

One of the gang

La dolce vita may be losing some of its sweetness as harmonisation with global standards sweeps through the Italian infosecurity community.



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Most people are likely to greet the news of a posting to the Italian office with delight. After all, the land of *la dolce vita* is also home to the world's favourite food, the best cinema, the most stylish fashion, the most desirable cars and the only woman for whom I have walked into a lamp post.

But it also has one of the world's most active underground economies. Some economists estimate the grey/black economy to contribute one-quarter to one-third of the national GDP. The US FBI believes organised crime gangs such as the Mafia and the Camorra have infiltrated almost every sphere of Italian society and business. Counterfeiting and smuggling of people and goods are endemic in some towns. Corporate frauds such as Parmalat, a labyrinthine bureaucracy, commonplace tax avoidance and money laundering, and widespread political bribery and corruption point to a business climate far removed from strait-laced Northern Europe.

Italy is nevertheless striving to become "normal". Just like the rest of us, it has pretty much standardised on the Wintel offering for desktop computers and servers. As a result, it faces the same computer-mediated



Cilli — legislate change

threats such as distributed denials of service, hacking, phishing and spam. Claudio Cilli, a computer science professor, infosecurity consultant and chairman of the Rome branch of the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA), reckons Italy is “homogenous” with Europe with respect to such threats.

Dave Emm, senior technology consultant at antivirus vendor

Kaspersky Labs’ UK office, agrees.

“There’s nothing going on in Italy (with respect to infothreats) that’s not going on elsewhere,” he says.

However, the Italian government is determined to fit the country for the networked world, and in

particular, e-commerce. It has introduced tough legislation covering data privacy and made spamming a criminal offence. (For a detailed assessment of Italy’s primary legislation that covers data protection and e-commerce issues see Baker & McKenzie’s website at <http://www.bakernet.com/e-commerce/italy-s.htm>.)

It has also just passed a bill permitting telephone taps in pursuit of organised criminals, child pornographers and other law-breakers. This has drawn the Garante (data privacy authority) into asking for clarification of how this will work and for safeguards for the innocent.

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As well as passing enabling legislation, the Communications Ministry is introducing Quality of Service standards for operators at every level. These will be built into their operating licences, with hefty penalties for missing and not fixing shortfalls.

Awareness still low

In addition, the ministry is trying to raise awareness levels of the need for infosecurity. It will sponsor a conference on the political and technical challenges of network and information security in Rome on 2-4 November. Aimed at government and technical experts, the conference aims to give practical advice and guidance based on experience gained worldwide.

“The implementation of a high level of communication network security is even more important when the focus is to ensure an adequate



Rome: Cinecittà, 6.5% of Italy’s GDP, 2,800 years of history

level of quality of service for the security functionalities of infrastructures that are critical for everyday life in a modern country, such as business-related services and critical infrastructures operations,” it says. Cilli is unconvinced that this will make a difference. Italians seem unconcerned with security threats posed by identity theft, for example, he says. “I hope their attitude will change,” he says.

In Cilli’s opinion, the way to win hearts and minds is to legislate it. He points out that companies paid lip service, if that, to infosecurity until 1 January 2004. This was when Italy’s harmonised data protection code came into force.

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“Most companies changed their security measures then only because this mandated minimum security measures to protect personal data,” he says. “Unless the government puts

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