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Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh  
Irish Presidency of the Council  
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## Speech by Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence Alan Shatter TD, at the Opening of the European Data Forum,

**Tuesday, 09 April 2013, Croke Park Conference Centre**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this morning's opening of this prestigious and fundamentally important conference for Europe, and indeed for Ireland. In this first half of 2013, which sees us mid-way through the Irish Presidency of the European Union, it is an enormous privilege to host this event.

I want to extend a warm welcome to the EU personnel who are present with us here today and also to welcome all those who have travelled to be here in this famous and historic sporting arena at Croke Park, Dublin. You are all very welcome indeed.

As you are no doubt aware, this event - the European Data Forum 2013, brings together experts in the field of Big Data from across industry, research, and the public sector, as well as from the wider science community.

The opportunities for Ireland and Europe in the area of Big Data and its analytics are, without exaggeration, unbounded. Large scale data analytics is quickly becoming the new frontier in productivity, in innovation, and in creating and sustaining a competitive advantage across both industry and the public sector.

LinkedIn is just one example of the major multi-nationals in the tech sector with a significant presence here in Ireland. Its CEO, Jeff Weiner, notes the importance of this data revolution, saying: "Data really powers everything that we do."

Recent figures from Microsoft, another major multinational operating in Ireland, have revealed that every day we create 2.5 quintillion bytes of data.

To put that into some context that is more comprehensible to the lay-person, to the non-computer scientists amongst us, – that means that 90% of the data in the world today has been created in the last two years alone.

The scale of this is truly mind-boggling and presents both major challenges and opportunities.

However, Big Data is more than simply a matter of size.

It is an opportunity to find insights in new and emerging types of data and content, to make business more agile, and to answer questions that were previously considered beyond our reach. Essentially Big Data is about helping us to make better informed decisions.

Analysing this explosion of data, now readily available, will revolutionise industries such as manufacturing and pharmaceutical production.

By harnessing this wealth of data, we can unlock significant value and potential, through making information more transparent, usable and sophisticated.

Refining these data sets will provide tangible insights into trends that, for instance, will inform and shape the future of the retail sector worldwide by providing even narrower segmentation of customer markets and pre-empting customer demands.

In the public sector, data analytics can also provide a platform for Governments across Europe and the globe to deliver more streamlined healthcare practices, education systems and housing reforms.

Importantly, Big Data will also have a huge societal impact. An example for Ireland being the research project such as that proposed by the new INSIGHT centre in partnership with RTE Digital, to explore the RTÉ archives, which will open up avenues to investigate our cultural, historical, sporting and linguistic heritage and provide us with deep insights into what it means to be Irish.

The Irish Presidency of the European Union is centred around “Stability, Jobs and Growth.” This ideal is mirrored in the Irish Government’s Action Plan for Jobs 2013 launched in February.

Our Jobs Action Plan has, at its core, a research and development strand which forms a key part of our economic rehabilitation. We are moving from the past failed economy based on over-reliance on property/financial transactions and now to a more sustainable economy based on smart investments in people, in high-value sustainable jobs and in new products and services.

Science, technology and innovation is now very much part of Ireland’s recovery – and major research related jobs announcements in the past 3 weeks or so here by the likes of Yahoo, McAfee, Zurich, Natural Power and NYPRO, is evidence of what Ireland has to offer in a range of sectors such as ICT, Medical Devices and Energy.

A key part of our plan for growth and jobs is the identification of areas where we believe that Ireland has distinct advantages - and the taking of all necessary steps to ensure that we can realise quality employment in those areas.

As part of our Action Plan for Jobs 2013 plan there are seven ‘Disruptive Reforms’ - one of which is focussed on ‘Big Data’/Data Analytics.

“Big Data” was selected because of its major potential to have a substantial impact on job creation, and the aim of this reform is to make Ireland one of Europe’s leading countries for the continually growing data analytics sector.

The Irish Government has also identified a number of key areas for research prioritisation around which publicly-performed and funded research should be based, in order to deliver a sustainable economic return.

Essentially we are trying to pick “winners” in a number of areas where we’ve already built up considerable research strengths and, not surprisingly, “Big Data” has been identified as one such priority area.

