

June 28, 2021

Farewell from the office of the HmbBfDI

End of the second and last term of Prof. Dr. Johannes Caspar

After two terms in office, Prof. Dr. Johannes Caspar's term as Hamburg Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information ends today. He was appointed by the Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg in May 2009 and re-elected for a second term in 2015. According to its own announcement, the Bürgerschaft will decide on his successor in August. Until then, the authority will be led by the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Ulrich Kühn.

Caspar's term of office saw key developments in the field of data protection: for example, the final transition from the analogue to the digital world took place during this span, combined with rapid technological progress and an economization of personal data. Particular highlights of a profound change were the introduction of the GDPR as a uniform data protection standard in the EU, but also the revelations by Edward Snowden about mass surveillance by intelligence services, as well as the currents concerning Cambridge Analytica and Facebook.

Parallel to these developments, since 2012 the Hamburg Transparency Act has become a major driving force for the further development of freedom of information not only in Hamburg. The idea of a transparent state that opens up to its citizens not just upon their request, but actively publishes information on the transparency portal, has since found many imitators. Transparency has become an essential feature of the digital democratic constitutional state.

Johannes Caspar on his term of office: "How we deal with information determines what our future will look like. This concerns information about people, but also access to information for people. Fake news, hate speech and a general mistrust of the state and politics can be reduced with general, unconditional access to official information, and abusive uses of personal data, especially to manipulate people, can be prevented through effective enforcement of data protection law.

The important challenge of ensuring informational integrity in times of digital revolution can only succeed if we work together. To this end, the independent supervisory authorities must cooperate efficiently and unbureaucratically in both the national and the European context. In political processes, it is important to recognize the opportunities offered by an independent approach to information technologies. Digital sovereignty and self-determination are more than just buzzwords. They must stand as guiding principles for an open, digital and people-oriented Europe, which requires a rethink at the local level in particular. Data protection and transparency are an integral part of the solution, not the problem. Awareness of this must be raised.

I would like to thank all employees who have accompanied the team on its journey with their incredible commitment, creativity and expertise for their great work. The last 12 years have been an exciting time in which we have achieved a lot together. All the best for the future and for all the important tasks that still lie ahead and will certainly not be easier."

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