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EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION SUPERVISOR

The EU's independent data
protection authority

“CPDP - Data Protection Day”

Opening remarks

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Good morning everyone. It is a great pleasure for me to open this conference with so many amazing speakers and so many friends and colleagues in the audience.

As you all know, 28th of January is Data Protection Day in the EU and other countries around the world because that very same day in 1981, Convention 108 was opened for signature. Our world today, forty-four years later, has changed a lot and it is fair to say that our understanding of data protection has also evolved significantly.

This is why, as we embark in a new political mandate for the EU, the Council of Europe and the United States, we are truly delighted to see so many people coming together to celebrate, reflect, and to engage in high level discussions about the future of data protection in the EU.

The challenges we face today are growing both in number and complexity.

On the one hand, we have “traditional” challenges. For example, the delicate balance between data processing for law enforcement purposes and data protection. I think you will agree with me that if political priorities shift, it will become probably necessary to revisit this old file.

On the other hand, we have brand new challenges coming from emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence systems, which promise huge benefits for all of us but at the same time, pose unprecedented risks that need to be properly managed.

And all this is happening in an evolving geopolitical landscape, where, we like it or not, the role of data protection extends far beyond the realm of privacy and it becomes often a safeguard for democracy itself.

Disinformation campaigns orchestrated by third countries, which are fuelled by algorithmic amplification of viral content, may have deep destabilising effects and may become a serious threat to our democracies. And the important concept to retain here, dear colleagues, is that this threat only materialises when we are in the presence of privacy violations and massive misuse of personal data.

There is also a new phenomenon, which is quite scary to be honest. Never in the history of humankind have we seen a concentration of wealth and power as we witness today in the hands of a few CEOs of a small number of Big Tech corporations. This creates a huge power imbalance, not only for the average citizen, but even for our own Member States that become suddenly dwarfed vis-à-vis these giants.

All this combined represents a significant challenge for our EU project, but as Cicero wisely said: “*Historia magistra vitae est*”— history is the teacher of life.

And the history of the EU teaches us that it is in complex historical crossroads like the one we find ourselves today, when we find also the greatest opportunities for strengthening our Union, become the more challenging the circumstances, the more essential it becomes for us, Europeans, to come together and to combine our strengths and our determination.



Many thought that the EU project was doomed after the failure of the ratification of the European Constitution, or after the Brexit referendum or during the Euro crisis. The truth is that we not only managed to overcome those crisis but we leave these crises behind with more Europe than before. This is why, despite the seriousness and the complexity of the challenges we face today, we should not be afraid or defensive. On the contrary, we should be very proud of our values, our European values, which have made us prosperous and tolerant in a region where wars and destruction used to be the norm not so long ago. History teaches us that if we remain united and true to our values, we will prevail.

This is why you can be reassured that at the EDPS, we will continue upholding and promoting a culture of data protection, in Europe and elsewhere, come what may, but make no mistake: at the EDPS we are not nostalgic about the past and we will not be deaf to words of wisdom or the words of those who remind us that there is room for improvement.

Let me just mention one of many possible examples. In recent years, the EU legislator has been at the forefront of an ambitious regulatory agenda for the digital world. This has resulted in the adoption of ground-breaking legislation, such as the AI Act, the DSA or the DMA, with the result that we benefit from high level standards of protection but we are also confronted with a very complex interplay between different legal disciplines and enforcers.

Here we should quote Cicero again: “Legum plura sunt, eo minus iustitiae”, “the more laws, the less justice” meaning that an excess of laws may lead to confusion, inconsistency and manipulation.

At the EDPS, we warmly welcome these laws but we also think that there are some evident overlaps between legal areas and room for improvement when it comes to effective enforcement. A clear example of this overlap is the practice of web scraping, very important for AI technologies, which raises simultaneous concerns for privacy, data protection, competition law or intellectual property. Therefore, we have launched several initiatives to foster collaboration among stakeholders and enforcers. One initiative I am particularly proud of is the Digital Clearinghouse 2.0 that I invite you to consult and, if by all means possible, to associate yourselves with.

There are many more examples of issues where we can probably do better, but I am not here to bore you with a long speech or to anticipate the outcome of today’s discussions. My job for today is just to set the tone and to welcome you all very warmly. It will for the European Data Protection Supervisor, Wojciech Wiewiórowski, after listening very carefully to what you have to say, to propose some tentative lines to take for this new political mandate at the end of today’s discussions.

I thank you all for being here today or for following this conference online, I hope that we all see more clearly by the end of the day the future we want for data protection in the European Union, and without further ado, I declare officially opened the CPDP Data Protection Day 2025.

Thank you very much for your attention.

