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ARTICLE 29 DATA PROTECTION WORKING PARTY

The Article 29 Working Party held its 85th plenary meeting on 22 and 23 March 2012 in Brussels

European data protection authorities adopt opinion on facial recognition

The European data protection authorities assembled in the Article 29 Working Party, have adopted an opinion on facial recognition technology within the scope of online and mobile services. The opinion provides best practice recommendations applicable to this technology when used in the context of online and mobile services.

There has been a rapid increase in the availability and accuracy of facial recognition technology in recent years. Once the subject of science fiction, it is now available for use by both public and private organisations. Online services, many owned and operated by private organisations, have built up vast collections of images, mostly uploaded by data subjects themselves. In some cases these images may also be (unlawfully) obtained by scraping other public sites such as search engine caches. In addition, small mobile devices with high resolution cameras enable users to capture images and link them real-time to online services through always "on" data connections. As a result, users are able to share these images with others or perform identification, authentication/verification or categorisation of individuals.

The risks to privacy posed by a facial recognition system depend on the type of processing involved and purpose(s). However, certain risks for example with regard to unlawful processing, security breaches during transit and lack of accuracy are particularly relevant. The opinion highlights these and other risks to data protection and provides relevant best practice recommendations.

Background information

The Article 29 Working Party on the Protection of Individuals with regard to the Processing of Personal Data is an independent advisory body on data protection and privacy, set up under Article 29 of the Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC. It is composed of representatives from the national data protection authorities of the EU Member States, the European Data Protection Supervisor and the European Commission. Its tasks are described in Article 30 of Directive 95/46/EC and Article 15 of Directive 2002/58/EC. The Article 29 Working Party is competent to examine any question covering the application of the data protection directives in order to contribute to the uniform application of the directives. It carries out this task by issuing recommendations, opinions and working documents.

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/article-29/index_en.htm