



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Martine Reicherts

EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Giving European citizens the data protection rules they deserve

Court of Justice of the European Union
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to open this seminar on data protection. The context here today is very important. New rules are under discussion at the Council and the European Parliament. And the venue for our seminar is highly symbolic given the historic decision recently issued by the Court of Justice on the right to be forgotten.

The Court decision highlights the urgency of reform

The ruling on the right to be forgotten is a milestone in the enforcement of European citizens' fundamental right to data protection.

The Court had to step in and take a stance because Europe lacks modern data protection rules that are fit for the internet age.

It will probably have to intervene again to fill the existing legal vacuum until the new rules proposed by the European Commission in January 2012 are put in place.

The Court has taken strong positions and provided helpful clarifications. Its role is to interpret the law. The legislator's role is to make the law. The legislator has made significant progress and the European Parliament is set to play its part. It is ready to negotiate with the Council. I am sure that the work of the Italian Presidency will ensure that the trilogues can begin in January 2015.

The Heads of State and Government have repeatedly affirmed the importance of adopting 'a strong EU General Data Protection framework by 2015'.

The Member States need to stick to this ambition. Europe needs this reform urgently, both to revive economic growth and job creation, and to make sure that the rights of its citizens are properly protected.

The reform also addresses the lack of trust among citizens with regard to commercial companies. Right now, 92 % of Europeans are concerned about economic operators collecting their data without their consent.

If trust is not rebuilt, businesses will not be able to develop the huge potential of the digital economy. That is why our aim is to hand control over their data back to citizens.

Lawyers have a key part to play

When the new rules are in place, the Court will have to ensure that they are applied uniformly throughout Europe.

It will not be able to do so fully without the cooperation of lawyers. So today the Court opens the doors of its main court room - usually reserved for formal sittings - to you,

the lawyers, who play a vital role in the proper administration of justice and the correct, uniform application of EU law. Society is changing rapidly; you see these changes every day and their repercussions on the application of the law. So your contribution to our discussions today is vital.

I know I can count on your commitment, as European judges and lawyers, to helping the legislator achieve the right balance between the economic aspect of personal data exchange, the protection of public interests and the protection of our citizens' fundamental rights. You are key partners in our endeavour to guarantee that citizens have new, sound rules across Europe in keeping both with the internal market framework and with our fundamental rights.

I am sure we shall all have some interesting and fruitful discussions. Thank you.