

## **ESSENTIAL Winter School on Trust and Resilience - Group Assignment**

### **Supervisors Handbook**

#### **Objectives of exercise:**

- Improve participants' capacity to identify, validate and integrate information related to security topics;
- Develop the participants' analytical skills;
- Familiarize students with current security debates such as the ones on whistle-blower legislation, surveillance legislation, role of intelligence services, extradition, back-doors and encryption, fake news etc.
- Develop participants' team building skills.

#### **Tasks for students:**

1. Each participant must prepare a situational analysis using PESTLE (STEEPL) methodology from the perspective of the role allocated to him/her inside his group and then present his/her work in front of the other participants (Wednesday 14 – Thursday 15)
2. Based on the four PESTLE analyses produced in the first stage, each group must prepare a scenario analysis, indicating possible solutions to be taken in each area, their limitations and opportunities. (Friday 16 – Monday 19)
3. Each group must then appoint one spokesperson who will present the results of the group work (Tuesday 20)

**Duration:** from Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> March to Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March

#### **Resources:**

- Handbook for students
- Coloured pens, pencils, markers
- 15 flipchart sheets
- Coloured post-its & cardboard of different sizes
- Tape
- Glue

**Background text provided to Students:****Situation:**

*25<sup>th</sup> November 2019*

Romania holds the Presidency of the European Council.

“During the Romanian Presidency, we are delighted to host, on the 4-5-6<sup>th</sup> of December the future of European regional security conference and kindly welcome all the EU officials, heads of states and experts to Bucharest. Regional security, in this time of uncertainty and crisis is a key element for European society. The essential task is to find balance between security requirements and human rights” said Minister for Foreign Affairs Teodor Melescanu.

The high level conference “European Regional Security – What Next?” is hosting 400 participants and over 30 speakers. The conference will be opened by President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis and the Head of the External Action Service, Federica Mogherini. Confirmed speakers include representatives from the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and development (OECD), NATO and heads and states and ministers from across Europe.

*1<sup>st</sup> December 2019*

Street protests are snowballing in Romania against a Canadian-led gold mining project in the Rosia Montana area in the Apuseni Mountains. More than 20,000 people joined a protest march in Bucharest on Sunday, and thousands in other Romanian cities took to the streets.

The Sunday marches represent the third major countrywide weekend mobilisation to oppose the project since Sep. 1. They drew the biggest numbers of participants so far. Smaller numbers of people have been protesting daily in Bucharest, in the western city of Cluj, and in others cities.

The protests erupted after the Romanian government proposed a draft law Aug. 27 that gives extraordinary powers to the project promoter, Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (in which Canadian group Gabriel Resources is the majority stakeholder).

According to the text, the company can relocate people whose homes are on the perimeter of the mine. Additionally, the law asks state authorities to grant the company all necessary permits within set deadlines regardless of national legislation, court rulings or public participation requirements.

Gold Corporation plans to build Europe's largest gold mine at Rosia Montana to extract 300 tonnes of gold and 1,600 tonnes of silver over 17 years. The operation would involve the destruction of three villages and four mountains.

An even larger protest is planned for Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December in Bucharest, when a high-level meeting of European officials is due to take place in the context of the Romanian Presidency of the European Council.

*16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 09h00 a.m.*

#### BREAKING NEWS

“Information leaked that Secret Intelligence Agency of Romania has been spying on environmentalists, marching against the Rosia Montana gold exploitation!”

Casa Jurnalistului (in English – House of the Journalist), a Romanian investigative journalism website reported that the Romanian Secret Intelligence Agency was collecting the telephone records of dozens of Romanians, involved in the Rosia Montana protesters. The paper published secret intelligence report showing that the Agency had directed the telecommunications company Green to hand over all its phone data to the SIA on an “ongoing daily basis”.

That report was followed by revelations by other two Romanian news agencies, Mediafax and PressOne that SIA had tapped directly into the servers of 3 national Internet firms to monitor email exchanges between protesters against the Rosia Montana.

Shortly afterwards, Casa Jurnalistului revealed that the individual responsible for the revelations about the SIA surveillance programme is Alex Ionescu, a 33 year old Cherry Blossom employee.

