber Security Strategy in 2016. Its main aim is to provide a well-planned, collective and systemic approach that respects the individual's fundamental rights and freedoms, whilst ensuring confidentiality, integrity and availability of cyberspace on a day-to-day basis.

In July 2016, the Commission published a Communication aimed at strengthening Europe's cyber resilience system, while also fostering a more competitive and innovative cyber security industry.

This Communication is attempting to address three major issues. Firstly, it aims at greater cooperation amongst Member States in order for them to be better equipped to deal with cyber attacks by the creation of a new information hub and the introduction of effective information-sharing mechanisms. Furthermore, the Communication is also seeking to address the challenges that Europe's cyber-security Single Market is currently facing by means of new market oriented policies.

Additionally, the Communication is aiming to facilitate the growth of the cyber-security industry by increasing the industry's supply of products and services. Such measures will aid the EU in becoming a leading player in the field. Cyber-security is also one of the topics which will be up for discussion during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

As mentioned in the programme of the Maltese Presidency, special attention will be given to increasing cyber-security awareness by leading discussions on the potential impact incurred by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and citizens when connected to the cyber space, highlighting the importance of 'Cyber Hygiene'.

To encourage further discussion on the importance of cyber-security and on the impact that the proposed Commission Communication will have on stakeholders in Malta, MEUSAC, in collaboration with the Ministry for Competitiveness and Digital Maritime and Services Economy (MCDMS), the Malta Information Agency (MITA) and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), will be organising a consultation session. This will provide stakeholders with an opportunity to participate in the formulation of Malta's position on this EU-wide initiative.

The consultation session will be taking place in the coming weeks. Further information may be obtained from MEUSAC either by calling 2200 3300 or by sending an e-mail on consult.meusac@gov.mt.