

www.coe.int/cybercrime

2023 Meeting of the 24/7 Network of Contact Points of the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

The Hague, Netherlands
20 October 2023

Summary Report

The Secretariat of the Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), with the support of the iPROCEEDS-2, GLACY+, CyberEast, CyberSouth and Octopus projects, organized the seventh annual meeting of the 24/7 Network of contact points under the Convention on Cybercrime, at the Europol Headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands, on 20 October 2023.

The 2023 annual meeting centered around capacity building, exploring new cooperation opportunities, and sharing good practices within the 24/7 Network in accordance with Article 35 of the Budapest Convention. The specific focus areas included institutional capacities, legal frameworks, main functions, processing of requests, promotion of the Network at the domestic level and collaboration with online providers.

This year, the national contact points actively engaged in the event, actively contributing to discussions by providing updates on their capacities, sharing examples of operations and highlighting successful investigations supported by the Network. The meeting boasted participation from 96 delegates in person and 44 online, collectively representing 78 countries (66 parties and 12 observers) and four organizations.

The 66 Parties that designated their representatives to participate in the meeting, either in person or online, were: Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritius, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tonga, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America. Israel and Liechtenstein were absent from the event, citing operational reasons.

Observers from 12 countries, namely Algeria, Barbados, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Uruguay, actively participated in the meeting. They expressed their gratitude for the valuable insights, shared experiences and clarified approach regarding the 24/7 point of contact practices. This knowledge will benefit them as they prepare to join the Budapest Conventions, helping them hit the ground running.

Moderation was overseen by Daniel CUCIURIANU, Programme Manager at the Cybercrime Programme Office (C-PROC), responsible for the secretariat of the Network on behalf of the Council of Europe. Delegates from the Council of Europe, European Commission, EUROPOL, EUROJUST, and the International Association of Prosecutors were present and actively contributed to the debates.

In the opening segment, Europol representatives Edvardas SILERIS and Emmanuel KESSLER commended the credibility and substantial role of the 24/7 Network in international cooperation on cybercrime and electronic evidence. They acknowledged that the Network would face an increased number of requests and challenges in the future, particularly with the signing and ratification of the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention. Expressing their support, they emphasized Europol's commitment to continued collaboration with the network, recognizing the pivotal role played by the Budapest Convention and its tools in combating cybercrime.

Michele SOCCO, representing the European Commission, underscored the significance of the 24/7 Network on an international scale. He expressed the European Commission's commitment to global capacity-building initiatives and the promotion and implementation of standards and tools outlined in the Budapest Convention. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining the network's functionality, he stressed the need to accommodate new members and their added responsibilities under the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention.

Han MORAAL, the Secretary-General of the International Association of Prosecutors, acknowledged the enduring collaboration between the Council of Europe and the IAP. He expressed appreciation for the active role of the 24/7 network in sharing information and offering immediate assistance in cybercrime investigations, emphasizing its vital contribution to the cross-border exchange of electronic evidence.

Robert LAID, the delegate of EUROJUST and the manager of the SIRIUS project, conveyed their support to the members of the 24/7 network. This support included facilitating access to their dedicated platform and promoting the effective utilization of existing tools for direct cooperation with online service providers.

The first session commenced with the moderator providing a brief overview of the meeting agenda, outlining the roles of the Network and Directory and summarizing the outcomes of the previous annual meeting. Discussions included the use of Council of Europe templates for submitting preservation requests, exploration of online service providers' rules and policies on data retention and preservation, considerations regarding the benefits of having single or multiple contact points at the Police and Prosecution levels, the new provisions on expedited disclosure of computer data in emergencies, proposals for optimizing network operations, creating a database of contact points in a format suitable for automatic processing and a presentation on the SIRIUS tools.

In the initial session, the outcomes of the Responsiveness Test conducted on 7 June 2023, were presented. This exercise aimed to evaluate the availability of network members for real-time assistance requests and assess the functionality of the provided email addresses and phone numbers. The overall results were positive, indicating a high level of responsiveness from members within a reasonable timeframe. Specific examples were shared and discussed with the audience to illustrate the successful outcomes of the exercise:

- 15 minutes, 24 countries responded, with an average response time of 6 min
- 30 minutes, 35 countries responded, with an average response time of 11 min
- 1 hour, 42 countries responded, with an average response time of 17 min
- 12 hours, 59 countries responded, with an average response time of 1h 11 min
- 24 hours, 61 countries responded (89,70%), average response time of 1h 37 min

Continuing the first session, updates were provided regarding the Directory of 24/7 Points of Contact, including the introduction of Brazil and Nigeria as new members to the network.

Representatives of Nigeria, Nne Akpan Ikoiwak and Nasiru Mohammed, provided detailed insights into Nigeria's recent accession to the Budapest Convention and the substantial advancements in institutional capacities to counter cyber threats. They highlighted the pivotal roles played by the Federal Ministry of Justice and the Nigerian Police Force. Their presentation covered recent progress in combating cybercrime, emphasizing international collaborations with organizations like the Council of Europe and ECOWAS, as well as the significance of informal cooperation.

