



PHARE PROGRAMME TWINNING PROJECT NO. LV/2002/IB/OT-01  
DATA STATE INSPECTION

Document 21

**Activity 4.1**  
**Development of a public awareness strategy for the general public**  
**How to raise awareness concerning data protection**

written by  
***Dr. Waltraud Kotschy***

**February 2005**



**Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Menschenrechte  
Mandated Body**



*This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.*

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## **How to raise awareness concerning data protection**

Initiatives aimed at reaching high level decision makers and opinion leaders

In a society where the use of electronic data processing is ever increasing it will be impossible to guarantee data protection merely by means of sanctions. It will much rather be necessary to introduce a common understanding in society that data protection is a value as such which has to be respected, regardless of whether infringement would meet with immediate recrimination or not. In order to create such a commitment in a civil society it is certainly necessary to reach all levels of society. However, when starting an awareness campaign it seems advisable to try to reach high level decision makers and opinion leaders first and then gradually broaden the target area of marketing the idea of data protection.

When addressing decision makers in public bodies or private enterprise in Latvia it will above all be necessary to create understanding for the specific nature of data protection as a fundamental right for citizens. That means that data protection is not a matter of convenience, to be adhered to if easily possible, but a matter of mandatory nature, a principle, which has to be followed wherever and whenever personal data are used.

### Activity one:

An awareness campaign should therefore start with engaging the scientific community in Latvia to help explain to the public, what is meant by "guaranteeing a fundamental right". The three best regarded juridical faculties resp. universities in Riga should be approached in order to gain their support for a "kick-off-meeting" introducing the idea of data protection to a selected public comprising, if possible, parliamentarians, high ranking administrators (ministers), representatives of political parties, journalists and so on. Adequate Media coverage should enhance the impact of this kick-off-meeting on the public opinion in Latvia.

### Activity two:

Media coverage of activity one should be aided by placing "spotlight"-articles on essential data protection features into print and television media.

### Activity three:

Activity two could be accompanied by starting a control procedure by the Data Protection Authority in an area of government or business, which is especially prone to data protection problems in the perception of the Latvian public. It could also be interesting to choose a topic for inspection which is a general data protection problem pertaining to the public as well as to the private sector, as e.g. the uniform personal identity code (personas kods). The outcome of this control procedure should be starting point for discussion of the practical implications of data protection in the media and in the general public.

In addition, special advantage should be taken from situations which have already gained high awareness because of controversial discussion in the media. In such cases taking a stance in public by proactively approaching the mass media might create a high degree of public perception for the Data State Inspectorate and the cause it stands for.

Activity four:

If data protection shall become a topic which is habitually taken into account whenever the use of personal data – especially in automated data processing – takes place in the state sector or in the business sector, the legal rules and their application must be moulded accordingly. It would therefore seem advisable to establish a data protection curriculum for specially chosen civil servants from all branches of government, where the implications of data protection could be explained and examples given, how certain types of data protection relevant situations have been dealt with in Latvia so far or even in other Member States of the EU. Persons having undergone this curriculum could act according to the “snow ball effect” as transmitters of knowledge about data protection in their professional environment and thus help to spread the idea of data protection in those government circles which will be mainly responsible for creating new legal rules and procedures in a data protection compatible way.

Activity five:

Winning over the private sector for data protection will need a special strategy. First reactions from this area usually are sceptical, as data protection is seen as a hindrance and as a cost factor. However, the idea that data protection is a positive factor in competition as consumers are increasingly knowledgeable about their rights and prefer companies which honour these rights, must be transmitted to business circles.

Acknowledging the fact that resources are nowadays always too short, a “top-down” approach seems more appropriate for an effective awareness campaign than trying to reach all levels of society at once, which will not be possible in the necessary density of activities in order to create impact. Activities one to four should be targeted first. Re-evaluation of the outcome of such a campaign should already be possible by mid year.

All activities – in particular, Activity one – should be carried out making use of the expertise and the resources of the Phare Twinning Project “Data State Inspection”.