As very recent evidence of this, at the end of February, the Irish Government announced details of the largest ever state/industry co-funded research investment of €300m made in Ireland to support 7 large-scale research centres of excellence.

One of these seven new centres awards funded through Science Foundation Ireland is called INSIGHT - a centre for Big Data and analytics technologies with close to 250 research personnel.

INSIGHT will focus its efforts on making Ireland a global leader in this rapidly expanding area. INSIGHT is a collaboration between UCD, UCC, NUI Galway and DCU along with over 40 industry partners, including RTE.

I am delighted to see that so many of the INSIGHT partners – such as RTE Digital, the Digital Repository of Ireland, DERI and CLARITY – are directly involved in today’s conference.

Public investment in these areas will ensure that we maintain, attract and develop dynamic partnerships, and create the quality jobs we need. This major investment demonstrates the continued commitment of this government to delivering increased societal and economic benefits for Ireland, and indeed, for Europe’s Data Economy.

Industry, the tertiary sector and government must continue to work together to ensure we continue to develop the specialised skills Ireland and Europe needs to remain globally competitive in a sector which is growing by 40% annually.

Of course I speak to you also today as current Chair of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union and as Ireland’s Minister for Justice and Equality and, in that context, I might be permitted a few moments to mention the area of Data Protection and developments in this regard at EU level. I am sure that all here are well aware of the context for this.

The Irish Government is very conscious, within all of the context of “Big Data” which I have already referred to this morning, of the need for a coherent and practical set of data protection rules at national and European Union levels. For this reason one of the priorities of the Irish Presidency of the European Union, and one of my specific objectives, is to achieve political agreement on key aspects of the proposed reform of the European Union’s data protection regime.

Since the adoption of the EU Data Protection Directive in 1995, nobody will know better than delegates here today how much the world has changed. The IT revolution in our lifetimes and the pace of technological change show no sign of slackening. Your own agenda for your event here is testament to the fact that technological advances and associated new business models present new opportunities for business. However they also pose new, and increasingly common, risks for privacy. In order to ensure

the sustainability of technological progress, new rules are needed which will both protect individuals' privacy rights and facilitate business in the digital age.

As you will know, in January 2012, the European Commission tabled radical proposals to change the current regulatory framework in order to address the challenges in data protection posed by the technological advances which have taken place in recent years. These proposals are currently being discussed separately in the Ministerial Council of the European Union and in the European Parliament. Adoption of the reform package is subject to co-decision between both institutions.

A key objective of the European Commission's reform proposals, which Ireland wholeheartedly supports, is to increase individuals' control over their own personal data. We must seek to ensure that data protection standards keep pace with the emerging technologies and new business models. Otherwise citizen confidence and trust in the digital environment will not be sufficient to enable us to realise the full potential of the digital economy and the economic growth, new jobs and dynamic innovation which it can deliver.

I firmly believe that we need a new regulatory framework that will protect our citizens while also allowing businesses to benefit from the creation of a streamlined digital single market and that implementation of a new Regulation will make doing business in the European Union easier and less costly. In essence, the Regulation will replace the almost impenetrable array of national rules that exist at present with one digital market which will be subject to a uniform set of data protection rules.

As with all discussions at EU level, there are many different aspects of the proposals which need to be discussed and difficulties resolved before a new Regulation can be adopted and put in place. Work is ongoing in this area and the Irish presidency is making strenuous efforts to foster agreement on the approach and text of the new Regulation.

I consider that the data protection reform proposals are one of the most important reform packages being discussed at EU level at present. Data protection affects all of us, whether in our private capacity as an individual or in our business or professional capacity as users of personal data. As I mentioned earlier, progress in this area is a priority of the Irish Presidency of the European Union. I intend to bring key aspects of the reform package to the forthcoming June JHA Council meeting with a view to achieving political agreement on them.

To conclude now, it is important to acknowledge the level of support for the European Data Forum 2013 from the organising partners. I want to extend a sincere thank you to the EU and all whom have made this important event feasible and for it to be hosted in Ireland this year.

I would like to thank all of the stakeholders involved in this year's forum, and I can truly say that the future is bright for the data sector, both in Ireland and across greater Europe. I look forward with great expectation to learning of the new ideas, innovations and opportunities that emanate from this event and your future research endeavours.

Thank you.

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