



STRATEGIC DECISION- MAKING EXERCISE 2021

During the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Portugal will host in February 2021 the Comprehensive Cyber Strategic Decision-Making (CC SDM) Exercise, where the Defence Policy Directors of EU member states will face and manage a cyber crisis in a hybrid warfare context. SDM will promote a discussion to enhance current initiatives and improve harmonization of the common defence and security policy at the EU level, as well as between member states.

Crisis management within a counter-hybrid and cyber threats scenario, boosted by a pandemic environment.

The decision to host the Comprehensive Cyber Strategic Decision-making (SDM) Exercise 2021 is entirely aligned with the EU member states' responsibility in backing EDA's mission "to support the Council and the Member States in their effort to improve the Union's defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the CSDP".

Hybrid threats and cybersecurity are paramount areas for the European Union and its member states, therefore, a strong commitment to developing national cyber defence and cybersecurity capacities, enabling states to face today's hybrid/cyber threats is mandatory. This subject will play an important role in the calendar of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In this sense, SDM constitutes a great opportunity to promote awareness and improve understanding at the political and military levels, supporting the strategic decision-making process from a whole-of-government approach, considering the relevant inputs from a cyberdefence perspective and from a comprehensive approach regarding hybrid warfare.

The SDM exercise has been developed by EDA since 2014, when the first proof-of-concept exercise was also executed in Portugal. Since then, the SDM was financed and executed by EDA in different formats in Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, and Slovenia.

Many EU member states face common threats, which can also target cross-border networks or infrastructures. Bringing a hybrid dimension into traditional cyber exercises, aligned with the European Union joint framework defining actions, can help counter hybrid threats and foster resilience at the EU and national levels, where cyber is a core area.

During a two-hour-long table-top exercise, Defence Policy Directors from EU member states will have the opportunity to:

- a) Improve situational awareness in order to ensure a common understanding of the crisis and the impact of hybrid attacks on EU structures;
- b) Strengthen coordination at the political level as the best solution to raise awareness on countering hybrid threats and cyber incidents, worsened by a pandemic scenario;
- c) Foster coordination, mutual assistance, and comprehensive responses in a pandemic scenario affecting the ability to respond;
- d) Identify cooperation and coordination mechanisms for mutual support between civil and military capabilities in a crisis management situation.

The exercise will constitute a hybrid crisis context, following up on the Germany-Portugal-Slovenia Trio Programme, where it is clearly stated that “the Trio will work towards better protecting our societies from malicious cyber activities, hybrid threats and disinformation”.

SDM is a Portuguese contribution to improving the resilience of EU societies and it is our strong belief that “strengthening the cohesion and capacity for joint action of both NATO and the EU that includes military mobility, cyber security and defence, development of capabilities, hybrid threats and capacity building” is also achieved by high-level training opportunities.