They also presented Nigeria's participation in Operation Haechi-III with South Korea, illustrating the efficacy of global cooperation in addressing cyber threats. Despite challenges stemming from a surge in requests for mutual legal assistance, they reiterated Nigeria's unwavering commitment to collaborating globally in the prevention and prosecution of cybercrime.

Edgard Almeida Queiroz Prata Resende represented Brazil and provided an overview of the structure and key competences of the Federal Police Cybercrime Directorate. The general coordination of international police cooperation includes main divisions dedicated to international relations, mission support, capacity building, strategic management, and innovation, all backed by 28 regional offices. Operationally, the Cybercrime Directorate oversees significant cases involving online child sexual abuse, electronic bank frauds, and high-tech crimes, incorporating analysis and intelligence components.

The Brazilian representative also highlighted a successful operation conducted in July 2023, initiated at the request of the 24/7 Contact point of Cabo Verde, showcasing the collaborative and effective nature of international cooperation in addressing cybercrime issues.

The second session focused on the capacity-building support delivered by the Cybercrime Programme Office through projects like iPROCEEDS-2, GLACY+, CyberEast, CyberSouth and Octopus. The session highlighted significant events dedicated to training and practical exercises for network members. Emphasis was placed on preparing them for their new responsibilities under the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention.

The program managers, Catalina STROE and Denise MAZZOLANI, presented the delegates with the outcomes of activities facilitated by their projects over the past year. They expressed their commitment to ongoing support for the network through upcoming projects. This includes assistance to countries seeking to join the Budapest Convention in establishing their national 24/7 contact point, support for strengthening 24/7 contact points in parties to the Budapest Convention interested in establishing a second contact point and outlining the available instruments and resources for the 24/7 contact points.

The session persisted with an exploration of the responsibilities of the 24/7 points of contact, covering aspects such as institutional capacities, legal frameworks, main functions, processing of requests, promotion of the Network at the domestic level, and collaboration with online providers.

Estonia showcased its 24/7 Point of Contact operating across three levels: operational intelligence (INTERPOL, EUROPOL, SIRENE, NCC, FRONTEX, NFPOC), back office (legal assistance in investigations; PRÜM FP, DNA and VRD; wanted and missing persons; mutual assistance and Europol Liaison Bureau), and the cybercrime unit. The advantages of the Estonian solution include no additional costs for the 24/7 part, avoidance of duplication with other channels, the same officer handling a case from the initial preservation request until the final EIO/MLAT, easy re-routing if another channel is needed, and the utilization of appropriate levels of IT expertise only when necessary. In the future, the 24/7 PoC is expected to become one of the main channels for information exchange due to the increasing number of processed requests.

Serbia highlighted the success of "Infinity" an operation initiated in response to an assistance request from Germany's 24/7 Point of Contact. The investigation targeted a criminal organization orchestrating a major investment fraud, specifically a boiler room scam. The organization used a deceptive call center to pressure potential investors into purchasing fraudulent securities through cold calls, resulting in substantial financial losses for investors. Throughout the operation, 14 suspects were arrested in Serbia, 1 in Germany and 1 in Bulgaria. Additionally, 4 call centers were shut down in Serbia, and authorities confiscated several apartments, cars, IT equipment, and 4 crypto wallets, one of which held 1.2 million dollars in cryptocurrencies linked to a suspect in Germany.

The National Counter Terrorism, Extremism, and Cybercrime Agency (NCTEKK) within the Criminal Police and Investigation Service of the Police of the Czech Republic showcased its capabilities as the national coordination and advisory center for other Czech Police forces and the official 24/7 Point of Contact according to the Budapest Convention. They operate in close collaboration with the Prosecutor General's Office, offering support throughout the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) process. In 2022, they reported handling over 400 outgoing and 50 incoming data preservation requests, highlighting their active role in facilitating international cooperation and information exchange.

Denmark highlighted its experience, tracing back to an investigation in 2018 when multiple police districts were handling cases of sexual harassment with the same perpetrator. The necessity for coordination and prioritization drove the establishment of the 24/7 Point of Contact. Presently, the team comprises 15 employees, including 1 head of section, 7 police officers, 2 OSINT experts, and 5 administrative staff members. This structure has significantly enhanced their ability to address and coordinate responses to such cases efficiently.

Hungary underscored the essential functions of its International Law Enforcement Cooperation Center, which manages requests to the National INTERPOL Bureau and addresses emergency cases. Additionally, Hungary highlighted the role of the National Bureau of Investigation Cybercrime Department, responsible for handling preservation requests, providing guidance and general information, and collaborating with service providers. The 24/7 Network serves as the primary channel for these departments, handling approximately 100 requests annually. Hungary actively conducts regular trainings and offers guidance to lower investigative bodies and prosecutors to encourage the increased utilization of this channel. Prior to submitting a preservation request, direct contact with international service providers is established, with a significant portion of requests directed to the USA, UK and Switzerland.

Iceland shared its capabilities and strategies for promoting the network domestically and enhancing cooperation with online providers. While reporting positive contact and collaboration with Internet Service Providers, especially regarding data preservation, Iceland emphasized that no information can be handed over without a court order. The exception to this rule is data related to online child abuse cases, where cooperation is prioritized for immediate action to protect victims.

