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The need for cybersecurity has never been so urgent

The threat of digital disruption calls for greater digital resilience

Digitalisation is transforming our economy and our society. It is a major source of growth and innovation, as well as a vital factor in tackling contemporary social challenges. The Dutch economy is among the most digitalised in the world. The quantity of data and the corresponding economic value are growing, and more and more devices are connected to one another and to the Internet. Digitalisation continues to increase across all sectors; new digital technologies are becoming more important and indeed vital to the functioning of day-to-day life in this country. Dutch society and its critical processes are almost entirely dependent on digitalised processes and their underlying information systems. Analogue fallback options have become virtually non-existent. Our near-complete dependence on ICT systems makes digital security essential. After all, the more these processes, data, services and connections become digitalised, the greater the consequences of any impairment of the confidentiality, integrity or accessibility of (information) systems. As the Netherlands' dependence grows, the country faces new threats, an increase in cybercrime and a growing number of incidents. Recently, relatively minor disruptions in connection with the ransomware attack on Maastricht University and vulnerabilities in the Citrix software have made the reality of the situation glaringly evident. The digital security of our citizens, businesses and society is far from a natural certainty.

Despite numerous reports published to date, awareness of how acute the situation has become remains insufficient. This has to change. The current corona pandemic underscores the urgent nature of cybersecurity: in order for people to work securely from remote locations, vital services and service providers must continue to function and digital networks must remain operational. We must act now in order to prevent potential digital disruption. It is crucial to the security of our country, our economy and our society that cybersecurity and the prevention of cybercrime be given the highest priority. Cybersecurity must become a prime concern in both the corporate and government sectors. Public-private partnerships are a prerequisite for an effective approach to cybersecurity, as the scarce knowledge and expertise present are scattered across many parties. The public and private spheres must work together if solutions are to be found. This requires careful coordination of crucial aspects such as information sharing (with all parties), knowledge exchange, cyber exercises (both vital and non-vital, with the government), talent cultivation (eliminating enrolment quotas) and knowledge development. Investments must be made in these areas.

Many steps to enhance digital resilience have already been taken at both the national and European level. For instance, various strategies, agendas and updates focusing on resilience have been released in

recent years, along with countless (often regional) cybersecurity initiatives, both large and small, launched by the government and the corporate sector but also by civil society parties. However, practical experience has shown that these efforts are insufficient. Greater cohesion, effectiveness and speed are needed. The question at hand is: how can we organise this differently going forward? The council feels it is vital that subsequent governments actively invest in cybersecurity by ensuring effective coordination and a programmatic long-term approach, including the associated financial resources. Only then can we achieve a nationwide network for detection, prevention, response and remedy in the period ahead.

The Cyber Security Council therefore urges all political parties to ensure that cybersecurity issues feature prominently in their election programmes.

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