A European strategy for data

Data represents the driving force of the European digital transformation. In order to harness the potential of the data economy, the European Commission aims to build a market for personal and non-personal data that fully respects European rules and values. During its March II plenary session, Parliament is due to debate data issues, before voting on an own-initiative report concerning a European strategy for data and a resolution on the European Commission's evaluation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Background

While the volume of data is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years (from 33 zettabytes, i.e. 10^21 bytes or one thousand billion gigabytes, in 2018, to 175 zettabytes in 2025), data reuse is hampered by low trust in data-sharing, conflicting economic incentives and technological obstacles.

European Commission

Against this backdrop, the Commission tabled A European strategy for data (‘data strategy’) on 19 February 2020, which aims to set up a ‘single European data space’, i.e. a single market for data. The strategy builds on four pillars: (i) establishing a cross-sectoral governance framework for data access and use, most notably by regulating data-sharing, (ii) strengthening Europe’s data spaces and cloud infrastructure, for instance by co-investing approximately €2 billion (of a combined investment of about €4-6 billion) in infrastructure, data-sharing tools, architecture and governance mechanisms, (iii) empowering individuals to control their data, as well as investing in skills and capacity-building, and (iv) promoting the development of at least nine common European data spaces in strategic sectors and domains of public interest, such as manufacturing, Green Deal, health and finance. As the first of a set of measures announced in the data strategy, the Commission put forward the Data Governance Act on 25 November 2020. It aims to facilitate data-sharing across the EU and between sectors, by strengthening mechanisms that increase data availability and foster trust in intermediaries, i.e. data-sharing services and data altruism organisations.

As citizens will only trust and embrace data-driven innovations complying with effective EU data protection rules, the Commission envisions a GDPR-compliant European data space. Ultimately, this vision requires a clear and workable personal data protection framework, which draws attention to the Commission’s GDPR review from 24 July 2020, two years after its entry into application. Pursuant to Article 97 GDPR and taking into account contributions from the Parliament, EU and national data protection bodies, as well as experts and stakeholders, the Commission concluded that the GDPR has met most of its objectives, but also identifies opportunities for improvement. For instance, more could be done in order to develop a truly common data protection culture, to strengthen data protection authorities and to facilitate international data transfers. The invalidation of the Privacy Shield Decision and the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union increase the need for action as regards the latter.

European Parliament position

On 24 February 2021, Parliament’s Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) adopted an own-initiative report on a European strategy for data. It welcomes the Commission’s data strategy and discusses the conditions for ensuring the European Union’s leading role in the data economy. On 16 March 2021, Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) adopted a motion for a resolution on the Commission’s GDPR evaluation report, expressing various concerns on implementation lacunae.

Own-initiative report: 2020/2217(INI); Committee responsible: ITRE; Rapporteur: Miapetra Kumpula-Natri (S&D, Finland); Motion for a resolution: 2020/2717(RSP); Committee responsible: LIBE.