Cherry Blossom is an Estonian-based company, which has developed the ALYSEUM intelligence analysis platform, widely used by intelligence agencies, law enforcement, financial intelligence units and security think-thanks across Europe.

After having leaked the information to the media, Alex Ionescu seems to have sought refuge inside the Jordanian embassy in Bucharest, who so far has refused to hand him over to Romanian authorities. Allegedly, the information seems to have been acquired through a back-door embedded in ALYSEUM, which enables some high ranking Cherry Blossom employees to have access to the ALYSEUM users’ databases.

It seems that Mr. Ionescu, who was one of the software engineers responsible for the design of the ALYSEUM platform had used a back-door into the programme to download sensitive national security information, which he believed proved beyond doubt that SIA’s actions are abusive and go against European human rights laws.

In a note accompanying the first set of documents he provided, he wrote: "I understand that I will be made to suffer for my actions," but "I will be satisfied if the federation of secret law, unequal pardon and irresistible executive powers that rule the world that I love are revealed even for an instant."

*16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 11h00 a.m.*

The Director of the Secret Intelligence Agency, Mr. Andrei Andreescu organizes a press conference to refute allegations made by ex-Cherry Blossom employee, Mr. Alex Ionescu, stating that all actions carried out by SIA were in compliance with Romanian law. He also expressed his deep concern that the revelations are endangering the work and identity of dozens of SIA agents working undercover to preserve the country's national security.

Mr. Andreescu has also called for the start of an immediate investigation into how such a security breach was possible inside Cherry Blossom and whether ALYSEUM does indeed possess a back-door that can be exploited by company employees to retrieve data from the clients' databases.

*16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 13h00*

Cherry Blossom owner, Ms. Marit Pihor, rejected all claims that ALYSEUM had a back-door and has expressed her willingness to assist Romanian authorities with their investigation, on what is now being called the "Ionescu Disclosure".

*16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 16h00*

Representatives of several European companies who are using ALYSEUM for intelligence analysis purpose have expressed their deep concern regarding the possibility of ALYSEUM having a back-door and have asked Romanian authorities to start an immediate investigation into how it was possible for an employee of Cherry Blossom to gain access to confidential data processed through the help of the platform

*16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 19h00*

Large groups of people are starting to gather in Bucharest and other cities across Romania to protest against recent revelations that SIA has been intercepting the communications of environmentalists protesting against the Rosia Montana exploitations. Similar protests are scheduled to take place in the next days in front of Romanian embassies abroad.

*17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 08h00*

Romanian Prime Minister, Viorica Dancila is meeting this morning with the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to discuss the revelations made by ex-Cherry Blossom employee, Alex Ionescu. Germany is just one of the countries mentioned in the revelations as having assisted SIA in gathering intelligence on the Rosia Montana protesters. Other countries mentioned in the report are the US, UK, France and Bulgaria.

17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – 12h00

A coalition of European digital rights and privacy NGOs led by famous Italian lawyer, Mr. Daniele Dante has published a media release asking for the Romanian authorities to take immediate action regarding the allegations of SIA surveillance. Mr. Dante has also expressed his willingness to provide free legal assistance to Mr. Ionescu who is in danger of facing multiple criminal charges from the Romanian authorities.

**Additional resources:**

1. Whistleblowing Protection Laws in Europe  
(<http://journalism.cmpf.eui.eu/maps/whistleblowing/>)
2. European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2017 on legitimate measures to protect whistle-blowers acting in the public interest when disclosing the confidential information of companies and public bodies (2016/2224(INI))  
(<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2017-0402>)

**Additional information to be given to participants depending on the outcome of their situational analysis:**

**Problem covered: Fake News**

Joker 1:

23<sup>th</sup> December 2019

“Adevarul” (Truth), a mainstream Romanian newspaper has published today a long piece on the “Ionescu Disclosure” claiming it is in possession of evidence which shows that Mr. Ionescu’s partner, Ms. Tatiana Collins, a Moldovan citizen is actually a Russian spy. These revelations would shed a completely new light on the reasons, which have driven the ex-Cherry Blossom employee to make public sensitive information regarding the actions of the Romanian Secret Intelligence Agency.

