DISICON

5TH EDITION

INFORMATION INTEGRITY CONFERENCE

CYBERSECURITY:
IS DISINFORMATION THE NEXT BIG THREAT?

Pristina, Kosovo
May 11, 2023

DISICON

5th edition

SUMMARY

In a world increasingly interconnected through digital platforms, the rise of disinformation in the midst of new cyber-security vulnerabilities is undermining democracy. To address this ever-changing threat, NDI organized its fifth the Information Integrity Conference, (DISICON-5), the largest platform of information integrity in the Balkans. This conference was held on May 11, 2023 in Pristina, Kosovo, with the overarching theme of *"Cybersecurity: Is disinformation the next big threat?"* DISICON-5 brought together local, regional, and international experts to discuss the urgency of information integrity in the region, the challenges of cybersecurity and balancing the protection of human rights. The event aimed to shed light on the potential consequences of disinformation campaigns and explore effective strategies to mitigate this growing threat.

Several sessions at the conference focused on understanding the motives and tactics behind disinformation campaigns. Speakers underscored the role of state-sponsored actors, hacktivist groups, and malicious individuals in orchestrating disinformation campaigns for political, economic, or social gain.

The conference also explored the challenges in detecting and debunking disinformation. Experts discussed the limitations of current technologies and the importance of developing advanced algorithms and artificial intelligence systems to identify and counter false narratives effectively. Ethical considerations surrounding content moderation and balancing freedom of speech and efforts to contain disinformation were also discussed.

DISICON-5 also held its first Cyber Attack Simulation that brought together 30 participants from political parties, NGOs, and the media. This simulation tested the readiness and response capabilities of these groups in the face of a simulated cyber attack. It highlighted that educating on cybersecurity practices and conducting regular vulnerability assessments are vital for ensuring the safety of the data.

World-renowned practitioners in journalism, academia, media and government enriched the discussion. During the one-day event, 150 guests participated in person.

DISICON in the media

DISICON-5 had views and interactions of more than **360,000** people. Views on social and online media were **149,014**. Interaction on social and online media were **215,642**.[1]

144 online news media portals covered DISICON-5. Eight TV channels reported on DISICON-5, ATV, Klan Kosova, KTV, TEVE1, Kanal 10, DUKAGJINI and Kosovo Public Television's channels RTK1, and RTK2 in the Serbian language. NDI Kosovo live-streamed the conference on its Facebook page.

[1] *Views refer to the number of times a particular piece of content has been displayed or accessed by users. This can apply to various types of content, such as videos, articles, images, or social media posts. When a user opens a webpage or clicks on a link to view a video, for example, it registers as one view. Interactions, on the other hand, measure the level of engagement and activity that users have with the content. These actions can vary depending on the platform and the type of content, but they generally include likes, comments, shares, clicks, and other forms of user engagement.*

DISICON

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360,000

TOTAL VIEWS AND INTERACTIONS

126,786
VIEWS AND INTERACTIONS
ON FACEBOOK

14,907
VIEWS AND INTERACTIONS
ON INSTAGRAM

45,556
VIEWS ON YOUTUBE

39,439
VIEWS AND INTERACTIONS
ON TWITTER

137,969
VIEWS AND INTERACTIONS
ON ONLINE MEDIA

150
IN-PERSON PARTICIPANTS

30
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

8
TV CHANNEL COVERAGE

OPENING REMARKS

Robert Benjamin, NDI's Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe Programs

DISICON-5 commenced with opening remarks by Robert Benjamin, NDI's Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe Programs. He issued a call to action for collective efforts in addressing cyber security challenges and information integrity issues in Kosovo. He underscored the importance of collaboration in tackling cyber security threats and that the battle against cyber threats and the protection of information integrity require unified action from various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Benjamin applauded Kosovo's efforts to approve the first national cybersecurity law.

Key takeaways:

- **Working together** is essential to tackling cyber security and information integrity issues in Kosovo. These challenges require collaboration between the government, civil society, and the private sector.
- **Addressing cyber threats** and protecting information integrity requires a comprehensive approach, including implementing policies, raising public awareness, and fostering international cooperation.

