Competition Instructions

Your team will take on the role of experienced cyber policy experts invited to brief the Political and Security Committee of the European Union which has been called to address an evolving cyber crisis. **For the purposes of this exercise**, the Political and Security Committee is made up of European leaders (including heads of state, heads of government, ministers of defence and foreign affairs, directors of intelligence services, and representatives from the private sector).[1]

This briefing document contains fictional information on the background and current situation involving a cyber incident seriously affecting healthcare infrastructure and services in a Member State of the European Union. The incident notionally takes place in April and May 2022. The scenario presents a fictional account of developments and both public and private reports on the cyber incident.

The parties to this fictional cyber incident are:
- The fictional state of the Republic of Nistria
- The fictional state of the Kingdom of Mustelus
- The European Union.

The Republic of Nistria

The Republic of Nistria is a fictional Southern European state on the Mediterranean Sea bordering France, Spain and Italy. Until 2013, Nistria was a former province of the Kingdom of Mustelus until its independence following a highly politicised and emotive referendum; many ethnic Mustelans continue to live in Nistria. Soon after its independence, Nistria became a member of NATO and most recently in December 2021, became the European Union's newest member state, much to displeasure of their Mustelan neighbours.

The 2013 independence campaign was spearheaded by the right-wing Nistrian People's Party, which has since dominated Nistrian politics. As a result, the Nistrian government has been classified as very right-wing and conservative, particularly due to its denial of climate change as well as its open anti-abortion and pro-fossil fuel views. Public concerns have been raised over the government's recently released plans to reopen a series of coal-fired power stations and coalmines across the country, with the intention of making coal once again one of the Republic's primary industrial revenue sources and critical infrastructures.

Nistria also hosts a wealth of highly developed e-commerce and digital technology industries, established while Nistria was part of Mustelus. Nistria is a manufacturer of the world's third most popular mobile phone brand, Nistron. This company is state-owned and brings in huge revenues for the Nistrian government. In 2020, Nistron planned to release the world's first folding mobile phone, the Nistron NH7000 FOLD. However, the official launch was delayed following a large-scale hack of Nistron's main servers, allegedly carried out by Mustelan agents with the intent of stealing manufacturing blueprints. The Mustelan government denied any involvement but also refused to extradite or prosecute any alleged perpetrators citing lack of evidence.

As part of the EU membership transition in this scenario, Nistria's healthcare sector has recently upgraded its systems to join the pan-European healthcare digital service infrastructure, DigiSantEU.[2] DigiSantEU was established in 2015 as an EU-wide healthcare database system, which allows any hospital and healthcare provider within the EU to access patient health records and up-to-date diagnostic results in order to provide healthcare services

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[1] The Political and Security Committee in reality is made up of EU Ambassadors representing their countries. More information can be found here.

[2] A fictional system.

to any EU citizen. One of the treaty-based conditions of Nistria joining the EU is the connection of all Nistrian healthcare services and providers to DigiSantEU.

On 6th April 2022 Nistria's central diagnostic hub executed the final upgrades necessary to fulfil all DigiSantEU membership requirements at the country's main hospital, Nistropolis Central Hospital (NCH). However, this upgrade was later followed by a series of unforeseen events that has compromised key information systems and dramatically impacted upon the hospital's ability to treat patients. Similar effects have started to be reported in the other four main hospitals in Nistria. The Nistrian hospital operators and government are in the process of responding to the problem. On the 9th of April 2022 the Director of NCH commissioned a cyber forensics company to investigate further.

The Kingdom of Mustelus

The second fictional state involved in this simulation is the Kingdom of Mustelus, a Southern European state on the Mediterranean Sea and neighbouring Nistria. This is a federal country made up of eight provinces. Nistria was the ninth province until its independence referendum. Unlike Nistria, Mustelus is not a member of the European Union or NATO.

Mustelus is also a highly digitised society and boasts a highly developed software industry with a particular reputation in computer games design, production and e-commerce. An unfortunate consequence of this is a highly developed digital black market which successive Mustelan governments have been unable to close. There has been an ongoing economic rivalry between Mustelus and Nistria, since Nistria's independence, centred around releasing the latest digital innovations and being a leading player in the regional and global technology industries.

Mustelus also practices a "green economy", with heavy investment in renewable energy and recycling. Mustelan eco-warrior groups have a very active presence in Mustelus itself and have openly criticised and protested against the Nistrian government's denial of climate change. In particular, the Mustelan-based paramilitary ecowarrior group EcoEarthNow! has generated increasing public support in its recent campaign against Nistria's plan to reopen coal mines. The group has previously used social media campaigns and public strikes to voice its opinion, and after an alleged threat to execute a cyber or physical attack on Nistrian infrastructure, was officially listed as an extremist group by the Nistrian government in 2018.

This has generated momentum in Nistria with many Nistrian Royalists suggested to have ties with similar Mustelus-affiliated ecowarrior groups. In addition, the Mustelan government has increasingly sought to reach out to the Mustelan diaspora in Nistria. This has generated unsubstantiated allegations of Mustelan government entities fomenting unrest in the diaspora community.

The European Union

In the universe in which this exercise is situated, the EU is a union of 28 member states, with the Republic of Nistria being the newest, 28th member. The EU's security policy and crisis strategy is directed by the Political and Security Committee.

The Political and Security Committee of the EU

The Political and Security Committee (PSC), is a body of the Council of the European Union. As such it upholds a consensus-based approach amongst member state representatives to devise pan-European responses to potential crises.

The PSC is responsible for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The Committee therefore actively:

- monitors the international situation;
- recommends strategic approaches and policy options to the Council;
- provides guidance to EU crisis entities such as the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM), the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS);
- and ensures political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations.

The PSC meets at least twice a week to keep track of the international situation. In a crisis, the PSC can hold significant authority. The Council may authorise decision-making capabilities to the Committee throughout the duration of a crisis management operation. One of the ways the PSC can exercise this authority is to adopt EU Decisions under the CFSP framework. EU Decisions are a specific type of EU legislation which are only binding on the specific Member State or entity to which they refer.

Also of note is that, at this moment in time, all European states are facing dramatically increased healthcare demands as a new virus, COVID-22, spreads across the European continent. This highly infectious respiratory disease was originally identified in Jeeperous, a small fictional country in Southeast Asia in January 2022, before spreading uncontrollably across the world and being declared a pandemic in late March 2022. Europe in particular is preparing for a 'first wave' of infections and hospitalisations, with the vast majority of member states imposing some form of national lockdown or social restrictions. Some hospitals are already starting to reach maximum capacity.

In the universe of this exercise, the Council of the EU has authorised the PSC to choose a course of action on behalf of the EU to ensure Europe's security, including in the field of EU healthcare. The Covid-22 pandemic has been classified as a threat to the Union and so is a PSC mandated issue. In this scenario, the PSC is made up of European leaders (including heads of state, heads of government, ministers of defence and foreign affairs, directors of intelligence services, and representatives from the private sector), whereas in reality the PSC meets at the EU-ambassador level. In addition, for the purposes of this exercise, COVID-19 does not exist. Similar to the real COVID-19 circumstances, nations around the world face extreme challenges while responding to the novel and fictitious COVID-22 in this scenario. All other political and security concerns reflect the EU's actual, real-life situation. You may use even real-world tools and legislature created since 2022.

Your performance during the competition will be marked by the judges.