



## **Opening address at the Fifth Workshop on Data Protection in International Organisations**

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*Giovanni Buttarelli*

*European Data Protection Supervisor*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am really pleased that this event is taking place today.

It is almost four years since we last met, in Brussels, as the guests of the World Customs Organisation.

Since then the political and legal landscape of data protection has been quite transformed. Data protection and privacy are matters of strategic importance, for countries, regional trading blocs, multinational companies. Safe Harbors and Privacy Shields are now headline news in a way which could not have been imagined back in 2012.

And yet this meeting is also a testimony to continuity and commitment among you, since our first meeting in 2005, which EDPS hosted with the OECD and the Council of Europe.

At the same time we have seen rapid technological change. Big Data and the Internet of Things are no longer just marketing slogans.

And you are first-hand proof that we live in an interconnected world. A fantastic world, where people and ideas, people and causes, people and other people are interconnected through a gigantic web of information. The opportunities are limitless. But so are the risks.

And while I simply tag them “risks”, you should know that I refer, in fact, to negative consequences on the personal rights and freedoms of individuals. Imagine that a database storing names and contact details of refugees gets in the hands of extremist groups. Or imagine that members of a family are automatically profiled as members of a religious group based on their history of online purchases and they suffer consequences because of that. Last, imagine that the content of all your electronic communications are accessed by governments, or your employers, or other interested parties, without that access being subject to any control.

Some of these scenarios happen too often in real life. And they are just examples of the challenges brought by the countless opportunities to use and transfer data in the interconnected world.

In recent years we have been talking and doing a lot in the European Union to address these risks. And we observed that we are by no means alone in this process. The protection of private life and of personal data are already part of a global “conversation” that goes beyond the EU bubble.

Make no mistake - data protection has gone global.

By January 2015, the total number of countries with a data protection law in force was 109, according to leading research by Professor Graham Greenleaf.

And we were happy to find out that, since our last meeting, some of the organisations you represent here have very seriously taken part in this “conversation” of instruments that protect private life and personal data. We are very curious to find out more about your contribution in the following sessions.

International organisations must keep pace with these developments, given that often they are not subject to the growing number of national laws.

We might even say that international organisations, because they are on the front line of the challenges and uncertainty of globalisation, should show leadership in modernising data protection standards.

I know some of you here in the room have participated in at least one of the previous four workshops that the European Data Protection Supervisor has facilitated, together with our partners.

The EDPS has become closely acquainted with the data protection practices of international organisations not only by participating in different international fora, but especially by supervising specific data transfers from EU bodies to international organisations. We are often consulted on the safeguards applied for transfers to recipients outside the EU, including to international organisations. Furthermore, the EU Anti-Fraud Office has requested our authorisation to transfer data relying on Administrative Agreements entered into with international organisations.

For those of you who participate to this workshop for the first time, let me briefly explain why we think this “tête-à-tête” approach of discussing data protection issues

together is important.

Back in 2005 we organised the first workshop, together with the Council of Europe and the OECD. The aim was to raise awareness and to develop a tool-kit providing guidance to international organisations on how data protection is, in practice, a part of good governance within organisations. I invite you on our website to have a look at that tool-kit if you haven't done so already.

In the next workshop, co-organised with the European Patent Office in 2007, we went one step further. We discussed more practical things, such as the role of a data protection officer, concrete ways to establish a data protection regime and channels for international cooperation.

In 2010, together with the European University Institute, we made another small step and we invited you to discuss issues such as monitoring of compliance, international transfers and the balancing of data protection as a fundamental right with security and freedom of expression.

The conversation further matured during the last workshop, in 2012, when together with the World Customs Organisation, we invited organisations and EU officials to share best practices and to present recent developments, including security breaches and the use of cloud computing.

And here we are today, in a world more connected than ever. Where we are more and more aware how important the protection of private life and personal information is. Where we truly realise that global challenges must be met by global solutions.

I am inviting you to make today one more step.

A big step: to formalise the general good practices we have been discussing in the past 12 years, to acknowledge that these practices are converging and to bring back home the good news that you are part of a new club.

Let's consider whether now is the time to stabilise our cooperation, perhaps in the form of an association or 'data protection coalition of international organisations'.

Therefore, together with our partners from the International Committee of the Red Cross, we invite you to actively debate throughout the day, to raise questions, to provide answers and, in the last session, to provide input to the Conclusions of the workshop and to adopt those Conclusions as part of our collective commitment to take privacy and data protection seriously in the interconnected world.

We have a full agenda ahead of us. Let the workshop begin!