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EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION SUPERVISOR

The EU's independent data
protection authority

“Data Protection Day 2023”

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28 January is Data Protection Day. On this day we celebrate the historical and global efforts to put privacy and data protection at the centre of our lives.

Data Protection Day is an opportunity to reflect on crucial past achievements - but today I will not look at the past. I would rather look at what is ahead of us this year and beyond.

There is an important **need to get back to the roots of the rights to privacy and data protection**, as fundamental rights and essential components of human's innermost dignity.

On the one hand, private digital goliaths have acquired so much power and information that people have lost any meaningful sort of control on what is processed about themselves; people are helpless in the face of such asymmetry of power.

On the other hand, public governments around the world engage in geopolitical confrontation, where "privacy" is either manipulated or anyway breached with covert surveillance such as Pegasus.

I look with concern at the trend of prolonging the attitude of covid-times of public access to privately held data, for instance geo-localisation, and using emergencies as a justification. At the same time, public-private partnerships reach an unacceptable extreme when the enforcement powers are given to commercial entities.

Decisions on **the use of personal data interfere with the very right of being alive in this world as humans**. Decisions on the use of personal data are political, and should be subject to a democratic debate, process and oversight.

This is true for uses of data by private and public actors alike. Have we maybe forgotten that the **role of governments is to empower**, not to weaken, the position of individuals? That this need for protection is even more crucial for the vulnerable ones, those who otherwise risk being left behind and aside, at the margins of this society?

Privacy and data protection *are* **foundations of democracy**. Privacy and data protection *are* **foundations of justice**. They *are* **foundations of fairness**. **In respect of everyone, no one exempted.**

I am proud that Europe is leading the way in regulating and shaping our future on important issues such as Artificial Intelligence, digital economy, political advertising and data spaces. What worries me though, is the potential dilution of privacy and data protection in these future legal acts.

We need a new deal - now more than ever - that reincorporates privacy and data protection into **the basic pillars sustaining our societies**. And we need individuals to get back in control.

Democracies entrust individuals to select their political representatives, despite politics being complex. Similarly, we must create the conditions for individuals to engage in free meaningful choices in the digital environment. Don't tell me it is too complicated for the "user". Tell me it is the right of the human being.

We must visualise this original intent, so to have privacy and data protection face the challenges of a society, which cannot stop and shall grow stronger. On data protection day, **I commit to making this my mission for the years to come.**