OPENING REMARKS

Ambassador of the United States to The Republic of Kosovo, Jeffrey M. Hovenier

Ambassador Hovenier’s opening remarks set a powerful tone, emphasizing the need to protect cyber infrastructure and promote access to fact-based information in the pursuit of upholding democratic principles in the global information space. He emphasized the significance of protecting cyber infrastructure and ensuring access to fact-based information as fundamental to protecting democratic principles in the global information space. Ambassador Hovenier highlighted the urgent need to address the issue of disinformation by providing citizens with tools to combat disinformation, such as improving media literacy. By enhancing the public's understanding of the media and equipping citizens with the necessary tools to critically analyze information, it becomes possible to build a more informed and resilient society capable of identifying and resisting misinformation. Ambassador Hovenier's address highlighted the commitment of the United States to collaborate on cyber security issues and combat disinformation effectively.

Key takeaways:

- **Collaboration is crucial** in addressing cyber security challenges and combatting disinformation effectively.
- **Improving media literacy** is essential to empower citizens with the tools to identify and counter disinformation.

OPENING REMARKS

AnnaCarin Platon, Head of the Political Section at the EU Office in Kosovo

AnnaCarin Platon, Head of Political Section at the EU Office in Kosovo, addressed DISICON-5 by emphasizing the threat of cyber threats and the potential for increased conflicts between states. She emphasized the importance of adopting preventative, preparatory, and resilient approaches to counter potential cyber attacks on critical institutions and infrastructure. Platon highlighted the necessity for Kosovo to undertake domestic reforms with robust legislation, as well as international cooperation, to effectively address this issue. Furthermore, Platon drew attention to the significant challenge posed by disinformation campaigns, which have the potential to undermine public trust, manipulate public opinion, and pose a threat to European values. She stressed the need for a joint response from institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the international community to combat this issue effectively. Platon emphasized that domestic reforms, international cooperation, and robust legislation are all required to protect critical infrastructure and preserve democratic values. The speech served as a reminder that addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts and a unified response from various stakeholders.

Key takeaways:

- **Encouraging international cooperation** to combat disinformation campaigns and preserve democratic values, ensuring a unified response from various
- **Strengthening Kosovo's cybersecurity** and protecting critical institutions by implementing cybersecurity law

DISISTORY

Rina Basholli, Information Security Lead, KODE Labs

Rina Basholli, the Information Security Lead at KODE Labs, shared her personal journey in cybersecurity during the DISICON-5. Rina emphasized the importance of the representation of women in the field of cyber-security. Basholli encouraged young women in Kosovo to pursue careers in computer science and cybersecurity, a predominantly a male dominated field. Her story serves as an inspiration and highlights the need for diverse perspectives in the industry. She hopes to serve as a role model for young women interested in the field of cyber-security.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Beyond Cybersecurity: A Human Rights Perspective

Moderated by Kreshnik Gashi, Editor in Chief, Internews Kosova, BIRN

11:15 - 12:30 (GMT+ 2) MAY 11, 2023
PRISTINA, KOSOVO
Teuta Sahatqija
Ambassador, Women in Tech
Moderator Kreshnik Gashi
Editor in Chief, Internews Kosova
@NDIKosovo

The panelists shared their perspectives on how to protect human rights in the digital space, including the right to privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information.

Kreshnik Hoxha highlighted the need for Kosovo’s institutions to prioritize the protection of personal data, since as a new country, Kosovo lacks established standards to ensure the safety of citizens' data. He emphasized that institutions realize their limitations in protecting data and that the potential for data abuse is high.

Riccardo Croci emphasized the importance of collaboration among different actors to secure cyberspace. Croci stressed the need for not only a technical understanding of cybercrime but also for the development of a legal framework and organizational model to address the criminal aspect effectively. Teuta Sahatqija shed light on the significance of human rights within the cyber ecosystem. She specifically highlighted the importance of ensuring a secure platform for private data and the distribution of personal information as important concerns. Sahatqija emphasized that women often fall victim to cyber attacks. Additionally, she discussed the emerging challenges posed by artificial intelligence, such as deepfake applications, which can manipulate someone's identity.

