

Cyber exercise and crisis communication training for Western Balkan experts

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On 11-13 February 2025, cybersecurity specialists from Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia gathered online and onsite to Tirana for a 3-day Live-Fire cybersecurity exercise organised by e-Governance Academy (eGA) and CybExer Technologies to enhance their practical cyber incident management skills according to real-world cyber threat scenarios. The Blue Teams had a unique chance to not only refine their abilities in identifying and responding to cyber threats but also in fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among peers.

The technical exercise ran in synchronisation with cybersecurity crisis communications training led by Guna Šnore, Chief Education and Training Expert at the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. The training and exercise ran in parallel to underscore the critical need for effective communication strategies in the face of complex hybrid threats, particularly in the realm of cybersecurity.

Key findings and outcomes:

- Enhanced incident response: Participants demonstrated improved abilities in identifying, analysing, and responding to simulated cyber threats in real-time.
- Stronger collaboration: The exercise fostered better communication and coordination among cybersecurity specialists from different countries, paving the way for smoother cooperation during real-world incidents.
- Improved communication strategies: The crisis communication training equipped participants with effective strategies for communicating with stakeholders and the public during cyber incidents, minimising damage and maintaining trust.

Impact and significance:

- Regional cybersecurity advancement: The exercise directly contributes to a stronger cybersecurity posture in the Western Balkans, better equipping the region to handle large-scale cyber incidents.
- EU's cybersecurity goals: The event aligns with the European Union's priorities in cybersecurity, particularly in enhancing preparedness, response, and international collaboration in the face of growing cyber threats.

- Building a resilient digital future: By investing in the development of cybersecurity expertise and regional cooperation, the initiative fosters a more resilient and secure digital environment for the Western Balkans.

"This hands-on experience gained from defending against real-time Red Team attacks is aimed to strengthen individual capabilities and improve overall readiness against future cyber challenges," said Aare Reintam, COO of CybExer Technologies.

"As hostile influences become increasingly sophisticated, equipping professionals with the tools to analyse the information environment and implement effective crisis communications is essential for building resilience," Guna Šnore emphasised.

The participants could gain a comprehensive understanding of how to navigate and mitigate the impact of cyber-related crises.

"These regional training sessions allow cybersecurity experts to be prepared to respond effectively to diverse threat scenarios. We have seen time and again that the preparedness, knowhow, and connections gained through these exercises prove to be a strong foundation for resilience to cyber crises," noted Merle Maigre, Head of Cybersecurity Competence Centre at e-Governance Academy.

"As our societies become ever more digitised and dependent on technologies, we are faced with challenges to our liberties, such as cyber and other hybrid threats, including foreign information manipulation and interference. This is why the European Union considers cybersecurity a top priority. It is part of our efforts to prevent and discourage cyber-attacks and increase resilience as well as create these global partnerships to be more immune to these attacks. Therefore, I am glad to see that European Union in Albania hosts these type of training events," European Union Ambassador to Albania Silvio Gonzato noted.

These trainings were part of the EU-funded project [Western Balkan Rapid 2.0](#) aimed to enhance cybersecurity preparedness, response and incident coordination of Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia for large-scale cyber incidents.

The Tirana event proved valuable in bolstering the cybersecurity posture of Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. By fostering collaboration and providing hands-on experience in a realistic cyber threat environment, the exercise significantly enhanced participants' technical incident management skills and crisis communication strategies. This initiative, as part of the Western Balkan Rapid 2.0 project, strengthens regional cybersecurity preparedness and contributes to a more secure

digital landscape in the face of evolving cyber threats. The emphasis on practical skills, knowledge sharing, and coordinated response underscores the commitment to building a resilient and secure digital future for the Western Balkans.

Video from the event: <https://vimeo.com/1056737054>

Cyber Balkans project website <https://ega.ee/project/cyberbalkans/>

CybExer <https://cybexer.com/>