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Spanish government launches first transparency website

• Administration to release 500,000 details about the way it spends taxpayers' money

CARLOS E. CUÉ / CARMEN PÉREZ-LANZAC | Madrid | 10 DIC 2014 - 12:08 CET



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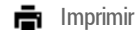
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The Spanish government will on Wednesday launch a new transparency website that will make over 500,000 details of public interest freely accessible to all citizens.

The project, which cost around €300,000 to complete, represents the first great transparency effort by the ruling Popular Party (PP) and is part of a new [Transparency Law](#) that goes into effect today.

The new legislation leaves Spain in 64th place out of 100 countries with right-to-know laws, according to Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy, which draw up an annual Global Right to Information Rating.

[Transparencia.gob.es](#) will release information that Spaniards have never had access to before, such as the gross salaries of all high-ranking officials, including ministers and state secretaries.

A team of 80 people worked to put the site together, which also centralizes other information that had previously been available but was scattered throughout various agencies.

Citizens will now be able find out what contracts and subsidies their elected officials award, and what agreements they enter into. The

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website also reveals that secretaries of state earn significantly more than ministers, despite their lower rank.

But just as relevant as the information that is on the website is the information left out of it.

Some data will only be available upon request. Petitions may be filed directly on the website, but users will have to identify themselves. A team of up to 36 civil servants will transfer requests to the agency in possession of the relevant information, and a reply will be issued within 30 days.

If the answer is not forthcoming or is unsatisfactory, citizens may turn to the Transparency Council, which will decide whether there are security issues that justify withholding the information.



Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy (right) has occasionally considered his meetings with Basque premier Iñigo Urkullu to be private and secret / CRISTÓBAL MANUEL

Government sources said that it has studied the way other countries handle these requests for information, and that most petitions will be satisfactorily handled within the 30-day period.

For instance, anyone may inquire how many advisors are working at a specific ministry, said the same sources. The answers to recurring questions will be added to the site.

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itself for a wave of requests during the coming days, before the novelty wears off.

The website only offers details about the central government. Regional and local authorities now have a year to develop their own transparency portals.

Spanish law establishes very clear limits on freedom of information compared with that of neighboring countries. The government has made it clear that records of who walks in and out of the government ministries or La Moncloa prime ministerial palace will not be released, even though such information is crucial for knowing who is meeting with politicians to try to influence them.

The executive explained that Spain's data protection laws prevent this kind of information from being made public, and that records are destroyed on a monthly basis.

A recent case illustrates the point. In order to become European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, Miguel Arias Cañete had to promise to unveil with whom he meets on a daily basis, so MEPs will know who is lobbying him. When Arias Cañete was agriculture minister in Spain, neither he nor any of his colleagues did anything of the sort. And neither are they doing so now.

The prime minister's agenda, which was already available on the La Moncloa website, is one of the shortest in Europe. On most weeks, it only lists control sessions in Congress and Cabinet meetings. All his

Spanish law establishes clear limits on freedom of information compared with that of neighboring countries



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other activities, including numerous meetings with entrepreneurs, bankers and influential people, are not revealed to the public.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has even gone so far as to consider that meetings with the regional premiers of the Basque Country and Catalonia should be “private” and secret. And both the Congress and the Senate refuse to detail [the trips that their members make using taxpayers’ money](#).

This opaqueness is not expected to change overnight, although government sources said once the transparency website gets underway, Spain will slowly start catching up with neighboring countries on the issue.

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