

As part of the ARC project - Awareness Raising Campaign for Small and Medium Enterprises (Awareness Raising Campaign on the Importance of Personal Data Protection for Small and Medium Enterprises), on May 25, 2021, the Data Protection Agency organized an international conference a: Experiences and challenges of European SMEs in complying with the General Data Protection Regulation “;“ GDPR 3 years on: The experiences and challenges of the European SMEs ”. The conference was organized in a hybrid format, for a smaller number of participants at the Westin Hotel, and other interested participants could follow the conference via live streaming at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7alsgJjI8>.

The conference and all educational activities of the ARC project were organized with the support of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce.

The conference, held on 25 May, on the 3rd year of full implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation, was organized to present the project results of the ARC project, funded by the European Union program "Rights, Equality and Citizenship", all with the aim of raising awareness with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises on the importance of personal data protection. The conference was intended primarily for entrepreneurs and their experience in complying with the GDPR during the 3 years since the GDPR was fully implemented, but also brought together many foreign and domestic experts in the field of data protection, information security and IT sector.

As part of the conference, two panel discussions were held, on the first panel in English, The Impact of the GDPR Across the Industries: State of Play and Future Developments, the panelists discussed issues relevant to European SMEs.

Representatives of the Supervisory Board for the implementation of the ARC project, Igor Vulje, Deputy Director of the Agency for Personal Data Protection, MB Donnelly, Deputy Irish Commissioner for Data Protection and prof. Paul de Hert from Vrije University in Brussels, presented the project results of the ARC project. Igor Vulje pointed out that the Personal Data Protection Agency has so far held 20 interactive workshops for small and medium-sized enterprises in order to support compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and developed a series of educational materials available on the ARC project website <https://arc-rec-project.eu/naslovna/>. Panelists Igor Vulje, Deputy Director of the Personal Data Protection Agency, MB Donnelly, Assistant Irish Data Protection Commissioner (DPC), prof. dr. Paul de Hert s Vrije Universiteit Brussels - Tilburg University, Ph.D. Paolo Balboni, Professor at the Faculty of Law, Maastricht University, Marija Bošković Batarelo, Lawyer, Parser Compliance doo, Marijan Bračić, Director of Data Privacy in Business Intelligence, Member of the Thematic Innovation Council Security of the Republic of Croatia, discussed many current issues in the field of data protection. which

affect and will continue to affect the business of small and medium-sized enterprises, such as: whether GDPR slows down and hinders the development of IT technologies and innovations, whether there is an adequate IT solution to align business with GDPR, and how the Digital Services Act will The Digital Markets Act and the new ePrivacy Directive affect the business of small and medium-sized enterprises. The panelists also touched on the very current topic of competencies and knowledge of data protection officers, who play a key role in the new system of personal data protection. For this reason, the Agency for Personal Data Protection, in addition to free training for entrepreneurs, also holds free training for data protection officers. In the second panel, in Croatian, panelists Mr. Zdravko Vukić, Director of the Personal Data Protection Agency, Ms. Natalija Parlov Una, Certified Auditor of Information Security and Privacy (TÜV NORD), Ms. Dijana Kladar, Lawyer, prof. dr. sc. Tihomir Katulić from the Faculty of Law in Zagreb and Mr. Igor Barlek (GDPR CROATIA) talked about how the GDPR has affected the business of Croatian small and medium-sized enterprises.

The key message of the conference is that the GDPR is not a burden or an obstacle but an opportunity for entrepreneurs to improve their business and gain an advantage in the market over competitors who do not respect fundamental human rights - the right to data protection. All conference participants stressed the importance of educating entrepreneurs and the principle of "better prevention than cure". It is very important that entrepreneurs are well informed about their obligations under the data protection legislative framework, harmonize their business and thus avoid situations in which they may find themselves in a role of violating the General Data Protection Regulation and therefore impose high financial sanctions.

The director of AZOP, Zdravko Vukić, said in the introduction that today we are more than ever aware of the fact that personal data and the right to privacy are fundamental human rights. "The GDPR has brought many changes, from greater rights to citizens, to new obligations for institutions and companies. Most SMEs do not have enough money and resources to comply with the legislative framework and that is why we provide them with constant support through free trainings and workshops, and to make all information available to them we have a new website and mobile application GDPR CROATIA ", said Vukic. Advisor to the President of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce and head of the Independent Department for Education, Quality and Information Security Petar Mišević pointed out that prevention and education are the best answer to the challenges that regulations on personal data protection pose to entrepreneurs. "About 96 percent of all companies in Croatia are micro and small companies, and this project has given us the opportunity to reach all of them and thematically address all the problems that plague them. Over 2,000 companies participated in the trainings, the feedback from the field is excellent, and we

continue to work on strengthening the competencies of our entrepreneurs ", said Mišević.

Croatian Parliament envoy Žarko Tušek said that even after three years of full implementation of the GDPR, we are still facing new challenges in business practice. "In talking to entrepreneurs, I can say that they welcomed the regulation with caution due to a number of obligations and measures that they had to implement in their business. That is why professional education is crucial ", said Tušek and emphasized that this is not only a regulatory requirement, but also a tool that can give companies an advantage over competitors. Croatian Government Envoy Josip Salapić pointed out and that all economic operators had to adapt to it. "Today's global trends impose digital trends in which it is very important to protect citizens' data. The government coped well with the pandemic, we kept the economy on its feet, and the Croatian Chamber of Commerce had a big one there as well ", said Salapić.

Minister of Regional Development and European Union Funds Nataša Tramišak emphasized that even greater attention will be paid to data protection and privacy in the future, as this is one of the preconditions for the use of European structural and investment funds. "In the new programming period, there will be an even greater focus on SMEs, ie on the digitalization of their business. It is extremely important how we use EU funds, and we are making significant progress in this regard. The current value of all European projects implemented throughout Croatia is HRK 95 billion. So far, around HRK 42 billion, or slightly more than 52 percent, has been spent and paid to users, and the state budget has been up by HRK 39 billion since joining the EU. In the future, we want even stronger absorption, and a new perspective opens up that possibility for us ", said Tramišak. "The protection of personal data has become one of the main topics of much debate and European citizens are aware of their rights in this regard. Our research has shown that in Europe about 70 percent of citizens know that the GDPR protects them, and in Croatia this figure is even higher, as many as 85 percent. The GDPR has also proven to be a flexible instrument during a pandemic, an important part of covid passports and raising citizens' confidence in the system, "said Oliver Micol of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumer Protection, head of the Data Protection Service. the new regulation will also be a key segment of all future EU digital initiatives.

Josip Salapić

Nataša Tramišak

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Olivier Micol

Petar Mišević

Hotel Westin, participants of the GDPR 3 years conference on: The experiences and challenges of the European SMEs "

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Zdravko Vukić, press conference

Nataša Tramišak

Zdravko Vukić

Igor VUIje

Marija Boskovic Batarelo

Tihomir Katulić

Marijan Bračić

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Panelists "The impact of the GDPR across the industries: state of play and future developments"

Panelists "How the GDPR has affected small and medium-sized enterprises"

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Igor Barlek

Sanja Smiljanic Grubisic

Zdravko Vukić

Natalia Parlov Una

Dijana Kladar

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Panelists

Panelists

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participants of the GDPR conference 3 years on: The experiences and challenges of the European SMEs "