

C-PROC at 10: Ten years of capacity building by the Cybercrime Programme Office of the Council of Europe

Alexander Seger¹

How C-PROC has come about

In October 2013, the Council of Europe decided to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Romania to establish a Cybercrime Programme Office ([C-PROC](#)) in Bucharest responsible for capacity building on cybercrime and electronic evidence. C-PROC became operational in April 2014 and has since supported well over [2000 activities](#) for more than 130 countries in all regions of the world. Having been responsible for this all along, here are some personal observations.

In early 2013, the international community - in the form of a United Nations Intergovernmental Expert Group - met in Vienna to discuss global responses to cybercrime. The one area that reached “broad agreement” was that capacity building was an effective way to address this challenge. While at that point we already had some seven years of experience in supporting countries in the implementation of the Convention on Cybercrime ([Budapest Convention](#)), the Vienna meeting made it clear that a more consistent response was required; we needed to enhance our own capacity for more capacity building. Returning from Vienna to Strasbourg, I proposed the creation of a dedicated office that would have only one task: to support countries worldwide in the strengthening of their criminal justice capacities in line with the Budapest Convention and human rights and rule of law requirements.

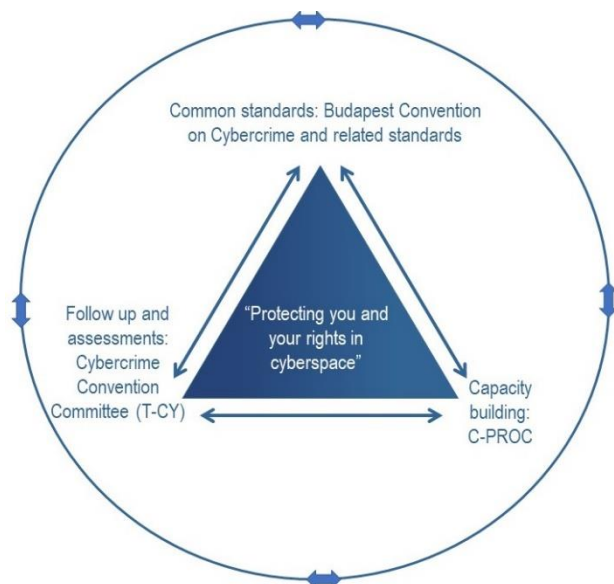
While different options were under consideration in February/March 2013, the Government of Romania offered to host such an office in Bucharest. Romania had been a very active Party to the Budapest Convention since 2004 and we have had excellent cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecution Service for Organised Crime and Terrorism

(DIICOT) and the Romanian National Police for many years. With the offer to host the office, this cooperation was elevated to another level.

In October 2013, following further feasibility studies, the Committee of Ministers decided to go ahead. The following week, the MoU between the Council of Europe and Romania was signed. In March 2014, the Parliament of Romania adopted the necessary legislation regarding the status of C-PROC. By 1 April 2014, we had a fully equipped office with core staff in place and got started right away.

C-PROC capacity building: the rationale

The approach, formula or algorithm of the Council of Europe regarding cybercrime is the triad of a) common standards (Budapest Convention and related standards), (b) follow up by the Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY) and (c) capacity building by C-PROC. This clearly is a “unique selling point”.



¹ Head of Cybercrime Programme Office of the Council of Europe. The views expressed here are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Council of Europe or of the Parties to the Convention on Cybercrime.

With C-PROC for worldwide capacity building on cybercrime, the Council of Europe not only completed its “dynamic triad”, but also gave a credible response to requests for more international assistance.

In 2013, we [formulated](#) the concept of capacity building on cybercrime as follows:

“Capacity building” is understood as enabling criminal justice authorities to meet the challenge of cybercrime and electronic evidence. This entails strengthening the knowledge and skills and enhancing the performance of criminal justice organisations including their cooperation with other stakeholders. It should be aimed at protecting individuals and society against crime and at protecting the rights of individuals, at promoting security, confidence and trust in information and communication technologies, at strengthening human rights, democracy and the rule of law in cyberspace and at contributing to human development.

We considered it to:

- respond to need and produce impact;
- enhance multi-stakeholder cooperation;
- feed into the development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations;
- reduce the digital divide;
- rely on broad international support;
- help overcome political divisions.

This concept and these assumptions have proven to be valid and continue to guide the work of C-PROC.

A prerequisite for any capacity building project is the “political commitment” by a government or counterpart institution to pursue the objective set by a project.

From the Council of Europe perspective we consider this prerequisite to be met when a government requests accession to the Budapest Convention. Implementation of this treaty is the objective to be achieved. Once that is the case, that country may then draw on the full range of support, including:

- Strengthening legislation;
- Training and specialisation of investigators, prosecutors or judges;
- Improving interagency, public/private and international cooperation, and so on.

In line with this logic we have not only been cooperating intensively with countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe but also with countries in Africa, the Americas or Asia-Pacific. Over time, some of these have become hubs for capacity building in their respective region, such as the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Mauritius, Philippines, Senegal, Sri Lanka or Tonga.

Projects

In October 2013, not only the MoU on the establishment of C-PROC was signed but also the agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Union on the GLACY joint project on “Global Action on Cybercrime”.

