Access Info Europe

Activity Report 2012

Message from the Executive Director

The sixth year of Access Info's operations saw the organisation steadily growing in a number of key ways. First and foremost we have a very strong team which is highly knowledgeable about the right of access to information and deeply committed to promoting and defending that right across Europe.

We have developed a robust portfolio of projects which comprise national and EU level campaigns, as well as horizontal projects in a number of areas: access to information for human rights, promoting transparency as part of the fight against corruption, mapping the legal framework for transparency of media ownership, defining standards for open government.

Access Info Europe funding position has strengthened significantly with a greater diversity of funders on a range of projects. Although we finished the year with a deficit, this was largely because we were midway though implementing a large EU funded project with funds from various donors still due in. Cash flow is ever an issue for non-governmental organisations, especially working in Western Europe where resources are scarce, but the overall financial health of the organisation is strong.

To identify three highlights of 2012, I would say that the first has to be our successful work to promote EU transparency and to hold back attempts to roll back on the transparency gains of the past decade.

Next our campaigning at the national level in Spain has encouraged the government to move towards presenting an access to information law to the parliament. The current version of the law is weak, but the fact that it is moving forward is an encouraging sign. The Spanish experience is now a model for other countries in southern Europe, such as Italy and Portugal.

Third, the exciting global context of the open data movement and the Open Government Partnership is giving a new impetus to efforts to promote government transparency. Access Info Europe has launched a set of open government standards and a civil society campaign to ensure that the opportunities presented by the OGP are capitalised on.

Last but not least, 28 September 2012 was the 10th International Right to Know Day. It's amazing what has been achieved in the past 10 years: access to information has been recognised as a right by all major international human right bodies, and we have 93 laws implementing this right globally. It's been an exciting decade, which Access Info Europe is proud to have been part of, and we are equally excited about the next 10 years promoting and defending this essential right.

I would like to thank Access Info Europe's many supporters, including the members of our Executive and International Boards and the Access Info Europe team, including Lydia Medland, Victoria Anderica, Pam Bartlett and Alvaro Rodriguez as well as our dedicated interns and volunteers.

Helen Darbishire
Executive Director & Vice President

Standard Setting

» **Right to Information Rating**: On 28 September 2012 Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy launched an improved version of the RTI Rating website. The new website contains updated results on all 93 countries with national right to information laws, searchable on various parameters, including total score and score in each category of the RTI Rating.

The rating has proved highly popular in national campaigns for improvements to access to information laws. In countries ranging from Finland and Denmark to Croatia and Macedonia it has been used across Europe to press for law reform. There are many instances of its use globally as well.

The **Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents** is an increasingly used benchmark for access to information laws, even though it has not yet come into force. Access Info Europe encourages ratification of the Convention.

» **Open Government Standards**

In September at the Open Knowledge Conference in Helsinki, Access Info Europe launched the Open Government Standards project. The goal is to promote clear civil society standards in the areas of transparency, participation, and accountability which are all core to the recently launched Open Government Partnership.
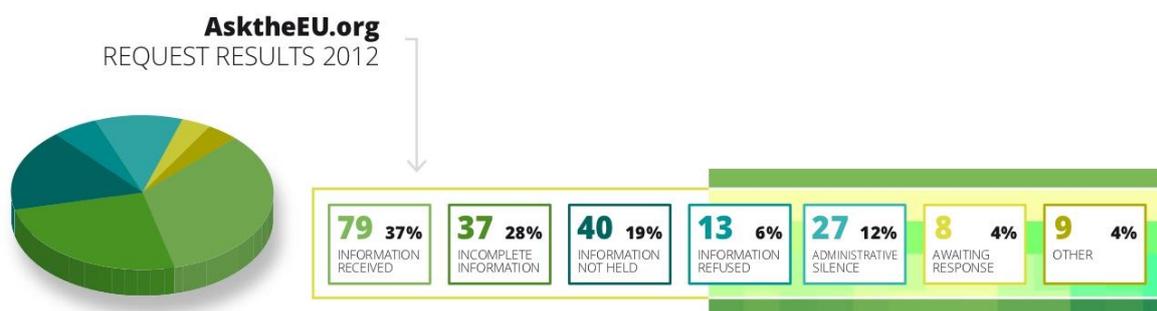
The launch of the standards follows months of preparation and research by the Access Info Europe team into current standards, which are more developed for access to information than for other areas. The Access Info Europe team promoted the campaign at events in Brazil, Croatia, and Italy.

In addition to the standards we have launched a website, with video in production, and a campaign kit of banners, material for printing and use in social media to disseminate the message "I want OPEN".

EU Transparency

» **Advocacy on European Union law reform**: A major focus in 2012 was defending the EU's access to documents rules. We convened and coordinated a coalition of over 200 organisations to successfully hold back reforms which would have limited EU transparency, coordination with the Parliament and key Member State helped ensure the success of the campaign.

