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28 January 2020

Dear Members of Parliament,

Save Data Protection

Today, Tuesday 28 January 2020 is Data Protection Day. It marks the day in 1981 when the UK and other nations in the Council of Europe pledged to "protect every individual ... with regard to the processing of their personal data". Over 55 nations are now signatories.

In the UK, we have in general excellent data protection laws, which help to safeguard individuals from the abuse of their personal information by private companies.

Now, as the United Kingdom prepares to exit from the European Union, our privacy standards are at a crossroads.

The signs from Government are unclear: as the future trade agreement is likely to be loose, it would be open to Government to dilute data protection, to make it harder to enforce, or to lower fines.

There will be pressure from many sectors, such as insurance, bank credit agencies and some large internet companies, to lower standards. Pressure will come from the US government, who will want to make 'data flows' more important than 'data protection' in future trade agreements.

Data protection matters to your constituents. It protects their sensitive personal data, such as health data, from being exploited. It seeks to protect them online and give them more control over who can use their personal data. In 2019, a Eurobarometer survey found 73% of people in the United Kingdom were concerned about not having complete control over the information they provide online.

Data protection matters for European co-operation on crime. It is clear that divergence or lowering standards could make it harder for Europol and the UK to share information about criminals.

Data protection matters to the tech sector, which risks being cut out of easy access to European markets.

We need a firm commitment from the government that:

1. Data protection standards will continue to apply across all industries, protecting personal data from abuse;
2. Trade agreements will not be used to dilute, undermine or circumvent existing data protection standards.

Now that we are facing an uncertain future it is more important than ever for the United Kingdom to commit to respecting the right to privacy.

We would be delighted to meet and discuss these concerns with you, and explore what you can do to support data protection in the United Kingdom.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JKillock', written over a faint, light-colored rectangular background.

Jim Killock
Executive Director
Open Rights Group