



35th International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners

"Privacy: A Compass in Turbulent World"

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Closing remarks

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Dear colleagues and friends,

When this conference took place for the first time - about 35 years ago - all participants found a seat around one fairly small table. At that time, the world was quite a different place.

Europe was divided in East and West, and no one could have imagined at the time that now - 35 years later - this conference has taken place in Warsaw, Poland, and with such a fantastic success, thanks to the energy and the hospitality of our hosts, the Polish Inspector General for Data Protection, Wojciech Wiewiórowski, and his team.

To be sure, this was not the first international conference in Poland: in September 2004, the 26th International Conference took place in Wrocław, at the invitation of Mrs Ewa Kulesza. So our Polish colleagues have contributed more than a reasonable share and they deserve our great thanks.

In recent years, the conference has also met in North America, in Latin America and in East Asia. Next year, it will meet in Mauritius, and thus for the first time in Africa. This reflects the gradual increase in size, in scope, in quality, and hopefully also the impact this conference is able to make in the world.

In the last 35 years, our community has grown tremendously. By the latest estimates, some seventy countries now have a national law on privacy or data protection. The number of data protection authorities has also grown, and many are now represented at this conference, either as a full member or as an observer.

Other relevant players have also become involved, such as different sectors of industry, civil society and academia. With that, our conversation has become both broader and deeper.

This year, we have looked at the role of privacy as a cultural value, and followed different streams concerning privacy and technology; the perspectives, roles and interests of key actors, and the reforms of legal frameworks around the world, and how to ensure interoperability between the different regions.

We now also see that the main frameworks at international level - those of the OECD, the Council of Europe and the European Union - have been the subject of reform. The OECD has recently issued revised Privacy Guidelines, and the work of the Council of Europe and the EU in this area is also proceeding well.

Striking at this stage, is that - in spite of obvious legal differences in details - the main lines of these reviews all point in the same direction: they are all designed to deliver "more effective protection in practice".

This explains the stronger emphasis on accountability of responsible organisations and closer cooperation of enforcement authorities across national borders. For the same reasons, we now also look further into issues of mutual recognition and interoperability.

Another positive trend is that data protection authorities are now also more and more involved in "re-thinking" their own effectiveness, "re-designing" their practices, and more generally in strategic analysis and planning.

This also leads to very useful questions about the role of DPAs versus other relevant players, about "centralisation or decentralisation" of privacy relevant activities, and about finding the best synergy and interaction between those different elements.

This international conference has thus become an increasingly valuable platform for exchange of views, of experiences and of good practices between different players. It serves to highlight best practices and stimulate closer cooperation across national borders and across regions.

For the very first time, an extended closed session for commissioners took place before the open part of the conference. As the chairman of the executive committee, Jacob Kohnstamm, has mentioned yesterday, this has not only allowed to devote more time to some main themes, but also to better share the results of this work with you and the general public.

So this year, we have welcomed a Warsaw declaration on the "appification" of society, and a series of substantial resolutions, including the one aiming at the development of a more strategic direction for this conference, and a forward looking resolution on the need for a global privacy framework.

The commissioners have also focussed on the need for more education and awareness raising activities, the empowerment of data protection officers and other privacy professionals, and on the development of a framework for closer cooperation of privacy enforcement authorities.

I very much hope that all this work will make a difference in practice - and that will in part depend on your continuing engagement as you all return to your countries.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege for me to take part in the work of this community over many years, and I would like to wish you all the best in meeting the challenges that will be facing all of us in the years ahead.

Thank you very much for your attention.