CETA & Preserving Digital Civil Society
Date: September 10, 2019

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KEY EVENTS

On July 26th, 2019, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) Vancouver, and the Vancouver Branch of the Canadian International Council (CIC) hosted the delegates of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) of the European Union (EU). The purpose of the event was to discuss the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada in the context of preserving digital civil society.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

In this joint presentation given by the CIC and CASIS, the following topics were explored:

1. The preservation of digital civil society between Canada and the EU;
2. The potential provincial and territorial challenges facing the implementation of CETA in Canada;
3. The geopolitical importance of CETA in the global international structure;
4. EU-Canada relations in the rule-based international system; and
5. Manipulation in online discourse and its effect on EU-Canada trade.

The presentation explored two important issues:

1. The reasons why the development of a "cyber social contract" becomes essential to ensure the safeguard of data at the individual, national and international levels; and
2. The lack of support of CETA within Canada and the EU.

The event concluded with a discussion that addressed CETA implementation and its challenges in Canada, and explored strategies to ensure the protection of the digital civil society.

BACKGROUND
The following sections outline the key elements of the presenters' topics.

1. Presentations:

a. Preserving Digital Civil Society

The complexities of navigating the digital silk road and preserving a digital civil society, especially when our data is weaponized against us by hackers to manipulate individuals and communities was highlighted. However, it was emphasized that hackers are not the only threat. In fact, even though data-driven companies, such as Google or Bing (referred to as "digital rest stops"), could ensure the protection of our online activities and information, these companies could still mine our information.

There are two possible solutions to preserve digital civil society from disruptors of the digital silk road:

- Practicing cyber hygiene and avoiding cyber apathy→ Cyber hygiene works to empower the individual citizen to use VPNs, routinely alter their security information, and shift their passive-defensive posture into an active one. And a framework through the form of a "cyber social contract" must be established to empower, secure online actions, and prosecute those who would break the "contract"

- Implement a reporting mechanism to hold the "digital rest stops" accountable for protecting people's information and data.

b. Potential Challenges Facing Canada-EU Relations

Some potential challenges include Canada's complex geography, as it poses a challenge for making trade agreements due to varying political and economic expectations between provinces. The development of North-South Integration in North America through the increase in cross border infrastructure would make it more difficult for small Canadian businesses to trade with the EU. There are several factors that could explain the reasons trade between Canadian businesses and the EU would become difficult:

- Regulation between provinces slow down trade,

- Canadian dependence on US trade (with the US accounting for 65% of Canadian exports)

- Chain companies direct the flow of trade

- Canada and Asia's trade relationship

Despite the challenges mentioned above, Canada's trade with the EU has slowly begun to increase. In fact, exports have accounted for over 7% year on year with an increase in various sectors (European Commision, 2018).

c. Geopolitical Importance of CETA in Global International Governance Structure

Although there are many promises from institutions that the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will strengthen the middle class, there are doubts that this is true, particularly because there are arguments that the CETA does not ensure payment of living wages, elimination of tax evasion, and stable full-time contracts (Tencer, 2017). Furthermore, there have been several protests against CETA across the globe, with 3.5 million people in Europe signing a petition against the agreement (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2016). Other groups have also rejected the agreement, including Canadian trade unions, consumers, environmental and public health organizations, and small and medium businesses (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2016).

d. EU-Canada Relations in the Rule-Based International System

In the context of the rule-based international system, it can be argued that there has been an increase in populist movements aimed to challenge the current order. It was argued that the liberal world order is under scrutiny, despite the current Canadian government's complacency with it, which raises the question of whether the international system is fracturing into more political factions.

e. Social Media Manipulation pertaining to EU and Canada

Social media manipulation through the provocation of online discourse and creation of political factions was addressed. It can be argued that personal data has now become a common good as an economic resource which can be bought or sold, and a social good tied to an individual's sense of self and identity. As our personal data has become part of the online interactions, the nature of our information has become intermingled with the role of the whole infosphere (i.e. media, social media, etc). The interaction between oneself and others now depends on the extent to which one trusts the information being shared. Considering this evolved role of technology, the infosphere, and data in our daily lives, it can be argued that there needs to be a shift away from ad hoc contracts towards a more evolved "cyber social contract" as failure to protect data and information may result in an uncivil society.

2. Discussion:

Other challenges to CETA's implementation in Canada were discussed:

- The different trade markets in Vancouver, Montreal, Ontario, and Halifax arguably hinder homogenous acceptance of CETA.
- Canada's dependence on the US might arguably prevent acceptance of CETA in Canada, as an FTA (like CETA) between the US and the EU would be unlikely with EU's strict stance on data protection and digital privacy (Cerulus and Scott, 2019).

Other suggestions for the protection of a digital civil society were made:

- Providing everyone digital literacy and cyber hygiene education (e.g. on maneuvering data handling, utilizing VPNs, etc.) would arguably increase awareness of and security against weaponization of data and breach of digital privacy.
- Institution building would arguably be key to dealing with online disinformation, ensuring institutional and human resource capabilities of governments would be able to operate in the new digital civil society (UN, n.d.).
- A cyber crime reporting mechanism would arguably be an appropriate tool for victims of cyber attacks.

The meeting concluded with a general agreement that there is no one answer to the aforementioned challenges, but that discussions like this one play an important role in the exchange of ideas and potential solutions.

References

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