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*Youth and Leaders Summit - Opening Speech*

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I would like to thank my dear friend Enrico Letta, Frédéric Mion and the Paris School of International Affairs for the invitation to join you today.

This is a wonderful event, bringing together the leaders of today with the leaders of tomorrow, and richly deserves its growing reputation.

So it is a great honour to be here, because my deepest desire is to be able to pass on what I have learned to the younger generation.

Some of you may be wondering why a data protection authority should be on the agenda of a day dedicated to technology and disruption?

I shall try to explain.

The premise for EU data protection law is that “technology should be designed to serve humankind”.

This is because data is the engine of technological development.

Artificial intelligence, biotech, the internet of things, facial recognition – these are all technologies which require the processing of personal information on a massive scale.

But the power to collect, analyse and profit from personal data has always raised questions of freedom and fairness.

That is why data protection laws appeared for the first time, almost fifty years ago, to impose obligations on those who seek to benefit from using people’s data, and to give those people enforcement rights regarding how their data should be used.

We now live in a society and economy where data has become valued above almost all other things.

In the last quarter of 2018 seven of the eight most highly valued companies were tech companies – all based on the West Coast of the US or in China.

It means that never in human history has informational power been concentrated in so few hands – those of a few companies and states, often working in tandem.

The challenge is whether our values of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights can survive in the face of this concentration of informational power.

Privacy – the universal need to have space of different degrees of intimacy in our lives, communications and relationships – is becoming a much bigger challenge than simply data protection.

Visions are colliding between, firstly, states like China who argue that the government determines the limits of freedom and ultimately owns data generated by digital technology; secondly, the United States, where, in the name of free markets, data is another locus for competition between companies and consumers: and thirdly Europe where according to the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, data doesn't belong to anyone but privacy is something inalienable and personal data is something to be treated with respect.

That is why we at EDPS have launched a global debate about ethics and digital technology.

Because at present there is no consensus about what is right and what is wrong when it comes to the development and deployment of incredibly powerful technologies.

On such questions the US has for decades been our natural interlocutor and friendly rival.

We share cultural roots and deep historical ties.

But these bonds are gradually weakening – a process that started long before the current 'America First' administration.

Meanwhile we are already approaching the third decade of the so called 'Chinese century' – and we are only just starting to awaken to the challenge.

Today, in China, over a million Uyghurs are believed to be imprisoned in 're-education camps'; Xinjiang province has become a digitally-enabled police state.

And then there is the 'Social Credit System' – which seems to elevate the "ethical" notion of "trustworthiness" over rights and the rule of law, reducing human beings and their freedom to computer-generated scores.

So digitisation and geopolitical uncertainty combine to form an existential threat to the careful balance which we have forged Europe over many centuries.

Concepts like territoriality, sovereignty, human dignity and individual autonomy and accountability are straining under the weight of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'.

In your discussions today, I would encourage you to think for a moment about the supercomputer in your pockets.

It is sucking up data – personal data – 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Data which will be stored for an indeterminate period in an enormous energy-intensive server somewhere on the planet, contributing as much to climate change as the aviation industry.

In poorer parts of the world – especially sub-Saharan Africa and central and southern Asia – people are given smart phones at an affordable price with certain data-hungry apps preloaded.

So in exchange for being connected, people are being farmed for their data.

Worse, they being treated like laboratory animals – tested for their reactions to different stimuli.

Some argue that this is a new form of colonialism – data colonialism – with the most vulnerable expected to sacrifice privacy, even their dignity, in exchange for the privilege of participating in digital life.

Over half the world's population is now connected to the internet.

But, according Freedom House, only 20% of them are experiencing a 'free' internet.

China's surveillance model is very attractive to governments around the world who feel threatened by a connected, digitally-literate population.

Most of you in the audience are, like my three children, digital natives: Generation Z or iGen, they call you.

You have probably heard about the so-called 'right to be forgotten'.

This is a slogan written into the GDPR by its authors.

It was conceived, in part, to protect young people who, in the youthful enthusiasm, posted photos which their older adult selves might regret.

In fact, it is probably my generation which is guilty of compromising the privacy of today's youth – when as parents we have naively filled the internet with cute/ embarrassing pictures of you with chocolate on your faces and in the bath.

Digital literacy may be more necessary for the over 40s than the under 30s.

That is why you are best placed think about whether the digital dividend has been fairly allocated.

The obvious imbalance between winners and losers calls for a new approach to regulation.

We can no longer afford to observe the bureaucratic niceties and jurisprudential silos of competition, consumer and data protection law.

From now on, all of these arms of the supervision of the digital economy and society need to be working together and coherently.

I predict 2019 is going to be a landmark year for Europe again.

According to many reports, democracy is now in decline around the world.

Studies also indicate that young people in the US and in Europe are less enthusiastic about democracy than previous generations.

Many people in this room are going to be voting for the first time this year.

The European Parliament elections in May will be the most important since the first direct vote took place in 1979.

At least 13 Member States will have national elections.

Outside the EU, the biggest democracy in the world, India, will also go to the polls.

Who knows - there may even be another Brexit referendum?

Most voting is not yet digital, but the “public sphere” of political discussions have gone digital.

What is and is not political is no longer very clear.

Accordingly to Chris Wylie, the Cambridge Analytica whistle-blower, even fashion items make a statement about your political views. And he said that before the *Gilets jaunes* occupied the streets of this city and others, which is another movement owing its virality to the influence of the dominant social media platform.

So ask yourselves today - how are you being manipulated when you check your phones?

Think about who might be behind the messages you see.

Work out how to hold to account the companies and public bodies that benefit from using your data, and determining what you see on your newsfeeds, timelines and streaks.

You have techniques for safeguarding your digital freedom which my generation didn't have.

Thank you for listening and my best wishes to you all.