

OPEN INSTITUTIONS: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

SIGNATORIES, 1 July 2014

- o Access Info Europe
- o Access to Information Programme, Bulgaria
- o Arbeitskreis Open Government Partnership Campaign, Germany
- o Association 61/MamPrawo Wiedziec.pl, Poland
- o Campaign for Freedom of Information, UK
- o Center for Civic Education, Poland
- o Centrum Cyfrowe Projekt: Polska, Poland
- o Citizens Network Watchdog, Poland
- o Civil Development Forum FOR, Poland
- o Cluster for eco-social innovation and development CEDRA HR, Croatia
- o Democratise
- o Diritto Di Sapere, Italy
- o e-Governance Academy, Estonia
- o ePaństwo Foundation, Poland
- o Fair-play Alliance, Slovakia
- o FIACAT - International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture, France
- o Frank Bold, Czech Republic
- o Friends of the Earth Europe
- o GONG, Croatia
- o Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland
- o Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries (HIVOS), The Netherlands
- o Institute of Public Finance, Croatia
- o Instituut Maatschappelijke Innovatie, The Netherlands
- o Involve, UK
- o Justice and Peace, The Netherlands
- o Klon/Jawor Association, Poland
- o K-Monitor Watchdog for Public Funds, Hungary
- o Natural Resource Governance Institute
- o ODRAZ - Sustainable Community Development, Croatia
- o Open Data Coalition for Romania
- o Open Estonia Foundation
- o Open Knowledge
- o Open Knowledge Denmark
- o Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland
- o Open Knowledge Ireland
- o Panoptykon Foundation, Poland
- o Peace Institute, Slovenia
- o Publish What You Fund
- o Publish What You Pay
- o République Citoyenne, France
- o Stefan Batory Foundation, Poland
- o The Access Initiative, Europe
- o The Democratic Society, UK
- o The ONE Campaign
- o Transparency International Croatia
- o Transparency International-EU
- o Transparency International, Greece
- o Transparency International, Ireland
- o Transparency International, Slovakia
- o Unit for Social Innovation and Research – Shipyard, Poland

A CALL TO THE NEW EU LEADERSHIP

We recommend that the new EU leadership commits the EU institutions to close engagement with and eventual membership of the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

OGP participation will encourage the EU institutions to uphold the same inclusion, transparency and accountability standards that they ask of others both inside and outside the EU. It will help bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens, and enhance the EU's credibility in its international efforts to improve the quality of governance in third countries by empowering citizens through participation.

WHY OGP?

The OGP is an international initiative whose 64 participating countries have committed to making their governments more open, accountable and responsive to citizens. The OGP process creates the opportunity for ambitious action plans for open government, co-designed by officials and civil society, followed by their jointly-monitored implementation. To date, 20 EU member-states are already engaged with the initiative.

WHY THE EU?

The EU institutions are more distant than national governments from European voters. The structures and processes within the institutions are difficult for citizens to understand, and there is a widespread perception of a lack of transparency and accountability. EU institutions share or have responsibility for many of the powers exercised by national governments, and have gained further powers as a result of the EU's response to the economic crisis.

EU leaders have made many legal and rhetorical commitments towards open, participatory and accountable EU governance but implementation has often been incomplete or not communicated in a meaningful way to the general public. The current approach towards open EU governance is not adequately responding to the concerns of citizens. As noted by the outgoing European Ombudsman in 2013: "An institutional culture of transparency has yet to be achieved."

IS THE EU ELIGIBLE TO JOIN THE OGP?

The OGP is currently restricted to state parties (meaning national governments), but does work with international and multilateral bodies and the need to involve other layers of government is part of discussions within the OGP community. Despite shortcomings in the implementation of transparency commitments, the EU already fulfils the OGP membership criteria: for **'fiscal transparency'** the EU publishes and explains its budget on a yearly basis; on **'access to information'**, Regulation 1049/2001 requires public access to documents; **'disclosures related to elected or senior public officials'** occurs through public declarations of interests of MEPs and Commissioners; and **'citizen engagement'** happens at the level of public consultations, the transparency register, and the new European Citizens' Initiative.

These membership criteria are minimum baseline standards that OGP members are expected to improve upon. The process towards developing an action plan would in itself be of benefit. The eventual plan would then include action points towards more transparent decision-making, better consultative processes, and timely and consistent access to documents, among others. The OGP would offer EU citizens a tool to demand improved accountability at the EU level, and an independent, qualitative and quantitative assessment of progress.

WHICH EU INSTITUTIONS WOULD BE INCLUDED?

As civil society groups supporting open and participatory government, we believe that commitment to OGP standards and processes should eventually cover all EU institutions. Priority focus should initially be on the three legislative institutions that hold the most political power - the European Commission, Council of the EU and the European Parliament. How the institutions develop that engagement, who leads in each institution and the inter-institutional negotiations on OGP will need to be explored by the institutions themselves, **but the first, all-important step is for EU leaders to make the commitment to do so.**

The European elections showed the depth of voter disaffection with a distant and unaccountable EU. The Open Government Partnership is an innovative, participatory and ambitious initiative that has already helped participating governments to improve their policies, governance and democratic legitimacy.

We believe this is an opportunity that the new EU leadership cannot afford to miss.



Campaign for
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This is an **open** statement:
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