

EU maps out new cyber-security plan

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EU commissioner in charge of new technologies Neelie Kroes speaks on December 18, 2012 at the EU Headquarters in Brussels. The European Commission on Thursday launched a new cyber-security plan, aimed at safeguarding vital information systems and bolstering the bloc's defences against a growing criminal threat.

The European Commission on Thursday launched a new cyber-security plan, aimed at safeguarding vital information systems and bolstering the bloc's defences against a growing criminal threat.

The plan calls on member states to set up specialised agencies to ensure the security of information networks and rapid intervention units to counter any cyber attack.

These bodies should cooperate to improve the resilience of information systems, on which all aspects of life increasingly depend, and bolster overall defences against crime.

To highlight the scale of the problem, the Commission cited World Economic Forum research estimating there is a 10 percent chance of a major critical information infrastructure breakdown in the coming decade, which could cost \$250 billion.

Cybercrime meanwhile costs even more, with security firm Symantec saying victims worldwide lose around 290 euros billion each year.

"The more people rely on the Internet the more people rely on it to be secure. A secure Internet protects our freedoms and rights and our ability to do business. It's time to take coordinated action," said Neelie Kroes, EU Commissioner in charge of the bloc's Digital Agenda.

EU foreign affairs head Catherine Ashton highlighted the importance of cyber-security to the bloc's wider political aims.

"For cyberspace to remain open and free, the same norms, principles and values that the EU upholds offline, should also apply online. Fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law need to be protected in cyberspace," Ashton said.

Last week, Twitter said it was hit by a "sophisticated" cyber attack similar to those that recently hit major Western news outlets and that the passwords of about 250,000 users were stolen.

"This attack was not the work of amateurs and we do not believe it was an isolated incident," Twitter information security director Bob Lord said in a blog post.

The attack coincided with the revelation of several high-profile security breaches as The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal said they too had been hacked, pointing to attackers from China.

Last month, the US Department of Defense reportedly approved a five-fold expansion of its cyber-security force to defend critical computer networks.

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