Jurius

New Approach on Interoperability of Information Systems

On 16 May 2017, the European Commission presented the seventh report on progress made towards an effective and genuine Security Union. In addition to providing an update on progress made on key files, the report focuses on the ongoing work to improve information management for borders and security.

Category: Articles
Region: EU
Field of law: Cybercrime

[Rz 1] The report sets out the Commission's new approach towards achieving the interoperability of EU information systems for security, border and migration management by 2020. Following the recent global cyberattack, the report also stresses the Commission's commitment to accelerate work to review the 2013 EU Cybersecurity Strategy in order to provide an effective response to cyber threats.

[Rz 2] Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos said: «The value of our security information is maximised when our systems talk to each other. The complex and fragmented systems we have today make us vulnerable. Actionable information is not always available for the law enforcement officials that need it. Today, we present a clear vision on how to act to correct this. To connect the dots and to eliminate blind spots to step up the security of our citizens across the EU.»

[Rz 3] Commissioner for the Security Union Julian King said: «The recent tragic attacks in Europe have highlighted the importance of effective information sharing between Member State authorities. The approach we are outlining today sets out a targeted and intelligent way of using the existing data to best effect. What we propose would be a step-change in the way we manage data for security, helping national authorities better addressing transnational threats and detecting terrorists who act across borders.»

[Rz 4] In April 2016, the Commission presented a Communication on stronger and smarter information systems for borders and security and launched the work of the High-Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability. The High-Level Expert Group delivered its report on 11 May 2016 confirming the views expressed in the April 2016 Communication, and putting forward recommendations towards the interoperability of information systems. The report takes stock of the recommendations of the High-Level Expert Group, and proposes the way forward to address structural shortcomings under the three main areas: (i) maximising the utility of existing information systems; (ii) where necessary, developing complementary systems to close information gaps; and (iii) ensuring interoperability between our systems.

[Rz 5] In 2016, the Commission has put forward a number of proposals with the aim of closing the outstanding information gaps, including the establishment of new systems such as the EU Entry/Exist System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) as well as reinforcing existing ones such as the Schengen Information System, Eurodac and the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS).

[Rz 6] The report sets out a new approach to the management of data, where all centralised EU information systems for security, border and migration management are interoperable in full respect of data protection and fundamental rights. The main features of this approach are:

- European search portal: allowing the systems to be searched simultaneously, in full compliance with data protection safeguards and possibly with more streamlined rules for access to the systems by law enforcement authorities.
- Shared biometric matching service: enabling searches across different information systems holding biometric data, possibly with hit/no-hit flags indicating the connection with related biometric data found in another system.
- Common identity repository: based on alphanumeric identity data (e.g. dates of birth, passport numbers) and detecting whether a person is registered under multiple identities in different databases.

[Rz 7] The proposed approach would overcome the current weakness in the EU's data management architecture eliminating blind spots. As a result, the EU Agency responsible for information system management, eu-LISA, would play a crucial role in providing technical expertise and bringing the work towards the interoperability of information systems forward. In order to allow eu-LISA to implement this new approach, the Commission will present a legislative proposal to strengthen the Agency's mandate in June 2017.

[Rz 8] The Commission will discuss the new approach with the European Parliament and the Council with an aim of reaching a common understanding on the way forward before the end of 2017. The discussion will feed into the proposal on interoperability which the Commission will present as soon as possible.

[Rz 9] At the same time, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to move swiftly on the delivery of legislative priorities on information systems for security, borders and migration management.

[Rz 10] In the area of aviation security, the Commission has facilitated contacts at political level to ensure coordinated actions between the United States and the EU. A meeting between the United States and the EU side took place in Brussels on 17 May 2017, in order to jointly assess the potential risks and work towards a common approach to address possible developing threats.

[Rz 11] President Juncker's State of the Union address in September 2016 and the European Council conclusions of December 2016 highlighted the importance of overcoming the current shortcomings in data management and of improving the interoperability of existing information systems. Recent terrorist attacks have brought this into even greater focus, highlighting the urgent need for information systems to be interoperable, and to eliminate the current blind spots where terrorist suspects can be recorded in different, unconnected databases under different aliases.

[Rz 12] In April 2016 the Commission presented a Communication on stronger and smarter information systems for borders and security, initiating a discussion on how information systems in the European Union can better enhance border management and internal security. In June 2016, the Commission set up a High-Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability to take this work forward and to address the legal, technical and operational challenges to achieve interoperability. The High-Level Expert Group held its last meeting on 25 April 2017 and presented the final report on 11 May 2017.

[Rz 13] The European Agenda on Security guides the Commission's work in this area, setting out the main actions to ensure an effective EU response to terrorism and security threats in the EU. Since the adoption of the agenda, significant progress has been made in its implementation, paving a way towards an effective and genuinely secure Union.

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