Additionally, Flutura Kusari delved into the concept of information integrity, stressing the importance of sharing true and reliable information. She noted that disinformation is not new, but its spread has gained unprecedented power and speed. Kusari highlighted the responsibility of the state to create an environment of access to information without obstacles and expressed concerns about financial pressures that harm the journalism profession. Leonora Hasani addressed the challenges faced in the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, and the importance of good governance in addressing cybersecurity issues. Hasani highlighted the need for adequate measures to address online violence, discrimination against women, and the training of courts on operational procedures to handle cyber-related cases effectively.

Overall, the panel discussion emphasized the need for robust data protection measures, collaboration among stakeholders, protection of human rights, ensuring information integrity, and good governance to tackle the challenges of cybersecurity and data protection effectively in Kosovo.

Key takeaways:

- **Strengthening data protection** measures and prioritizing the development and implementation of robust data protection standards. This includes establishing clear guidelines and regulations to safeguard citizens' personal data.
- **Encouraging collaboration** between government agencies, law enforcement, private sector organizations, and international partners. It is crucial to establish legal frameworks that address cybercrime comprehensively, enabling effective criminal investigations and providing guidance on emergency response protocols.
- **Safeguarding human rights** in the cyber ecosystem, especially the online violence against women, by developing comprehensive strategies to protect human rights online.
- **Promoting information integrity** by fostering a culture of truth and reliability. This involves investing in media literacy programs, empowering citizens to critically evaluate online information, and collaborating with media organizations to counter disinformation campaigns effectively.
- **Strengthening legislation** to address disinformation and its consequences is crucial for maintaining public trust and protecting democratic values.
- **Ensuring good governance** practices in addressing cybersecurity challenges. This includes providing adequate resources and training to courts, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant institutions to effectively handle cyber-related cases. Strengthening operational procedures and protocols will enable a more coordinated and efficient response to cyber threats.

KEYNOTE DISCUSSION

with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Albin Kurti

Moderated by Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, Senior Country Director, NDI Kosovo

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The keynote discussion between the Prime Minister Kurti and NDI Kosovo's Senior Country Director, Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, focused on the digitalization of society and the advancements in technology, highlighting their transformative impact on businesses and civil society. Prime Minister Kurti emphasized the benefits of digitalization and the potential for increased efficiency and new business models. However, he acknowledged the vulnerabilities and challenges posed by cyber threats, privacy concerns, and the spread of disinformation. To address these challenges, Prime Minister Kurti discussed the strategic roadmap for digitalization developed by the Kosovo Government, which encompasses e-governance and the strengthening of the innovation ecosystem.

Prime Minister Kurti highlighted the recent comprehensive cyber security law emphasizing inter-institutional cooperation and clear duties for cyber security entities. He stressed the importance of collaboration among stakeholders and highlighted the three key bodies responsible for defending the system: the Cyber Security Agency, the National Cyber Security Council, and the State Cyber Security Center. Kurti emphasized the need for raising public awareness, conducting regular cyber security exercises, and providing clear guidelines to protect children online. Moreover, Prime Minister Kurti underscored the essential link between political pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law. Kurti emphasized the importance of gender equality and inclusivity in cyberspace, advocating for the defense of minorities and vulnerable individuals.

Kurti discussed the importance of education, awareness programs, and fostering an inclusive culture as crucial elements in creating a secure and inclusive cyberspace for all.

Key takeaways:

- **Ensuring an inclusive culture** that recognizes and respects individuals from all backgrounds in cyberspace.
- **Enhancing cybersecurity measures** by fully implementing the cybersecurity law, and promoting inter-institutional cooperation to effectively address these cybersecurity related challenges.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Disinformation as a Security Threat: A global Perspective

Moderated by Valon Kurhasani, Deputy Country Director, NDI Kosovo

The panel discussion featured insightful perspectives on the significant role of civil society, the dangers of disinformation, and the urgent need for proactive cybersecurity measures. The panelists provided valuable recommendations for stakeholders to address these challenges and protect their assets and information effectively.

