

Interview Article with Evangelos Ouzounis regarding ENISA's Report "Incentives and Challenges for Information Sharing in the Context of Network and Information Security"



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First of all, could you give us some background information to why this report has been conducted now?

For the last two years we have been working on Information Sharing and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Some key elements impacting on such co-operations include incentives and barriers, which do influence the way stakeholders co-operate with each other. Since there have not been many studies on these topics in recent years, especially in the context of information security, ENISA decided to analyse the socio-economic barriers to and incentives for information sharing.

What is your feedback from the public/private sector when it comes to incentives and barriers? Do they differ a lot?

There are, of course, significant differences between the incentives and barriers for the public and the private sector. The private sector is willing to share information with the public sector, but have some concerns about the value or quality of the information shared and the economic incentives.

What are the incentives needed for the private sector to engage in information sharing?

From our research we can see that there are certain problems for the private sector to build up and to engage in partnerships with the public sector, which are very important to understand. It takes years for such partnerships to develop. Slowly, as trust increases over time, the private sector could deploy good practices and thus avoid regulation. Also, the public sector better understands the opinion of the sector and implements the appropriate policy and regulatory measures. In that case, the public sector will collaborate with a voluntarily more active industry partner and thus might not have to impose new regulatory measures.

Even though there are barriers, aren't the incentives more important when it comes to CIIP? Is there still awareness raising need for the importance of information sharing and CIIP?

There is a general, rather abstract awareness, but we need to do more. On the other hand, we cannot tell the Member States what to do. We can only advocate the importance of information sharing and inform about the benefits. The pan-European Public-Private Partnership for Resilience (EP3R) initiative might also be an inspiration for other countries to do the same on a national level.

What are the main barriers for the private sector?

There are some differences compared to the literature, some expected and some not. For instance, we were expecting to see an interest in cost savings from the private sector.

Moreover, there are also some barriers related to competition issues. A lot of companies are afraid to share information with their competitors. It does take time to develop trust among competing companies. For this reason, it is very important that participants in these information sharing groups have the right profile. In other words, it is important that they are security experts, not lawyers. Security experts can trust each other and they can focus their discussions on technical issues, not market or legal issues.

Are reputational risks for the private sector a barrier?

In the beginning, yes, but as soon as they realise that the information is only being shared confidentially among group members, they feel comfortable to discuss openly. Some information sharing groups have established a code of conduct whereby members who do leak information are immediately expelled from the group and miss out on all (future) benefits of the information sharing.

What are the incentives for the private sector to be more transparent?

Again, it comes back to the benefits gained by taking part in information sharing groups. There is a balance between openness, transparency, inclusiveness and trust that needs to be achieved. It is a matter of value being created. If the members of the groups see that there is value they will take part.

How do you create this value in the groups?

The value relates to the information that is being shared. If members share information of mutual interest to each other, and they all learn, the members develop a synergetic approach to problem solving and hence value is created. If there is mistrust or if the information shared is irrelevant, the value will, of course, decrease.

Have you seen an increase in the number of information sharing groups created?

In countries with a more liberal approach to legislation, we have seen groups being created. Some examples are the UK, the Netherlands and Germany, which have established successful groups. There are other countries like Sweden and Finland, which intend to develop the concept widely. We hope that more and more countries will be persuaded to value this.

Is there anything that needs to be done when it comes to legal frameworks, to make information sharing easier?

In some countries there are inconsistencies regarding information sharing. For example, information that is shared in one Member State without causing any problems regarding privacy law might quite well cause a huge problem in another Member State. In other words, on a pan-European level, we see some inconsistencies.

Does this mean that a pan-European good practice guide would be difficult to create?

Actually, we did produce a good practice guide last year, but it is difficult to bring this guide to a pan-European level. Mostly because of the legal framework and related legal issues applied in different Member States. However, a pan-European guide makes sense to a lot of companies, since they operate in many of the Member States.

In the report, you say that barriers to information sharing can be mitigated through developing trust and ensuring appropriate rules and structures. Could you be more specific?

Based on our experience, trust grows best in small groups. The second thing is that the same people need to take part in the discussions again and again. There needs to be continuity among the group members. Thirdly, the attendance needs to be regular and discussions need to be very focused, so that value for the participants is created, both for the public and the private sector.

The main objective is not that the private sector is merely sharing information with the public sector or vice versa. The most important thing is that both sectors gain from these partnerships. As soon as this becomes clear to the members of a group, the trust increases dramatically.

There are several recommendations for the different stakeholder groups. Could you highlight a few?

One of the main recommendations that we highlight in our report, is that there is considerable value in the concept of information sharing. In some countries there is a natural dialogue between the private and the public sectors, in other countries this dialogue does not exist.

The results of the study can be used by both Member States to establish PPPs and equally by the European Commission to launch the pan-European Public Private Partnerships for Resilience (EP3R). More recommendations for EU institutions/ENISA as an EU body, national governments and the private sector, can be obtained from the report or the FAQs to this report.

What are the risks of talking about Information Exchanges (IEs)?

Talking about IEs or more precisely about participation in an IE is an additional risk for members of these groups. For example, a bank might not want to talk openly about being a part of an information sharing group with other banks, as talking about financial and related security issues might lead to a reputational risk. However, a group led by a public body can make general, non-attributable statements about findings, and without explicitly referring to the source (i.e. specific member of the group).

Is there anything you would like to highlight from this report?

ENISA would like the findings and recommendations from this study on incentives and barriers to reach out to opinion makers and policy makers of both private and public sector alike. We would like to see the information being used in the development of national platforms. Hopefully, it will lead to a better understanding of the incentives for and barriers to information sharing.

What are the next steps?

From ENISA's side, this is the first report on this topic. ENISA has worked on the issue of information sharing in the past and will continue to do so. We are about to launch a study on good practices for PPPs. We do consider ENISA the appropriate body to establish and manage pan-European information sharing. In that respect, we are open to discuss in greater detail the different aspects of information sharing with both Member States and the private sector.

Furthermore, we will organise sessions with a number of successful Member States, presenting these case studies to other Member States with a view to help them better understand the concept and facilitate the setting up of new IEs in more Member States. By the end of the year, we will also have taken stock of the situation in various Member States, identifying the number of Member States that have implemented the concept and the way they did this.

For full report including all recommendations:

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www.enisa.europa.eu

<http://www.enisa.europa.eu/act/res/policies/good-practices-1/information-sharing-exchange>

For press release:

<http://www.enisa.europa.eu/media/press-releases/incentives-challenges-for-cyber-security-information-sharing-in-europe-identified>

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