



**Reception at the Exhibition "A Look Inside", hosted together with the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the Belgian Data Protection Authority (CBPL-CPVP)  
Exhibition Centre "De Markten", Brussels, 28 January 2013**

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*Peter Hustinx*

*European Data Protection Supervisor*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to have been asked to take the microphone this evening, particularly after the very relevant remarks by Paul de Hert (VUB) and Willem Debeuckelaere (CBPL-CPVC) together with whom we are hosting this event in the context of Data Protection Day 2013.

As it was mentioned, William Faulkner wrote his famous essay on Privacy in the 1950s, yet it still has such resonance today.

It is indeed a fact that personal information has never been *less private* than today. So much about us is used to identify patterns and trends of human behaviour that perhaps it is time to reflect on the kind of technologically controlled world we wish to live in.

There is much in our society that we have gotten used to, that – yes, for many of us, at least to some extent – has become a normal convenience: CCTV cameras, loyalty cards, sometimes even big brother-style reality shows and sensational exposés in the media ("freedom of the press", don't you know!).

Social transparency is increasingly the norm, and much is justified and accepted as a result; just think about how much has been introduced since the Twin Towers were attacked – extraordinary rendition, exchange of passenger name records and the like – all in the name of reducing the risk from terrorists and protecting democracy.

As former US Vice-President Dick Cheney predicted shortly after the September 11 attacks, 'extraordinary' soon becomes the 'new normalcy'.

We have accepted so much change, so much intrusion, can we reverse this trend? Indeed, should we reverse the trend or "... get over it" - as we "have zero privacy anyway"<sup>1</sup> as the infamous quote goes?

I believe we must take a stand. While patterns of behaviour can be monitored and we can be profiled endlessly, our minds are possibly the last private space we have – that is before scientists find a way to decode what we are thinking!

Agreed, it is difficult to set clear boundaries around the concept of 'privacy' in this new normal state, but we must assess our boundaries – our communication, our domestic spaces, our thoughts, the contents of our pockets – how much are we willing to reveal? What else should we be obliged to share in the name of national security?

We should defend and take back control in this technology driven world to preserve what is essential: namely the dignity, autonomy and *unique value* of every human being. This includes the right of every individual to develop his or her own personality, to *not* be one of the crowd if he or she chooses, and to have a *fair influence* on matters that have a direct impact on our lives.

This means that we should also reinforce the legal and technical tools we still have to protect and control the use of our personal information, and to ensure that our personal information remains sufficiently protected also when it is kept or used by others.

This is why both the EU and the Council of Europe are now involved in reviews of their legal frameworks for data protection, and why forty-seven member states of the Council of Europe as well as all EU institutions, agencies and bodies are today celebrating the 7<sup>th</sup> European Data Protection Day.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott McNealy, co-founder of Sun Microsystems

But let me go back to the theme of this exhibition '*A Look Inside*' on Surveillance Art. Oscar Wilde wrote: "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors". And this exhibition is therefore a potent reflection of us.

This is an original way to celebrate Data Protection Day and we are proud to have been associated with it.

So ladies and gentlemen, enjoy, absorb, be moved, be shocked and, above all, talk to each other about the wonderful and intriguing art around you – this is the perfect opportunity to introduce yourself to those you don't know or to renew acquaintances. Here's to an enjoyable evening.