» **AsktheEU.org**: In September 2012 we celebrated the first year of operation of the EU request website AsktheEU.org which has become the preferred choice for Brussels based CSOs to ask for EU documents, along with an increasing number of journalists. Results from the first year were presented in the European Parliament.

AsktheEU.org
REQUEST RESULTS 2012

79 37%	37 28%	40 19%	13 6%	27 12%	8 4%	9 4%
INFORMATION RECEIVED	INCOMPLETE INFORMATION	INFORMATION NOT HELD	INFORMATION REFUSED	ADMINISTRATIVE SILENCE	AWAITING RESPONSE	OTHER

» **Training civil society on access EU documents**: With the Open Society Foundations we provided technical advice to and conducted a two-day seminar to mental health CSOs from Central and Eastern Europe on accessing EU information. This was one of many events throughout the year, including as part of the EU Citizens project.

» **Transparency of decisions on financial issues:** Access Info Europe participated in the debate with the European Union Ombudsman's Office on transparency of European and international financial systems, held in Brussels on International Right to Know Day 2012. This was a moment to note that the right of access to information meant that members of the public should have a right to know about what inter-governmental organisations are doing and in the context of the financial crisis to insist on transparency about the handling of the crisis from the Europe's leaders and European Institutions including the European Central Bank.

Corruption and Lobbying

Access Info Europe is a member of a number of coalitions working on issues of corruption and lobbying transparency. The Coalition for the UN Convention against Corruption has been active pressing for the right of access to information to be included in the review of member states compliance with the Convention which has been signed by 147 countries to date.

Access Info Europe is also on the Steering Committee of the ALTER-EU network, which advocates for transparency and regulation of lobbying at the EU level. The "Daligate" tobacco lobbying scandal in the Autumn of 2012 underscored the need for much tighter rules around lobbying and greater access to information.

Trainings for Journalists: Legal Leaks

» **Balkan region journalist training:** Access Info and n-ost organised a training for 60 journalists from the former Yugoslavia in Zagreb in March 2012 as part of a larger project to support use of access to information laws in the region. Other trainings included the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Summer School in Macedonia in August and a regional training in Belgrade in September, as well as a training for Macedonian Journalists in November.

» **The Legal Leaks Toolkit** is now available in Bosnian, Croatian, Hungarian, Macedonia, and Serbian versions (in those languages plus in Albanian for Macedonia). **A help desk** facility run by Access Info provides follow up assistance to journalists from the Western Balkans wishing to file requests in European countries and at the EU.

» **Masters in Investigative Journalism** (Spain): Access Info Europe helped coordinate, run, and conduct trainings in a pioneering Masters course in Investigative journalism, the first in Spain, which started in October 2012.

Civil Liberties: Access for Rights

Access Info Europe has continued this year to develop our Access for Rights work-stream with a strong focus on using the right of access to information to collect data for human rights advocacy. We are working with human rights groups and networks to help them use the right of access to information to its full potential. We believe that advocacy for all human rights issues can be increasingly evidence-based and that the use of access to information laws will help advocates obtain the information that they need to support their work in other areas advancing and defending human rights.

» **CIA flights / Portugal**: We have continued to pursue appeals in Portugal to obtain data on CIA extraordinary rendition flights and these have been successful, resulting in new evidence of value into investigations into and litigation in response to human rights violations. Some of the information obtained has been used in preparing cases going to the European Court of Human Rights.

» **EU's Fundamental Rights Agency:** Access Info Europe participated in the Vienna meetings of the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency to conduct a training for human rights organisations on how to use the right of access to information, including the right of access to EU documents in their data gathering work.

Citizen Participation in the EU

A major focus of Access Info Europe's Europe activity during this project period has been demonstrating the value of EU transparency for permitting participation in decision making. This was done under the EU transparency part of this project and with the funding from the European Commission for the "EU Citizens" Project, conducted together with AITEC - based in France, Environmental Law Service - based in the Czech Republic, Friends of the Earth Europe - based in Belgium, Health Action International - based in the Netherlands, and SpinWatch - based in the UK.

The project involved training CSOs on how EU decisions are taken and engaging them in advocacy on issues such as the reform of Regulation 1049 and reform of EU lobbying rules to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

One of the main events was a trip to Brussels for citizens from across the EU (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, and the UK) to learn about how decision making in Brussels actually works. In total 48 citizens travelled to Europe's administrative capital, where activities included meetings with Members of the European Parliament, meetings with public officials, a tour of the offices of lobbyists which shows where power is concentrated in Brussels.

