

Press Release

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The right to private life is not an obstacle in the fight against terrorism

Statement by Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, on the occasion of the Data Protection Day

Strasbourg, 28.01.2007 - All governments have the duty to protect their citizens from the terrorist threat, but the response should be lawful, intelligent and effective. The European Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to respect for private life, but gives the authorities the power to interfere when national security and public safety are at stake. At the same time, any limitations must be necessary, adequate, proportionate and based on law.

I am concerned that some of the recent arrangements for data exchange, which were introduced at the insistence of the US Government, fail to meet these criteria, especially with regard to personal information related to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, health and sex life.

The Council of Europe is willing to provide expert advice and help all our member states, both members and non-members of the European Union, to conclude adequate arrangements which will not only provide for effective anti-terrorist cooperation, but will also comply with the European Convention on Human Rights and avoid a challenge in the Strasbourg Court.

I should like to thank the European Union, especially Commissioner Franco Frattini, for his valuable support for the Council of Europe "Data Protection Day" on 28 January, which marks the signature of the Council of Europe Convention for the protection of individuals with regard to the automatic processing of personal data.

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