Portugal presented its cyber stakeholders, highlighting their cooperation through an informal model based on mutual trust and lacking formal guidelines or memorandums. The working group involves the Armed Forces, Intelligence Services, National Cybersecurity Centre, and the Judicial Police. The primary channel of communication is the 24/7 Point of Contact based in Polícia Judiciária, utilized for the INTERPOL Network and G7 network as well. Polícia Judiciária holds specific competence for urgent measures related to expedited preservation of traffic data and urgent searches and seizure of data. For other requests, the authorization of the prosecutor is required, and in some cases, the prosecutor may need authorization from an investigative judge.

Bulgaria presented the organizational structure and key functions of their 24/7 Point of Contact, which handles requests related to cybercrime, internet frauds, and illegal propaganda on internet platforms. They further provided examples of successful international cooperation, specifically highlighting a case involving money laundering proceeds from Business Email Compromise (BEC) and CEO frauds. This operation targeted 50 victims, utilized over 90 money mules, and resulted in financial losses amounting to 44 million EUR and 15 million USD.

During the meeting, Türkiye offered insights into its institutional capacities at both central and local levels. While data preservation is not explicitly covered by domestic legislation, Turkey relies on data retention as a successful means to obtain relevant data from providers in cybercrime investigations. They also presented an example of effective international cooperation, highlighting a case involving collaboration with the USA 24/7 Point of Contact in a bomb alert situation.

In the final session, the discussion revolved around synergies with other networks. Shenaz MUZAFFER represented the International Association of Prosecutors and Aleksandra TUKISA from the European Commission, provided insights into the provisions of the EU Directive 977/2023.

Shenaz MUZAFFER presented an overview of the International Association of Prosecutors vision, organization, objectives and partnerships, emphasizing key elements such as the professional program, the Global Training Academy (GTA), regional and annual conferences, specialist networks and the Prosecutors' International Cooperation Platform. The discussion explored potential synergies with the 24/7 Network, delving into future training and cooperation opportunities for members of both networks.

In the last session, EU Directive 2023/977 concerning the exchange of information between the law enforcement authorities of Member States was discussed. Particular emphasis was given to Articles 14-15, which mandate that each Member State establish or designate a Single Point of Contact. This designated point is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the exchange of information under the Directive, comprising staff from their competent law enforcement authorities.

The concept of Information Highways, operating 24/7, was introduced, underscoring the significance of more efficient and secure methods for information exchange. The discussion emphasized key principles, including the need for clearer, detailed, and well-thought-out requests, the proportionate use of urgency in cases, respect for data ownership and legal certainty, and adherence to principles of proportionality and necessity. During the session dedicated to the European Commission, the next steps and the timeline for implementation of the Directive at the national level were raised and discussed.

The 24/7 Point of Contact meeting concluded with several proposals aimed at further improving the functioning of the Network:

- The Council of Europe will continue updating the Directory and sharing it with the Network. Members are encouraged to promptly provide information on any changes. A new version of the Directory is scheduled for release in December 2023.
- The Council of Europe will persist in guiding new members and providing support for the establishment of 24/7 contact points.
- The Cybercrime Programme Office (C-PROC), through its capacity-building projects, will continue promoting the use of templates and assisting with training activities.
- New synergies with other networks such as SIRIUS and INTERPOL will be explored.
- The 24/7 Contact Points Network is recognized as a valuable channel for facilitating

international cooperation among Parties to the Budapest Convention. It is anticipated to play an even greater role within the new framework introduced by the Second Additional Protocol.

CONTACT

Daniel CUCIURIANU
Council of Europe
Secretariat of the Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY)
www.coe.int/cybercrime
daniel.cuciurianu@coe.int

PROGRAM

Friday, 20 October 2023	
09h30	Opening session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council of Europe - Daniel CUCIURIANU • EUROPOL, European Cybercrime Centre – Edvardas SILERIS • European Commission – Michele SOCCO • International Association of Prosecutors - Han MORAAL • EUROJUST - Robert LAID
10h00	Session 1: Updates on the functioning of the 24/7 Network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions of participants - tour de table • Outcome and conclusions of the 2022 Annual Meeting • Results of the Responsiveness Test on 7 June 2023 • Updates in the Directory of 24/7 Points of Contact • Introduction of Brazil and Nigeria, new members of the network
11h00	Coffee break
11h30	Session 2: Capacity building, good practices and operating procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building support provided by C-PROC to 24/7 Points of Contact • Presentations of Denmark, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Portugal, Bulgaria and Iceland: institutional capacities, legal frameworks, main functions, processing of requests, promoting the Network at domestic level and cooperation with online providers
13h00	Lunch break
14h00	Session 3: New cooperation opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Serbia and Turkiye: institutional capacities and international cooperation facilitated by the Network • EU Directive 977/2023 - Aleksandra TUKISA - European Commission • Synergies with other Networks - Shenaz MUZAFFER - International Association of Prosecutors - online
15h20	Closing remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council of Europe • EUROPOL, European Commission, International Association of Prosecutors
15h30	End of event