Transparency of Media Ownership

» **Researching legal framework on transparency of media ownership (Regional):**
Working with the Open Society Media Program we have mapped the legal framework for accessing information about owners of the media in 20 European countries. We found that in most countries it is impossible to know who really owns the media. The findings have been presented to the EU, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

TRANSPARENCY OF
MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN EUROPE

A report for the High-Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism

This report set out the main findings of a research project which indicates that there is currently insufficient transparency of media ownership in most European countries. A series of recommendations show how to increase public access to information about media ownership as an essential prerequisite for promoting and protecting media pluralism.

National Campaigns

Spain

Access Info continued in 2012 to supports campaigns to promote the right of access to information at the national level. In Spain the campaign reached a new intensity with the presentation to parliament by the government of the draft transparency law. Spain also joined the Open Government Partnership although with no consultation on the action plan.

- **Engaging the Public**: Access Info Europe has seized opportunities to engage the public in calls for transparency, for example through public petitions (an Avaaz petition on strengthening the law signed by over 85,000 people, or a Change.org petition on political party transparency signed by 170,000 persons); we encouraged 3,800 people to participate in the consultation on the transparency law (results of the consultation were never formally made public but were leaked and showed support for reform).

- **Supporting Regional initiatives**: Access Info Europe has engaged with the governments of a number of regions of Spain, including with Andalucía, the Basque Country, Catalunya and Navarra, giving advice on draft access to information laws. We have engaged with regional data protection agencies, ombudsmen, anti-fraud offices, political parties, associations of public archivists, civil society and media to advance these campaigns.

- **Litigation**: Access Info Europe has launched various cases for access to information, the most high profile of which has been the 2007 request for information about what Spain is doing to implement the UNCAC which in 2012 we lost at the Supreme Court, resulting in a €3000 award of costs against us. Access Info Europe is also supporting other groups on access to information litigation, including Friends of the Earth Spain on information about the location of genetically modified crops, and the platform Eurovegas NO which is trying to find out about the lobbying by controversial US business magnate Sheldon Adelson of the Madrid regional government to set up a gambling complex on the outskirts of Madrid; to date the Spanish Ombudsman has issued a decision in our favour calling for release of information by the Madrid authorities.

- **Tools for Transparency***:* Together with the Foundation Civio we built an Alaveteli request platform, Tuderechoasaber.es (Your right to know) which has to date been used to submit around 500 requests and has been an invaluable advocacy and monitoring tool; we hope that when a law is eventually adopted it will serve to actually help the public obtain information, especially if the level of responsiveness were to increase.

Italy

- **Strengthening civil society**: Access Info Europe has worked closely with the founders of Diritto di Sapere, sharing strategic and practical advice, and helping in the process of developing the statutes: Helen Darbishire is a founder board member.

- **Italy and the OGP:** Together with Diritto di Sapere, Access Info Europe has engaged with Italy's public officials working on the OGP process and has provided strategic advice on events, agendas, contacts, civil society liaison, and has helped put together events and participated by moderating and/or speaking on panels.

ACCESS INFO EUROPE

Income and Expenditure Accounts

Financial Year 1 January 2012 - 31 December 2012

This is a summary presentation in English of the original accounts prepared under Spanish law by:

Numéritas, SL

ALCALA 75 3ºIZQ

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Income	
Grants and Project funds	300,870.76
Honoraria Conferences	15,676.21
Reimbursement travel	6,141.30
Donations private individuals	608.00
Total Income	**€ 323,296.27**

Expenditure	
Personnel & Management Costs	
Executive Director (with tax, social security and health insurance)	60,242.70
Staff and professional collaborators (inc. tax and social security)	109,856.54
Consultants & Researchers	38,387.67
Accountant & Payroll services	4,426.21
Courses and training (inc. reimbursement costs)	-295.00
sub-total	**€ 208,191.21**

Operating and Project costs

Office rental	20,393.86
Office cleaning	1699.58
Utilities – Electricity, Gas & Water	966.12
Office supplies, consumables, newspapers, books	3,110.48
Design - Graphic & Web	7,827.59
Printing	1,302.67
Office & IT Equipment	1,423.43
Software	65.40
Web hosting	1,290.92
Web domains	309.71
Telephone/internet/mobile/Skype	3,553.55

Expenditure (continued)

Postage and couriers	509.77
Membership Associations	0.00
Office Insurance	88.10
Depreciation Office Equipment & Furniture	1,333.05
Bank charges (includes transfers allocated to project costs)	1,725.98

Project Costs

Re-Grants to Partners	105,343.75
Travel - Long distance (trains and planes)	14,076.75
Travel – short distance (train, taxi, bus, bike, metro)	4,605.65
Accommodation	8,267.80
Request fees	5.68
Conference Registration	120.00
Conference Room Hire + Refreshments	1,004.42
Refreshments and business meals	5,024.82
Contests & Prizes	1,000.00
Visas	0.00

sub-total	**€ 185,054.08**
Total Expenditure	**€ 397,672.20**

BALANCE	**-€ 74,375.92**