10 OCTOBER 2014

Reducing the undesirable impacts of surveillance

The IRISS consortium releases handbook on increasing resilience in surveillance societies

Surveillance continues to grow widely with a huge impact on the lives of individuals and society at large. Though some forms of surveillance may be acceptable or tolerable, others pose a serious challenge – threatening democracy, fundamental rights and freedoms and the very fabric of society with often irreversible, corrosive impact.

It is vital that individuals, groups and organisations are able to adapt to and/or resist surveillance. To this effect, the IRISS project consortium has released a handbook to help increase resilience in surveillance societies. The handbook is aimed at different stakeholders, such as policy-makers and regulators, consultancies, service providers, the media, civil society organisations and the public to help them think about how they can increase resilience in a surveillance society, for themselves and for their fellow citizens. Resilience to surveillance requires ways of preventing, mitigating, remedying and "bouncing forward" from the negative effects of surveillance.

David Wright, Managing Partner of Trilateral Research which co-ordinated the preparation of the handbook, comments, "we live in a surveillance society, one in which the use of surveillance technologies has become virtually ubiquitous and in which such use has become widely (but not uniformly) accepted by the public as endemic and justified by its proponents as necessary for economic, security or other reasons. Even if there are democratic procedures, a surveillance society is one in which there is a parallel system of power exercised by large, oligarchic companies and intelligence agencies over which effective oversight and control are largely illusory."

The handbook is divided into three parts: Part One provides some background on resilience in surveillance societies; it defines the terms and identifies features of resilience and today’s surveillance society. Part Two lays out a set of questions (generic and specifically addressed to target stakeholder groups) intended to provoke consideration of proposed or existing surveillance systems, technologies, practices or other initiatives. Part Three offers a list of measures that can be taken to increase resilience in surveillance societies and to restrict the scope of surveillance systems to what can be legitimately justified and to minimise the impacts of surveillance systems on the individual, groups and society.

The Handbook is available as a PDF on the IRISS project website and as an interactive tool.

About the IRISS project

The Increasing Resilience in Surveillance Societies (IRISS) project received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under Grant Agreement No. 285593. IRISS comprises 16 partners from nine EU countries. The project, which began in February 2012, analyses the spread of surveillance systems and technologies in public and private sectors from the perspective of their impact on
the fabric of a democratic society. The project aims to explore options for increasing social, economic and institutional resilience and strengthening democratic processes and public discourse about appropriate reactions towards threats against open democratic societies. The EU provided the three-year IRISS project with a grant of €2.6 million.

The IRISS consortium is led by the Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology (IRKS, Austria). The other partners include Trilateral Research & Consulting (UK), the University of Stirling (UK), the University of Edinburgh (UK), the Eotvos Karoly Policy Institute (Hungary), the Institute of Technology Assessment (Austria), the University of Sheffield (UK), the University of Hamburg (Germany), Vrije University of Brussel (Belgium), Open University (UK), Universität Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI (Germany), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (Norway), the Universita Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Italy), Comenius University Bratislava (Slovakia) and the Universität der Bundeswehr München (Germany). The handbook was part of Work Package 6 (Resilience options) of the IRISS project, and coordinated by Trilateral Research & Consulting, with contributions from the University of Edinburgh, Eotvos Karoly Policy Institute (EKINT, Hungary), Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Open University (UK), the University of Hamburg and the Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology (IRKS, Austria).

The IRISS project website: http://irissproject.eu

For more information, contact:

Professor William Webster: william.webster@stir.ac.uk
David Wright: david.wright@trilateralresearch.com
Reinhard Kreissl: reinhard.kreissl@irks.at