Re: Open Government Partnership [#ogpEU]

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

Last year in the run up to the European elections civil society across Europe called on the new EU leadership to commit the EU institutions to close engagement with and eventual membership of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). While the new Parliament and Commission have both stated the importance of transparency, accountability and better policy making there has been limited progress to date. As our representative in Brussels, we ask you to turn our call into action.

More than ever, EU institutions are more distant than national governments from European voters. The EU's structures and processes are difficult for citizens to understand, and there is a widespread perception of a lack of transparency and accountability. The current EU approach towards open governance is not adequately responding to the concerns of citizens. For example, the recent report by Open Knowledge "*Where does Europe's money go?*" highlights the difficulty for European stakeholder groups in understanding how EU funds are being spent.

By engaging with the Open Government Partnership (OGP) process, as recommended by the European Ombudsman, the EU has the opportunity to become a leading force for change and open up its institutions for greater transparency, accountability and responsiveness to European citizens.

OGP is a multi-stakeholder initiative that brings together champions of reform from governments, parliaments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector who recognize that public sector institutions are much more likely to be effective and credible if they open their doors to citizen input and oversight. Since its launch in 2011, 65 countries have joined, including 20 EU member states, 5 candidate countries and another 9 European Neighbourhood countries. It is time for the EU institutions to prove that they hold themselves to the highest standards of transparency and accountability, and to proactively respond where they do not.

The core idea of OGP is to provide a mechanism through which public institutions and civil society establish an ongoing dialogue on the design, implementation and monitoring of concrete and ambitious commitments that improve government transparency, accountability and responsiveness to citizens. At the international level, OGP provides a global platform to connect, empower and support reformers committed to transforming government and society through openness. National initiatives to involve citizens in policy making and monitoring that have already emerged from European OGP participation can inform the EU's own attempts to close the gap with citizens. In some countries parliaments are making their own commitments to become more transparent and accountable. For example, Croatia has committed to including external members like scientists and experts in Parliament working bodies.

OGP presents the European Union with a clear opportunity for renewal of social and civic engagement, for restoration of faith in the EU institutions, and for securing and fortifying the EU's global reputation. The European Parliament can only benefit from an initiative that would complement its own mandate of ensuring democratic oversight and accountability within the EU.

Therefore we are asking the European Parliament to initiate an exploration of how the European institutions (primarily the European Commission, Parliament and Council) can become active participants in the Open Government Partnership, with a view to eventual membership. More specifically we call on you to:

- Initiate discussions internally within your political group on how the EU can engage with OGP;
- Engage the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) to investigate how OGP might assist its efforts to improve the functioning of the EU;
- Ensure that the own initiative report on Transparency, Accountability and Integrity in the EU institutions (Sven Giegold/Greens/European Free Alliance), scheduled for consideration in the autumn contains ambitious and practical reforms, that reflect OGP standards;
- Encourage the parliamentary intergroup on integrity (Integrity - Transparency, anti-corruption and organised crime) to assess OGP criteria, methodology and action plans to inform its work, including through a public debate on OGP in the parliament;
- Ask parliamentary questions of the European Commission to initiate discussions with the OGP Steering Committee to explore EU institutional engagement with OGP.

Until now, the EU has been noted by its absence on the open government and OGP stage. This does not reflect the open government-related support and expertise that already exists within the institutions. Rather, it suggests a lack of innovation and leadership in the face of a crisis of confidence in the EU project. We believe this is an opportunity that the European Union cannot afford to miss and hope you join us in making it reality. We are available to discuss the initiative in more detail, and to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Darbishire	Neil Campbell	Rupert Simons
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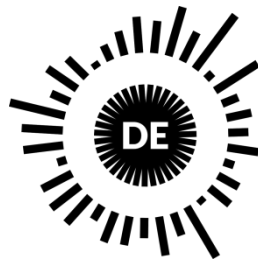Partnership

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