

Dear Vice-President Reding,

Dear Dr. Rossides,

Dear EDRi members

European Digital Rights was founded ten years ago by 10 digital rights NGOs from 7 European countries. This took place at a quite challenging time for fundamental rights, after the terrorist attacks in the US and the begin of the so called war on terror.

In the press release we published to announce the existence of EDRi ten years ago, we wrote the following:

*"The need for cooperation among European organisations is increasing as more regulation for the internet, privacy and interception is originating from the European Union. Especially since September 11 the pace in which civil rights threatening regulation has been passed, demands unified action from the defenders of these rights."*

And this is what we have done ever since: To defend the fundamental rights of the people in Europe in the digital domain.

Since then we have seen a number of important changes. With the Lisbon Treaty – to name only one of these changes – the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union entered into force and serves as a common basis for fundamental rights protection in the European Union.

However we still see, that we must not take our fundamental rights for granted:

In the political debate the fundamental rights position is still often understood to be a maximum position, which needs to be limited and restricted in favour of other political interests.

But the contrary is the case.

Our fundamental rights as laid down in the European Convention of Human Rights as well as in the EU Charta form the minimum consensus of which rights every individual enjoys. Therefore any legislation should rather respect a certain safety zone in order to not violate this minimum set of guaranteed rights, instead of restricting these rights for the sake of other interests.

Ten years after its foundation, EDRi looks back on a history of a strong and ever increasing cooperation of NGOs across Europe. With now 35 member organisations from 21 European

countries we managed to build a sustainable and well functioning digital rights representation in Brussels as well as in the states where our members are active.

Understanding Europe as the geographical area of the member states of the Council of Europe, there still is enough room for further growth. And this growth will be necessary in order to ensure that fundamental rights protection becomes an integral and natural part of any legislative process as well as of the daily life of the people in Europe.

The data protection reform package is currently in the midst of its legislative process. The outcome of this important reform will determine the amount of data protection and privacy people in Europe will enjoy in the future. It will determine if we still will be able to communicate privately over electronic means and whether governments or private companies will be allowed to monitor our electronic activities in order to satisfy some supposed legitimate interests. It will also determine how seriously the laws that protect our fundamental rights to privacy and data protection will be enforced in the future. This will make all the difference, if the rights that are written on paper actually will deliver their promise and translate to a trustworthy digital environment for the everyday lives of the people in Europe.

Having said this, Vice-President Reding, it is my pleasure to welcome you in the name of European Digital Rights and give you the floor for your intervention.