

Foreword

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greetings from Brussels. It is a real pleasure and honor to open your debate today.

First of all, my warm thanks go in particular to the International and Regional Studies Institute of the University of Szeged for the invitation to contribute. I am very sorry for not being with you in person but we are extremely busy finalizing the preparation of the incoming International Conference for Privacy and Data Protection Commissioners. It is a global event this year happening in Brussels only in three days from now, so I am sure you understand.

Speaking about the General Data Protection Regulation, you devoted this conference to discussing the status of adapting national legislation to the new framework, in particular, in Hungary and Poland and the new Regulation has been the reality, we may agree, for almost five months now. Further harmonization and modernization rules were among its key objectives and we should be mindful of a crucial point that the GDPR has not sparked a Copernican revolution. I have said it on several different occasions: what the GDPR has caused is a gentle evolution in the direction of raising the data protection standards worldwide. It is a catalyst for change, it is a game changer.

¹ The foreword was transcribed based on the video message of the European Data Protection Supervisor, delivered at the conference.

The GDPR, in fact, seeks to inspire a good form of innovation and inject human values into the market. It aims at reaping the benefits of technology while still enabling citizens to enjoy their (our) fundamental rights to both privacy and data protection. Accountability is a real pillar of the GDPR, which implies acting in full respect of the words and of the spirit of this Regulation which in turn seeks placing a data subject at the very center.

New rights, as the one to data portability, have a great potential for contributing to shaping digital economy in the future. Data Protection by Design and Data Protection by Default will also orient the development of technology and process-design. In this sense, the GDPR sets new parameters for the responsible design and deployment of technology. It requires that companies, designers as well as developers put the interest of the individual at the heart of innovation. The reach of application rules has also evolved with the GDPR; they now apply beyond Europe and this circumstance is crucial in protecting rights in the EU. GDPR has also raised increasing awareness worldwide to the need for better valuing people's rights.

The new Regulation inspires data protection legislation around the world, nowadays one hundred and twenty-eight countries have privacy laws and more are in the making. So it is quite an outstanding result, if you think about how narrow and limited once was the community of countries with legislation in these areas: privacy and data protection. In Europe, we have done our homework, but still, there is a lot to be done.

First, let us consider secondary harmonization. GDPR is a fundamental piece of the framework, but much is left to the margins of maneuver of Member States in some important areas. We have been seeing how approaches vary from country to country. A fair portion of the GDPR's success in this sense will, in my view, depend on how convergent these regulatory choices will be.

Take the age of consent of minors for instance or the more flexible regime for scientific research. Member States may decide to derogate from some rights under specific circumstances. A national legislation

should therefore balance different interests keeping in mind that the right to high standards in terms of data protection is a fundamental right in the EU and therefore convergence should be pursued with this basic aspect in mind.

The second element to consider relates to enforcement. Enforcement of rules is of key importance and it will bring tangible results very soon. Let me say a few words on digital ethics, since I would like to encourage you to widen the angle of the discussion and consider what else should be on the table when dealing with people's fundamental rights.

We have a very ambitious plan to better explore the impact of digital technologies on our lives and the ethical approaches required to orient technology. We will do this with the more than one thousand registered participants, plus guests and people connected in Sofia at our upcoming conference. For an entire week, delegates coming from all over the world, eighty-one countries, will debate Artificial Intelligence, facial recognition and biometrics, attention economy, micro-targeting in political campaigns, tracking and surveillance, digital monopoly, discrimination, and biases, of course, in algorithms. This year's Cambridge Analytica scandal opened Pandora's box. The current revenue model does not seem to be sustainable any longer, it is likely to frustrate people if they are not going to be treated with more dignity and respect. The so-called digital divide, between those who receive benefits from technology and those who are harmed by it, is steadily growing and this is increasingly unfair. So, let me say, there is a huge need to tackle this.

Let me go now onto my concluding remarks, ladies and gentlemen, to say that technologies should be of course developed, deployed anew, but in such a way that they enhance our rights and values and improve our way of life and not the opposite. We are calling then for a renewed sense of responsibility and commitment from all actors involved.

It is now time to wish you a fruitful and engaging day of discussions.