GLACY together with the project “Cybercrime@Octopus” and the project on “Cybercrime in the Eastern Partnership Region” provided the initial means to deliver activities and produce results.

Ten years later, by December 2023, we had [projects running](#) with a combined budget of some EUR 40 million:

- GLACY+ (global);
- Octopus Project (global);
- CyberEast (Eastern Europe);
- iPROCEEDS-2 (South-eastern Europe);
- CyberSouth (Southern Mediterranean).

In the course of these ten years, we had to adapt our focus to new challenges. For example, to provide tools and enhance capacities to address ransomware offences, financial investigations related to virtual currencies, electronic evidence related to war crime and gross violations of human rights within the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, or to ensure that cybercrime laws do not restrict the freedom of expression beyond what is necessary and proportionate.

The COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards forced us to adapt our mode of delivery, and within weeks we were ready to carry out activities online. This encouraged us to improve our online resources and to develop a platform for online training on cybercrime and e-evidence that is now about to become operational.

New standards have become available. In May 2022, the [Second Protocol](#) to the Budapest Convention on enhanced cooperation and disclosure of electronic evidence was opened for signature. Supporting the implementation of this Protocol is now built into all C-PROC projects.

Impact

Our projects have produced impact at multiple levels, starting with those criminal justice officials who are more skilled and better equipped to meet the challenges of cybercrime and e-evidence. Developing capacities by training academies to deliver training for investigators, prosecutors and judges in a sustainable manner has been a priority.

Successful investigations and prosecutions, including international operations, are being carried out all over the world, often because of the legal basis, and the skills and tools as well as the platforms for cooperation provided by C-PROC.

At the meta-level, indicators of impact by C-PROC include, for example:

- Domestic legislation on cybercrime and e-evidence in line with the Convention:
 - By 2013, some 70 States had defined offences against and by means of computers in line with the Convention.
 - By November 2023 about 130 States had done so.
- Membership of States in the Budapest Convention:
 - By 2013, 53 States were Parties (41) or had signed it (2) or been invited to accede (10).

- By November 2023, 91 States were Parties (68), or had signed it (2) or been invited to accede (21).

In 2022 and 2023, C-PROC also facilitated signature of the new Second Protocol. By November 2023, 43 States had signed (of which 2 had also ratified) this Protocol.

C-PROC has been strengthening a criminal justice response to cybercrime that is not only effective but also meets human rights and rule of law, including data protection, requirements. At the policy level, C-PROC thus contributed to a free, open and global cyberspace and to the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.

Partners

Project activities by C-PROC have been carried out in partnership with a very large number of national, regional, international, public and private sector organisations. Incredible synergies have been created.

As C-PROC depends on extra-budgetary resources, support by donors has been crucial from the outset when the office had to be equipped. More than EUR 60 million have been mobilized during these first ten years. Funding by the European Union through joint projects and voluntary contributions by the USA, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, Estonia and others have permitted C-PROC to deliver results. And with office space at the UN House in Bucharest, the Government of Romania provided C-PROC with an international home.

People

While we cooperate with institutions, operate based on rules and procedures, and rely on computer systems, algorithms and increasingly on artificial intelligence, it is actually people that make a difference.

Bright and highly committed individuals on different continents have been driving legislative or institutional reforms in their respective country and facilitating accession to

the Convention on Cybercrime. Without such champions many achievements would not have materialised. It is these individuals who keep us going.

The same criteria applies to the team at C-PROC that comprises many very dedicated and skilled people. They go out of their way to make things happen whatever the day of the week, the time of the day or the corner of the world where action is needed. Lesson learned: consider the passion factor when recruiting people.

It is a real privilege for me to be working with all of them.

The future

After ten years, C-PROC is a well-established and effective centre of expertise for capacity building on cybercrime and e-evidence.

The dynamic interplay between the common standards of the Convention and its Protocol, the Cybercrime Convention Committee and C-PROC constantly creates new ideas. This approach is unique and comprehensive.

But there is no room for complacency. The office cannot afford to simply do more of the same, but will strive to deliver activities and results of even better quality and with deeper and more sustainable impact.

Projects by definition are time-limited. Several of them will end in December 2023; new ones have been designed to commence in January 2024. This constant cycle forces us to evolve, address new challenges, develop new partnerships and remain effective and competitive.

One of the challenges is scalability. The number of countries seeking to join the Budapest Convention and requesting assistance keeps increasing. This requires more resources from donors but also more efficient methods of delivery, including via online tools. Partnerships with other organisations will help share the burden.

C-PROC will remain closely linked to the Budapest Convention and the T-CY as part of the “dynamic triad”. Therefore, assisting countries in the implementation of the Second Protocol - with its tools for direct cooperation with service providers, for cooperation in emergency situations, or for joint investigation teams but also the data protection safeguards to facilitate cooperation - will be a priority.

Overall, C-PROC will continue to support human rights, democracy and the rule of law in cyberspace. It will permit more people to cooperate more and better in order to make a difference. After all, more cooperation is a vaccine against conflict and instability, and a booster for peace and justice.

Bucharest, December 2023