

EU states push for sanctions for cyber attackers

October 15 2018, by Damon Wake



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A group of EU states including Britain and the Baltic countries is

pushing the bloc to slap sanctions on cyber attackers, as Europe seeks to strengthen its electronic defences.

Eight countries are calling for the urgent creation of a legal framework to hit hackers, warning that a lack of tough action leaves the impression that cyber attacks would go unpunished.

The move comes amid growing concern at Russia's alleged malign cyber activities, with Western powers blaming Moscow for numerous acts of hacking and electronic interference.

This month the Netherlands revealed dramatic details of a bid by Russia's GRU military intelligence agency to hack the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

The confidential EU proposal seen by AFP, backed by Britain, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, Finland, Romania and the Netherlands warns that "the pace of events has accelerated considerably".

"This context makes the introduction of such a regime a pressing priority," the text says, urging EU leaders to formally back the proposal at their summit in Brussels this week.

The paper warns it is "only a matter of time before we are hit by a critical operation with severe consequences on the EU".

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius told AFP that evidence from NATO and other cyber experts showed the problem was "becoming more and more intense".

"It's just a question of time whether it will be attacks on very vulnerable even strategic segments, so we should develop our own armoury to

withstand," Linkevicius said.

Real consequences

Lithuania and the other Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, say they come under near-daily cyber attacks, most originating in Russia, targeting everything from banks and government institutions to transport infrastructure.

Attempts to tackle the problem have sometimes been hampered by the fact the hackers are adept at covering their tracks, making it hard to identify them with certainty.

If approved, the sanctions regime would freeze assets held in the bloc by targeted individuals and ban them from travelling to the 28 member states.

The new proposal says this would impose a "meaningful consequence" on hackers and also signal at a political level that [cyber attacks](#) will not be tolerated or overlooked.

But the proposal may face resistance from some EU members who want to improve relations with Russia, such as the new Italian government.

While the proposal calls for action at this week's summit, Linkevicius said it was difficult to be sure of the timing, acknowledging "there is not big enthusiasm from some capitals for sanctions".

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