# The software-defined era is awakening: COPA-DATA leads the rebellion in industrial automation

DAVOS, SWITZERLAND, January 26, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- COPA-DATA is reinforcing its position as a forward-looking voice in industrial automation. As an Associated Partner at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, the independent software vendor used the global platform to highlight software-defined automation as a key enabler for resilient, future-ready industrial automation. With its zenon software platform, COPA-DATA advocates a software-first approach that challenges traditional, hardware-centric automation models and gives industrial organizations greater flexibility, sovereignty and control.

Industrial automation is at a turning point. Manufacturers and energy operators face rising regulatory pressure, volatile supply chains and increasing demands for sustainability, while still relying on rigid automation architectures designed decades ago. At the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, these challenges were discussed across industries, with a clear signal emerging: future competitiveness depends on the ability to adapt faster than hardware cycles allow.

This is where software-defined automation comes into play. By decoupling control logic from proprietary hardware, software-defined automation enables industrial organizations to modernize step by step, without large-scale rip-and-replace projects or new vendor dependencies. Instead of locking innovation into long investment cycles, companies can evolve their operations through software updates, virtualized systems and open but secure interfaces.

"Industrial automation has been dominated by hardware-first thinking for far too long," said Stefan Reuther, Member of the Executive Board at COPA-DATA Headquarters. "Software-defined automation shifts the focus back to flexibility and sovereignty. It allows companies to adapt their operations at the speed of change, not at the speed of hardware replacement."

Stefan Reuther participated in the WEF Annual Meeting 2026 in Davos to position software-defined automation as a strategic response to global uncertainty. From geopolitical tensions to skills shortages, the ability to operate resiliently and the adoption of modular production systems has become a key competitive differentiator. Software-defined automation supports this shift by breaking down silos, reducing vendor lock-in and enabling closer integration between IT and OT.

"Resilience today is not only about securing supply chains, it is about designing operating models that can absorb change," Stefan Reuther stated during an interview in Davos. "A software-first approach gives organizations the freedom to experiment, scale and respond to new requirements without becoming dependent on individual hardware suppliers."

With its zenon software platform, COPA-DATA enables this transition across industries such as life sciences and pharmaceutical, food and beverage, process manufacturing as well as energy and infrastructure. The platform supports open architectures, virtualized environments and modular automation concepts, helping customers modernize while protecting existing assets.

By participating at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, COPA-DATA underlined its ambition to actively shape the future of industrial automation. As global discussions increasingly focus on resilience, sustainability and digital sovereignty, a software-driven approach is evolving from a technical concept into a strategic imperative, addressing also the OT sovereignty of each plant or company. The software-defined era has been awakened and is beginning to reshape industrial automation.

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About COPA_DATE:

COPA-DATA is an independent software manufacturer that specializes in digitalization for the manufacturing industry and energy sector. Its zenon® software platform enables users worldwide to automate, manage, monitor, integrate and optimize machines, equipment, buildings and power grids. COPA-DATA combines decades of experience in automation with the potential of digital transformation and a strong drive for sustainability-enabling solutions. In this way, the company supports its customers to achieve their objectives more easily, faster and more efficiently.

The family-owned business was founded by Thomas Punzenberger in 1987 in Salzburg, Austria. In 2024, with more than 450 employees worldwide, it generated revenue of EUR 99 million. A sales network of international distributors and 14 subsidiaries ensures that the software is marketed worldwide. More than 500 certified partner companies further support end users with the efficient implementation of the software, particularly in the key industries of pharmaceutical, energy & infrastructure, food & beverage and automotive .

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