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## EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION SUPERVISOR

The EU's independent data  
protection authority

### ***“EDPS 2004-2024-2044”***

Opening remarks at the European Data  
Protection Summit: Rethinking Data in a  
Democratic Society

Wojciech Wiewiórowski  
European Data Protection Supervisor

## Introduction

- Good morning! Thank you all for being here on time to celebrate the EDPS' 20th anniversary with me and the entire EDPS team. Although our official anniversary is in January, we envisioned our celebration as an ongoing process culminating to today's Summit. Plus, the weather is much nicer in June!
- This process includes several key initiatives you might have encountered over the past months:
  - Our 20 initiatives: commitments and actions showcasing the EDPS' continuous effort to lead as a modern data protection authority.
  - Our 20 talks: experts and influential personalities from various fields sharing their unique perspectives on privacy and data protection.
  - A commemorative book, which we unveil today.
  - And finally, today's summit.
- All these initiatives share a common purpose: they were born from the conviction that our anniversary should be a moment to reflect on the past to better prepare for the future.

## Why the Summit?

- If you open today's conference programme, you'll find an introduction to the five questions and panels we will explore. This introduction explains that we aim to use our 20th anniversary to bring to the forefront of the public a debate about the role of the state in the era of ever-growing information collection about citizens and the place of data protection in modern democracies.
- The debates today will discuss the role of data protection, its possibilities and limitations, its successes and missed opportunities in contributing to the development of democratic society fundamentals. We have gathered minds who, while broadly committed to protecting human privacy, can critically examine the meaning of fundamental rights to privacy and data protection in today's reality.
- But, why? Why focus on data protection and public authorities? Why discuss data and democracy instead of simply celebrating our 20th anniversary and appreciating our achievements?
- As the EDPS, we have a specific mandate that gives us a particular perspective among data protection authorities. Over the past 20 years, we have looked beyond Big Tech and the GDPR. We have look at EU institutions, and we have seen them as a broader reflection of issues arising from data processing by public authorities. What we see often worries us. And when we worry, we organise a conference!
- What are we worried about? Increasing data collection by governments? National security being used to justify more intrusive measures? The rise of populism and right-wing radicalism challenging the human rights' foundations of the European Union? Yes, we

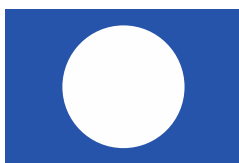


worry about these things. But, there's one more concern, the very reason for this Summit: the worry that data protection is often helpless against threats from state actors.

- Today, we want to reflect on why this is. Can we do anything better, whether in terms of concepts and norms or their implementation? Are there lessons from the past 20 years that can inform and improve our practice? In other words, we want to analyse the application of data protection in the context of public authorities as a gateway to broader reflections on data protection and its functioning. We aim to use our 20 years of experience and immense development in data protection as a starting point for a successful journey into the next 20 years.
- What's at stake in this journey? Democracy. Too pompous? Maybe. But, too often, I feel data protection is about itself. For my predecessor, Giovanni Buttarelli, it never was. The rush to digitise has had an impact on society and the environment, as well as on treasured norms, such as the rule of law and democracy, as stated in Giovanni's manifesto from 2019.
- Indeed, these treasured norms require more than just the GDPR. We need to change the mind-set of treating what's not covered by the GDPR as minor, tangential, or even obscure. At the EDPS we know something about it - you are not a real data protection authority is a comment we still hear sometimes!

## Presenting the Panels

- I look forward to today's discussions and encourage you to see them as interconnected.
- First, we start with the basics: Daniele Nardi, Legal Service Office in the EDPS, will moderate a session reflecting on the objectives of data protection as a fundamental right, both procedurally and substantially. Are we on the right track to meet these objectives? What does data protection safeguard that cannot be secured through other means?
- Next, Thomas Zerdick, Head of Supervision and Enforcement Unit in the EDPS, will continue these reflections in the specific context of data protection's role in relation to the State. Is data protection effectively limiting the State's appetite for data? Are the powers and functions of States, and the societal needs they must meet, sufficiently governed by data protection laws?
- Then, Anna Buchta, Head of Policy and Consultation Unit in the EDPS, will address the somewhat forbidden fruit of data protection: national security and the role data protection should play in building a democratic oversight system. At the EDPS, we believe in a broader European Union competence in security measures.
- Anna Colaps from my Cabinet, will attempt to operationalise these reflections, moderating a session dedicated to addressing the problem of data protection's reactivity.
- Finally, Kazik Ujazdowski from my Cabinet, will invite his guest panellists to venture into the future, turning the day's rich debates into practical proposals.
- I also invite you to attend sessions organised by the EDPS' long-standing partners: civil society, academia and Data Protection Officers of EU institutions, agencies, offices and bodies. I thank them for responding to our invitations and curating their own "agora". Last,



but not least, you will have a chance to get to know about our commemorative book during a dedicated session, on top of a discussion on disinformation prepared by the EDPS press team.

## Conclusion

- Ladies and Gentlemen, today is not about the GDPR. Today is about data protection as a discipline and how it impacts our democracies.
- Unfortunately, to the broader public, this discipline is not very popular, and its effectiveness in contributing to a healthy democracy still leaves room for improvement.
- The coming years will only amplify the challenges and struggles of data protection, while our successes over the past 20 years will gradually mean less. As Giovanni expressed in his manifesto, *the GDPR is a gold standard, but the EU data protection community must prepare for the next decade*. Five years since we lost Giovanni, his call remains more relevant than ever. With today's Summit, we want to answer this call.
- Thank you for joining the EDPS in this endeavour and for celebrating our 20th anniversary with us.

Check against delivery