Ms. Tatiana Collins is currently in Chisinau, visiting her parents and could not be contacted by the media for further information.

**Problem covered: Protection of identity of intelligence officers/Operational risks**

Joker 2:

*23th December 2019*

**BREAKING NEWS:**

Romanian intelligence officer working for the Secret Intelligence Agency has been found beaten to death in a remote area of the Herastrau Park in Bucharest. Information collected so far seems to show that the officer had been working undercover as a member of the extreme left group – Anarcho. The police is investigating but so far, it is not clear who is the perpetrator of the crime.

Sources say that this is only the first of many such incidents that we will witness in the next days as a result of Alex Ionescu's disclosures, which have led many SIA agents undercover have their cover blown.

**Problem covered: Non-related incident which can accentuate crisis (misinterpretation of information)**

Joker 3

*23th December 2019*

About 200 residents and businesses are without phone and internet after road workers cut a telecommunications cable in Bucharest. The cable was reportedly cut through by workers on December 22nd.

RDS<sup>1</sup> spokesman David Pop said the cable was under Bd. Primaverii, close to the Jordanian Embassy.

The Jordanian Ambassador to Bucharest, Mr. Abdel Hamid has expressed his concern that this incident may be connected to the fact that the embassy is currently hosting Mr. Alex Ionescu, the former ex-Cherry Blossom employee who has released sensitive data regarding the activities of the Romanian Secret Intelligence Agency.

**Problem covered: Poor management of cyber-security risks (e.g. existence of a back-door into the software)**

Joker 4

*1st January 2020*

A global cyber attack forced several financial companies across Europe to stop their activities. The losses experienced are in the category of millions of euros. Researchers with Czech Republic-based security software maker Avast said that the attackers seems to have exploited

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<sup>1</sup> A Romanian telecommunications company

a back-door in the ALYSEUM intelligence analysis platform, developed by Estonian-based Cherry Blossom company.

Cherry Blossom has recently been implicated in a large scandal involving the revelations made by ex-Cherry Blossom employee, Mr. Alex Ionescu, who seems to have exploited a similar back-door in ALYSEUM to gather sensitive information regarding the activities of the Romanian Secret Intelligence Agency.

### **Problem covered: Bad management of media communication/public perception**

Joker 5

27<sup>th</sup> December 2019

Large-scale protests are expected to occur today in Bucharest and other large cities in Romania, as people gather in the streets to protest against the government's inactivity in relation to the revelations made by ex-Cherry Blossom employee, Mr. Alex Ionescu. Several Romanian and international NGOs have already publicly criticized Romanian parliamentarians for failing to start an inquiry into the activities of the Romanian Secret Intelligence Agency.

The revelations made by Mr. Ionescu has made Romania vulnerable to both national and international pressure, as several EU officials have already expressed their criticism towards the government's lack of action. Among these, a major role is played by Germany, which is one of the country directly affected by the Ionescu disclosure.

### **Consultations:**

Technical advisor: Joe Cannataci

Legal advisor: Jeanne Mifsud Bonnici

Media advisor: Irena Chiru

Security advisor: Marian Sebe

### **Schedule for consultations:**

By appointment from Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> to Monday 19<sup>th</sup> in the following time intervals:  
08h00 – 09h30 or 17h30 - 19h00

### **Rules regarding consultations**

When being asked for advice by the students in relation to either task 1 – preparing the situational analysis and/or task 2 – scenario analysis, **supervisors can only assist students by:**

- a. Indicating them relevant resources that they can use to carry out/improve their work;

- b. Indicating the correct qualifications for a certain concept/situation/phenome (e.g. hand the main character over to Romanian authorities would fall under extradition agreements);
- c. Provide short background explanations on certain procedures, requirements etc., when this information is not easily available online (e.g. intelligence procedures in case of an information leak).

**Supervisors are discouraged to:**

- a. Asses the work being carried out by students, either individually or as a group before the work is being formally submitted;
- b. Intervene in the work being carried out by pointing out errors or suggesting new elements to integrate;
- c. Make any suggestions regarding the way in which the work is being presented (e.g. how information is grouped on the flipchart sheet etc.)