

WORLD NEWS

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Days before elections, EU approves new cyber sanctions regime



FILE PHOTO: A man holds a laptop computer as cyber code is projected on him in this illustration picture taken on May 13, 2017. REUTERS/Kacper Pempel/Illustration

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union will directly penalise computer hackers after governments agreed on Friday a new mechanism to target individuals anywhere in the world, freezing their assets in the bloc and banning them from entry.

“This is decisive action to deter future cyber attacks,” British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said in a statement.

Just days before European Parliament elections on May 23-26, officials are on alert to any attempts to undermine the vote via disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks.

While no names were added immediately, the EU says the sanctions mechanism will allow the bloc to move quickly to punish future attacks, rather than rely on the current system of special country lists that are complex to negotiate.

Russia has made cyber and electronic warfare a key part of its military operations, Western officials say, and Britain, the Netherlands and the United States have accused Moscow of conducting a campaign of hacks against the West.

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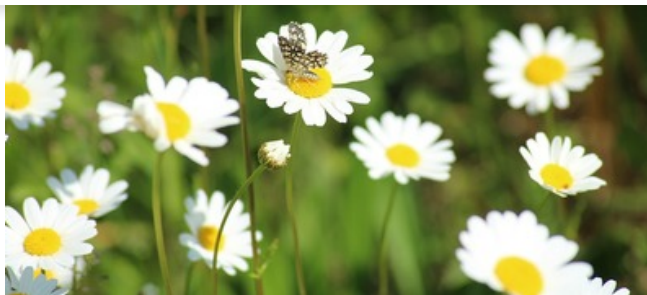
EU and NATO diplomats believe China and North Korea, as well as Russia, have developed sophisticated computer hacking weapons and cyber surveillance software to spy on and undermine the West, often using criminal groups to mask the origin of such attacks.

The EU cyber regime plan follows a similar sanctions mechanism to punish chemical weapons attacks by targeting people blamed for using banned munitions regardless of their nationality.

Another sanctions mechanism has been set up for perpetrators of human rights abuses.

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