Do we need an Internet Ombudsman?

The Cyber-security Strategy of the European Union[1] falls short when it comes to users and user issues. Search for "users" in the document yields only 3 hits:

Raising awareness

" End users play a crucial role in ensuring the security of networks and information systems: they need to be made aware of the risks they face online and be empowered to take simple steps to guard against them".

What is this empowerment? What are those simple steps?

Who will define those "simple" steps and bring them to the attention of the users? Who will create awareness of those "simple" steps among users? Also about what they are "empowered" to do? Every citizen is a user or a potential user. Creating awareness takes nothing less than nationwide awareness campaigns. Who will organize those and who will finance them?

Users do not trust the Internet

 "Unfortunately, a 2012 Euro-barometer survey showed that almost a third of Europeans are not confident in their ability to use the internet for banking or purchases. An overwhelming majority also said they avoid disclosing personal information online because of security concerns. Across the EU, more than one in ten Internet users has already become victim of online fraud".

Just statistical data, no remedy?

This statistical data is alarming. And it will stay alarming until somebody does something about it. Nothing will happen on its own. An EU policy is missing followed up by EU wide awareness campaign is needed to use this data and turn the situation around and rebuild confidence among the users. Again who will organize it and who will pay for it?

"The Commission invites the Member States to:

Organize a yearly cyber-security month with the support of ENISA and the involvement of the private sector from 2013 onwards, with the goal to raise awareness among end users."

This is the only mentioned action with reference to end users and it is up to the Member States to carry it out. Is one month enough? Definitely not. We need 12 cyber-security months, many cyber-security years to raise enough awareness to be successful. And who is to organize it and who is to finance it?

Awareness has to be supplemented by helpful information and progressive improvements to the user environment. Does anybody care about this? The growing of the market for information and ICT is a basic economic factor. Confidence of users would support growth and positive progress. Market needs additional measures even with regard to economic interests and growth.

The report covers the security situation pretty well at all levels except when it comes to the user. He or she is very much well left on own. General statement like "need to be made aware of the risks they face online and be empowered to take simple steps to guard against them" says nothing for those 30% who are afraid to use the Internet for banking?

The only action mentioned is referred to the member states to organize a yearly cyber-security month with ENISA. No reference is made to getting users involved? One month. That is all? 11 months a year the users are left on their own? It sounds very much like the Commission does not know how to deal with the situation at the user level? It sounds like the Commission is referring the issue to the others to solve. And what is a profit hungry industry going to do? As little as possible hoping it will blow over. Awareness raising is also needed at the industry level. The growing of the market for information and ICT is a basic economic factor. Confidence of users would support growth and positive progress. This will benefit the industry.

The online shops are a part of the Internet value chain. What is their role and responsibility when it comes to cyber-security? The users are their customers. Are the online shops doing enough to protect their customers? Some reports have suggested that they are a part of the problem themselves by not investing enough in state of the art equipment and expert

knowledge to keep in step with the rapid development of the security situation[2]. Is this something which needs to be looked into further? Who should do this? A report commissioned by the Commission on the on line shop Cyber-Security Situation would be most welcome. This would include technical, management and quality issues but also user views of the on line shop situation. CECUA is ready to take part in such a project.

The users need a safety net to fall on if they get into trouble. Something like proposed in the CECUA draft Bill of Rights www.cecua.eu One option would be an Internet Ombudsman for those users to turn to who get into trouble and cannot resolve their problems on their own. Something like this, highly visible, is needed to win back and comfort the many disillusioned users. TIME IS NOW.

Dr. Jon Thorhallsson

CECUA President

jon.thorhallsson@cecua.eu

www.cecua.eu

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/eu-cybersecurity-plan-protect-open-internet-and-online-freedom-and-opportunity-cyber-security

[2] http://www.pcwelt.de/news/Experten-warnen-vor-Sicherheitsluecken-in-Online-Shops-376534.html