Attn: Mr Thierry Breton, Commissioner for Internal Market  
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200  
1049 Brussels  
Belgium  
Sent by email: cab-breton-contact@ec.europa.eu

CC: Ms Vera Jourová, Vice President and Commissioner for Values & Transparency  
cab-jourova-contact@ec.europa.eu

9 December 2020

Joint Statement on Open Data Directive & Company Ownership Transparency

Representing 101 leading transparency, anti-corruption and open data organisations from across Europe, we call for company registers, including full ownership and corporate structure data, to be freely accessible and published in open data format.

More than $11 trillion has already been spent by governments all over the world urgently responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and reliable information on who controls anonymous companies is central for preventing financial mismanagement, fraud and corruption.

Now more than ever, businesses, journalists, and civil society groups need high-quality and readily-accessible company ownership information in order to carry out proper due diligence on potential fraudulent or false companies.

Company structure and ownership information has been recognised as part of a “high value dataset” under the EU’s Directive on Open Data and the Re-Use of Public Sector Information (Open Data Directive). Some Member States are, nevertheless, resisting providing full access to this data arguing that there is an associated cost in doing so.
It is evident that the cost of publishing this essential information is minimal compared to the significant economic savings and invaluable societal benefits that accrue from avoiding fraud and corruption.

We therefore call for the following company structure and ownership information to be the absolute minimum made public under the Open Data Directive:

- Name of the company owner;
- Month and year of birth;
- Nationality;
- Owner identifier;
- Names of shareholders;
- Country of residence of shareholders/owners;
- Company insolvency status;
- All updates to the information submitted, including the date of the most recent update.

The commitment to open company registers would be the most critical transparency and anti-corruption measure that the EU will adopt in 2020.

Such publication is fully in line with the European Union’s 5th Anti Money Laundering Directive (AMLD5), which has already committed to opening up registers of beneficial owners of companies, and Member States are currently transposing that Directive and setting up these registers.

Furthermore, standards have already been set in the UK and Denmark, with the information in these company registers available as open data.

The European Commission and Member States should now guarantee full publication of companies and company ownership information as a high-value dataset in implementing the Open Data Directive, under a genuinely open licence without additional restrictions. Anything less than full publication would ultimately foster an environment where corruption is allowed to persist. This is the time for more transparency and accountability, not less.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Darbishire, Executive Director of Access Info Europe

For and on behalf of:

Access Info Europe
One
Open Contracting Partnership
Open State Foundation (NL)
OpenCorporates
OpenOwnership
Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project OCCRP
The B Team
Transparency International
Transparency International EU
AAV- Associació d'Arxivers i Gestors de Documents Valencians
ACICOM (Associació Ciutadania i Comunicació)
Archiveros Españoles de la Función Pública (AEFP)
Asociación de Usuarios de la Comunicación (AUC)
Asociación Española de Acreditación de la Transparencia (ACREDITRA)
Asociación para la Comunicación e Información Medioambiental (ACIMA)
Asociaţia Aradul Civic
Asociaţia Civică Adevăr şi Dreptate Argeşean #activAG Piteşti
Association Green Istria
BIOM NGO, Zagreb
Both ENDS, The Netherlands
Branchevereniging B2B Intelligence
Bystriny (Currents)
Campaign for Freedom of Information
Center for Independent Journalism
Center for Public Innovation
Center of NGOs Slovenia (CNVOS)
Cenzura Plus (Censorship Plus), Split
Citizens Network Watchdog Poland
Civica
Civio
Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris i Documentalistes de la CV (COBDCV)
Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)
Corruption Kills (asociaţia Corupţia Ucide)
CorruptionWatch UK
Daphne Foundation
Diritto di Sapere
Doctrine
European Coalition for Corporate Justice
Evoluţie in Instituţie
FACT coalition
Federación de Sindicatos de Periodistas (FeSP)
Forum Apulum
Forum Informationsfreiheit
Freedom of Information Centre Armenia
FullFact
Fundación Hay Derecho
Funky Citizens
Geeks for Democracy
GFOSS - Open Technologies Alliance
Global Witness
GONG
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor
Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina
Iniciativa Barcelona Open Data
Innovación y Derechos Humanos (ihr.world)
K-Monitor
Law Development and Protection Foundation
Mafia? Nein Danke!
Mono Jurisdiction Organisations
MySociety
Netzwerk Steuergerechtigkeit
Newspeak House, The London College of Political Technologists
Observatorio de RSC
Ondata
Open Data Charter
Open Knowledge Foundation Denmark
Open Knowledge Foundation Finland
Open Knowledge Foundation France
Open Knowledge Foundation France
Open Knowledge Foundation Germany
Open Knowledge Foundation Portugal
Open Knowledge Foundation Sweden
Open Knowledge Foundation International
open3.at
OpenCorporates
OpenFinData Ltd
Ostro
Parliament Watch Italia
Plataforma en Defensa de la Libertad de Información (PDLI)
Publish What You Pay International Secretariat
Publish What You Pay UK
Reporteros Sin Fronteras Sección Española (RSF España)
SOMO
Spend Network
Stakeholder Democracy Network
Sustentia
Tax Justice Network
Tax Justice NL
The Good Lobby Italia
The Open Data Institute
TI Armenia
TI Italy
TI Lithuania
Transparency International Anticorruption Center
Transparency International Slovenia
UK Open Government Civil Society Network
Vouliwatch