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EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION SUPERVISOR

The EU's independent data
protection authority

“Opening remarks”

Data Protection Day 2026: Reset or refine?

Wojciech Wiewiórowski
European Data Protection Supervisor

Dear all,

I am truly delighted to co-organise today's event with the Council of Europe, and to be able to celebrate together the 20th anniversary of Data Protection Day.

As you may know, Data Protection Day was established in 2006 by the Council of Europe to commemorate the anniversary of the opening for signature of Council of Europe Convention No. 108, the first legally binding international treaty on data protection. Convention 108 was later 'modernised' in 2018, to deal with challenges resulting from the use of new information and communication technologies and to strengthen the Convention's effective implementation.

In 2026, we are also going to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the GDPR. During this year, we will be discussing the question of the GDPR's 'modernisation' in light of the Digital Omnibus Proposal that was put forward by the Commission last November.

It is never an easy task to 'modernise' a legal instrument, especially when it forms part of the very foundation of data protection law in Europe and beyond.

Today's event will be a unique opportunity to discuss if and how we can "update" and simplify the existing rules without compromising data protection core principles and while maintaining strong safeguards for individuals. As a data protection community, we should also reflect on how Europe's normative model can continue to inspire a human-centric digital future.

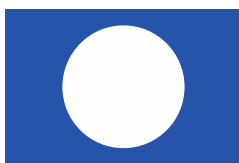
Presentation of the panels and side events

I am very pleased to welcome each of the experts that will be participating in today's panels, as well as three outstanding keynote speakers:

- Beatriz de Anchorena, who is Head of the Agency for Access to Public Information (AAIP), Argentinian Data Protection Authority, and current Chair of the Committee of Convention 108 of the Council of Europe,
- Jelena Virant Burnik, who is the Information Commissioner of the Republic of Slovenia and Deputy Chair of the European Data Protection Board,
- Professor Anu Bradford, who has kindly offered to share with us a video since she could not attend in person. The video will focus on the false choice between digital regulation and innovation.

Today's event is structured around four main topics:

- We will start by diving deep into a fundamental question: When is data personal? This debate has been recently reinvigorated by the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union, most notably the *EDPS v SRB* judgement.
- The second panel of the day will explore how Convention 108+ fits into the international regulatory framework on data protection. We will discuss its potential to create a level playing field for like-minded countries, helping them define high standards for privacy and data protection in the digital age
- The third panel will offer diverse perspectives on the current EU data protection reform. The discussion will involve a key question: if 'simplification' or 'modernisation' of data



protection law is needed, what does it mean exactly and how should we assess the current proposal?

- Finally, we turn to the protection of confidentiality of communications and terminal equipment. The last panel will in fact focus on how to best address the constantly evolving practices and technologies in the area of online tracking.

The discussion will not only take place on the stage: at the end of each panel session, all participants will be invited to share their insights and questions. Moreover, side events have also been planned. Our master of ceremony will tell you more about this.

Personal insight

Before we dive in, let me share a few thoughts on how I see the need to defend the current European data protection framework in the current geopolitical and technological context.

First, I would like to remind that effective enforcement of data protection rules in the digital world is not only the institutional mission of the EDPS; it is also a topic which requires constant reflection and open exchanges. Those of you who were also present for yesterday's event on the Digital Clearinghouse will know what I mean: since new legislative instruments have introduced additional chapters to the EU's digital rulebook, there are also new 'sheriffs in town'. We need to be able to work together efficiently and effectively, so that together we can deliver the right outcomes for individuals, businesses and society as a whole.

My second message is that simplification should not be an euphemism for deregulation. The narrative that GDPR compliance constitutes a disproportionate burden that prevents competitiveness and innovation is an old song, heard throughout the long and difficult negotiations of the regulation. And yet, in less than 10 years, the GDPR has become the gold standard in the field of data protection, not only at the European level, but also worldwide.

The GDPR is more than a regulatory instrument: it is anchored in Articles 7 and 8 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and cannot be compromised in the context of reform debates. I am personally convinced that simplification is a means, not an end. Regulatory improvements should focus on an increased harmonisation and providing clarification and legal certainty, but the key principles and rights under the GDPR should remain untouched, so that personal data can continue to be used in the confidence that fundamental rights of individuals are respected. Trust is key, both for economies and individuals.

I believe that in the uncertain times we are living in, the protection of personal data becomes more important than ever. The role of data protection extends far beyond the realm of privacy and indeed it often becomes a safeguard for democracy itself. Let us think of disinformation campaigns orchestrated by third countries, which can only materialise through privacy violations, uses of profiling and large-scale misuse of personal data. In extreme situations, data protection serves as a foundation, and not a luxury.

Against this background, I renew my call for a swift and rapid entry into force of the Council of Europe's Protocol modernising the Convention 108 on the processing of personal data. Five ratifications are still missing for the entry into force of Convention 108+, which has the potential to become a global standard on data protection.

Thank you for your attention and let me wish us a productive and successful Data Protection Day.

