

DATA PROTECTION DAY

28 JANUARY 2010

On an initiative of the Council of Europe, Europe celebrates a Data Protection Day on 28 January. On this day, and over the following week, throughout the European Union initiatives are being undertaken to stimulate everyone to familiarise themselves with an important aspect of life: the processing of personal data and to become more aware of their rights and responsibilities.

It is impossible to imagine life today without processing of personal data. Personal data became a key denominator to our daily life activities. Internet, electronic financial transactions, chip cards, video surveillance, body scans at airports, the use of new technologies contributes to the fast development of our society. They offer us great possibilities but at the same time they also make us more vulnerable. More and more personal data is processed. This, and the ever more growing demand for the use of these data for law enforcement - including the cross border exchange of law enforcement information between state authorities of the European Union Member States and beyond - creates tensions when looking for the right balance between the needs of law enforcement and the requirements of data protection.

This year is marked by a substantial change in the European Union's legal framework. The Lisbon Treaty strengthens significantly the importance of data protection. This is also echoed in the multi-annual program of the European Union -the Stockholm Programme- focusing on the interests and needs of citizens. The challenge raised by the European Union to itself is the respect for fundamental freedoms and integrity while guaranteeing security in Europe. *Protection and respect* must be the key words aiming to achieve both objectives.

On the 1st of January 2010 the Europol Convention was replaced by the Council Decision of 6 April 2009 establishing the European Police Office (EUROPOL). Unifying and strengthening the exercise of the right of access is one of the important achievements of this decision.

An effective and credible "infrastructure" enabling individuals to know and exercise their rights shall be one of the priorities of the data protection authorities. Being aware of and being informed about the processing of personal data is a very important fundamental aspect for every individual's life. Living a life without unnecessary interference or unjustified treatment based on unlawful processing of personal data is essential for every individual.

Today it is also an occasion to remember the commitment made by the JSB Europol in its Fourth Activity Report for the future "*the JSB Europol together with national data protection authorities will <..> further increase their activities to ensure real protection for individuals not only for now but also in the future*".