With escalating international tensions on privacy, there is an urgent need for a high-quality privacy research centre with a global focus based at a major European university that serves as a neutral platform to build bridges between the private sector, policymakers, academia, and NGOs, both within Europe and between different regions of the world. The best location for such a centre is Brussels. Brussels is where key decisions are taken on data protection in the European Union, and EU rules set the standard for data protection and privacy law around the world. Besides the EU institutions, major stakeholders all have offices in Brussels, including prominent NGOs, multinational companies, business associations, and others.

The Brussels Privacy Research Hub (BPRH) aims to be the first European academic privacy research institution of global stature. It will take advantage of being located in the capital of Europe to engage EU policymakers, data protection regulators, the private sector, and NGOs, and to produce innovative, cutting-edge research on important questions of data protection and privacy law and policy.

WHO WE ARE

The BPRH will be established under the auspices of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB, Free University of Brussels), a leading Belgian university based in central Brussels. Under the leadership of Professor Paul De Hert, VUB has already created and developed the annual CPDP conference (Computers, Privacy and Data Protection, www.cpdpconferences.org) into one of the premier privacy events worldwide.
Our work is carried out in a manner that is neutral, transparent, and is guided by the highest standards of ethics and impartiality.

We believe in network-building, and have built a strong network of contacts with other leading privacy researchers both inside the EU and outside Europe, e.g., in Japan and the United States, with whom we will work.

OUR WORK

We focus on all areas of data protection and privacy research. Among our main areas of interest are empirical research on privacy issues; privacy governance and regulation in the EU; global flows of data; reconciling law enforcement and privacy interests; privacy challenges posed by new technologies; comparative research on privacy in different regions; jurisprudential issues of privacy protection; and many others.

Our activities will include ones such as the following:

• Publishing high-quality academic research of all types.
• Bringing prominent visiting scholars to Brussels for short- or long-term visits.
• Training the next generation of privacy lawyers and privacy officers.
• Organising workshops, seminars, and public debates on specific themes of interest.
• Attracting a select group of PhD students.
• Participating in the work of international organisations.
• Bidding for EU tenders.
• Creating synergies with other leading privacy research centres.
• Playing an integral role in further development of the annual CPDP conference.

In particular, the BPRH seeks to serve as a source of expertise for EU policymakers and a venue where they can engage in reasoned, non-political discourse on the growing number of complex issues in this field.

The BPRH will focus on data protection and privacy law but will also incorporate expertise from non-legal disciplines. It will create a professorship in global data protection and privacy law, held by Christopher Kuner, a lawyer and academic of world-wide stature in this field. It will take a multi-disciplinary approach, and will include academics (including additional professorships) in related areas such as computer security, sociology, and economics.

The staff of the BPRH has a deep level of understanding of EU data protection law and policy-making, and extensive contacts with the relevant EU institutions, that are only possible after long experience of living and working in Brussels.

Besides permanent staff, the BPRH will bring visiting scholars (such as regulators and academics) to Brussels for short- or long-term visits. Furthermore, it will closely involve EU officials and data protection regulators in its activities.

OUR MISSION

The BPRH’s main goals are to produce privacy research of the highest quality; bring together leading thinkers from around the world; and foster an interchange of ideas among privacy stakeholders in a climate of intellectual openness.

We are guided by the following principles:

• We believe strongly in the relevance and importance of data protection and privacy law, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the rapid development of technology and globalization.
• We also believe that fresh and innovative thinking based on multidisciplinary research is necessary to meet these challenges. The BPRH thus brings together scholars from a wide array of disciplines who will collaborate with the private sector, policymakers, and NGOs to produce cutting-edge research.

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GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

We will create a state-of-the-art governance structure for the BPRH to ensure its independence and accountability. It will be governed by a management board (including Professors De Hert and Kuner), with the input of an advisory board comprised of eminent individuals in the academic, government, and NGO communities from around the world. We have already approached several regulators, EU institutions, companies, and privacy associations, who are all enthusiastic about the BPRH and are interested in participating.

We have drafted a five-year plan for the BPRH with clear goals and milestones that is available upon request.

SPONSORSHIP

The BPRH will be privately funded, with funding obtained from multiple sources. All funding will be paid directly to the VUB, and there will be several levels of sponsorship. While decisions will be made by the management board to ensure independence, sponsors will have input into the work of the BPRH.

TIMING

We are already in contact with potential sponsors and leading figures in the data protection and privacy communities who want to be involved with the BPRH. The launch is planned for late 2014 or early 2015.

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