Moira Whelan highlighted the crucial role of civil society in effecting change and emphasized the leadership of civil society in addressing cybersecurity. She stressed the need for full participation of all relevant stakeholders in tackling technical issues and addressing cybersecurity concerns. Ana Toskic drew attention to the potential dangers of disinformation, particularly in the context of social tensions and its impact on the integrity of information.

She underscored that disinformation not only exploits human weaknesses and emotions but also serves as a mechanism for controlling narratives and maintaining power structures. Paolo Piccirillo provided valuable insights on cybersecurity measures, urging immediate action to protect assets and critical data. He emphasized the importance of activating remote managed security services and developing cybersecurity capabilities. He highlighted the availability of advanced security operation centers that can assist in safeguarding assets and data.

Key takeaways:

- **Recognizing the role of civil society** in effecting change and addressing cybersecurity challenges, emphasizing the importance of full participation from all stakeholders in tackling technical issues.
- **Acknowledging the risk involving disinformation,** particularly in the context of tense political developments, and its potential to manipulate narratives to ensure a better response.

PRESENTATION:

Disinformation as a Security Threat: A global Perspective

Paolo Piccirillo, Vice President of Sales, Police Forces & Homeland Security (virtual address)

LEONARDO
Aeronautics
Helicopters
Defence Electronics & Cyber Security
REVENUES
€ 14.1 BN
REVENUES BY BUSINESS SECTOR
REVENUES BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA
PAOLO PICCIRILLO Leonardo S.p.A.
Paolo Piccirillo
Vice President of Sales Police Forces & Hom
Security Leonardo, Italy

Paolo Piccirilo delivered a compelling presentation at DISICON-5 on the practical approach to building national cyber resilience. Piccirilo emphasized the significance of national cyber resilience and security in safeguarding fundamental rights and fostering social and economic development.

Throughout his presentation, he highlighted the key challenges faced in achieving cyber resilience, which include enhancing the cyber security skills of all employees, modernizing national IT legacy infrastructures and applications, and preparing to counter a rapidly evolving and intricate threat landscape. Piccirilo stressed the importance of taking immediate action in protecting assets and critical data. He recommended initiating security monitoring to safeguard assets. He emphasized that there is no time to wait when it comes to cyber security protection. By recognizing the importance of cyber security and taking proactive measures, any organization or institution can protect their assets, ensure data safety, and thrive in an ever-changing digital landscape.

Key takeaways:

- **Enhance cyber security skills** of all employees through regular training and awareness programs to detect and mitigate cyber threats effectively.
- **Protect critical data** by initiating security monitoring to identify and respond to potential threats promptly.

DISISTORY

Agon Rexhepi, Human Rights Activist

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Agon Rexhepi, a human rights activist, provided insights into the ongoing struggles faced by the LGBTQ+ community in the digital realm in Kosovo. Rexhepi underscored the distressing reality of online violence, including hate speech and harassment, that frequently targets individuals in this community, resulting in severe repercussions. To foster a secure and inclusive online space, he emphasized the crucial need to share the stories and challenges experienced by the community, while also raising awareness about this pressing issue.

WORKSHOP

Cyber-Attack Simulation

Facilitated by Bardhyl Jashari Geneva Center for Security Governance - DCAF and Metamorphosis Foundation, North Macedonia

The conference organized the first Cyber Attack Simulation which brought together participants from political parties, NGOs, and media, facilitated by Bardhyl Jashari from the Metamorphosis Foundation. This simulation tested the readiness and response capabilities of these groups to a potential cyber attack. It highlighted that educating employees on cybersecurity practices and conducting regular vulnerability assessments are vital for ensuring the safety and security of digital assets. The participants were divided into three groups including all sectors and exposed them to the challenges that certain stakeholders face should cyber breaches happen. After a 45 minute discussion facilitated by the NDI team and Bardhyl Jashari, the groups came up with a detailed response to the scenario presented in the scenario. The political party group proposed assessing the impact, securing their infrastructure, and collaborating with relevant authorities. The NGO group focused on supporting the Central Election Commission, advocating for increased funding, and raising public awareness. The media group emphasized responsible reporting, fact-checking, and collaboration with cybersecurity experts to restore public trust. The participants were acknowledged for their participation in the DISICON-5 workshop on cyber attack simulation.

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