

For immediate release

Germany: civil society website makes it easier to ask for government information

Madrid/Berlin, Friday 1 August 2011: A coalition of German and international access to information organisations, which includes Access Info Europe [1], today launched a portal for submitting information requests to the German government.

The German Freedom of Information law came into force in 2006, but the majority of German citizens are still not aware of their right to access information held by public authorities, nor the procedures for doing so.

Developed by the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany, the new internet portal "*Frag den Staat*" ("Ask the State") aims to serve as a central online hub for requests addressed to German federal ministries and all federal public bodies.

The "*Frag den Staat*" portal will make it easy for anyone to file a request via an online form. Responses from public authorities will automatically be published on the web platform so that they are freely accessible for everybody.

"We are simplifying the process of asking for information in Germany and making it more transparent for the average citizen," commented Daniel Dietrich of the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany. *"This should also reduce the burden on public bodies as it helps prevent filing of multiple requests for the same information."*

A special feature of the web portal designed for NGOs and journalists is that requests will not be made public immediately while a story is being pursued in order to ensure exclusivity; eventually however all requests and answers will be available to the public in a searchable database.

"Frag den Staat" is based on the successful UK website "Whatdotheyknow.com" developed by mySociety.org, which in 2010 was used to submit approximately 12% of all information requests submitted to British public authorities.

Access Info Europe is working with MySociety on development of a European Union level web portal, "Ask the EU", to be launched on 28 September 2011, International Right to Know Day.

Notes for Editors

[1] The organisations supporting "Frag den Staat" together with Access Info Europe include: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Informationsfreiheit, Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten-Union, Deutscher Journalisten-Verband, Digitale Gesellschaft, Legal Leaks, Mehr Demokratie, netzwerk recherche, n-ost Netzwerk für Osteuropa-Berichterstattung, Open Data Network, Transparency International Deutschland

[2] Access Info Europe is a human rights organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting the right of access to information in Europe as a tool for defending civil liberties and human rights, for facilitating public participation in decision-making and for holding governments accountable.

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