Threat Landscape Report 2021 Q3 - Executive Summary

Direct Threats to EU Institutions, Bodies, and Agencies

INCIDENTS

4 significant incidents affected EUIBAs this quarter.

In 3 cases the attack started with a compromise of a publicly accessible server (Oracle WebLogic, Microsoft Exchange).

In the other case, attackers obtained credentials via a phishing campaign.

In at least 3 significant incidents, threat actors successfully exfiltrated data.

Since the beginning of 2021, CERT-EU has already recorded 15 significant incidents, compared to 13 during the whole of 2020 and 8 in 2019.

THREATS

CERT-EU released 26 threat alerts (compared to 20 during Q1 and 22 in Q2).
The top 5 reasons for threat alerts were:

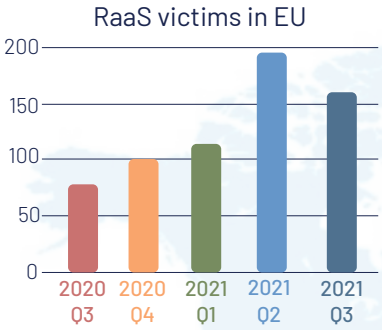
- Active exploitation of zero-days or n-days: Microsoft Exchange, VPNs, etc.
- Recent activity or new tools used by top threat actors
- Sharing actionable data related to TTPs used in significant incidents
- Spear-phishing campaigns directly affecting EUIBAs or sectors of interest
- Active use of commercial mobile spyware

Top threat actors: CERT-EU currently tracks 13 top threat actors. The level of exposure of EUIBAs has been high for 4 of them: two alleged Russian threat actors, one alleged Chinese, and one allegedly of North Korean origin.

Social media: The most frequently used social media network for impersonation of EU staff or the digital identities of EUIBAs has been Instagram, followed very closely by Facebook and at a distance by Twitter.

Malware and tools: The three most observed pieces of malware or malicious tools to which EUIBAs have been exposed were Cobalt Strike, Mimikatz, and Dridex. However, no infections have been confirmed.

Threats in Europe



Ransomware

A supply chain attack conducted by REvil against Kaseya VSA, software used by many MSPs, had a major impact on several organisations including in Europe, causing significant disruptions.

Taking into consideration the first 9 months of 2021, the average number of ransomware victims per month increased by 129% in 2021, compared to last year.

Nation-state activity

The EU has acknowledged and condemned Russian "Ghostwriter" cyberespionage / information operation activity against EU member states. The Russian APT29 threat actor targeted European governments with a zero-day exploit earlier in 2021. The EU, the UK, and the US attributed the Hafnium ProxyLogon attacks to China and are calling for an immediate stop to such adversarial activities. France reported a significant cyberespionage campaign by the Chinese Zirconium (aka APT31) threat actor. The NSO group and its Pegasus spyware have been used in several espionage cases against politicians and journalists.

Hacktivism

Belarussian hacktivists continue hack-and-leak operations against the Minsk regime.

Threats in the World

China: China is establishing full control over all domestic knowledge of software vulnerabilities. As always, China is active on social media, working to amplify pro-Chinese messages.

Russia: Political opposition and anti-corruption entities in Russia fall victim to DDoS attacks and data leaks. Stricter internet controls and censorship established before the September parliamentary election remain in place after the election. Proposed legislation prohibits foreign companies from processing biometric data of Russian citizens.

Iran: Iranian governmental websites were taken offline after a "cyber disruption".

North Korea: A North Korean cyber threat actor compromised a major South Korean major producer of combat ships & submarines.