

Convention on EU best practice in access to public sector information

6-7 November in Brussels

Report of the discussions

For [this convention](#) about Freedom of Information (FoI) organised by [WeCitizens](#), in partnership with EESC and the university of Louvain, in the framework of the [SIA4Y project](#), 14 speakers of 11 different nationalities intervened during these two half-days.

International trends

According to Ms Adlin Hulin, the promotion of freedom of expression is high in the agenda of UNESCO, which has competencies in the field of culture and education.

Transparency International actively fights against corruption. Matilde Manzi, from TI-Europe, explains the slow process of increasing protection for whistleblowers. EU Member states need to transpose a recent EU Directive and should extend its scope. They also need to decide whether anonymous denunciations of crimes are accepted.

Mrs Assya Kavrakova, from ECAS, shows that we have in 2018 an unprecedented increase in civic engagement. Taking into account that young people act differently, we should be quick enough to grasp the opportunity to enhance democracy.

Mr Alvaro Gonzalez Perez presented two initiatives of his European students federation, AEGEE: <http://yvote.eu> and Generation Climate Europe (<http://gceurope.org>). The latter fosters youth climate dialogue, in order to reach joint statements and require stronger climate change policies.

Mr Jean-Paul Pinon, CEO of WeCitizens (Belgium), insists on measures that make politicians more accountable. He also advises a general measure to increase the interest of the average citizen for politics: removing the withholding tax (the tax paid directly by the employer to the State, on account of the employee).

Mrs Rachel Hanna, from Assess Info Europe (Madrid), reminds that we must find the right balance between access to data and protection of privacy. Concerning lobby, everything should be transparent.

Mr Jean-Marie Sohier, from Sealord (Belgium), suggests that citizens set commonly accepted policy standards and investigate how politicians comply.

Country experiences

Mrs Eila Heikkilä presents the Ohjaamo system in Finland: a network of One-Stop Guidance Centers that offer support to persons under the age of 30 for various issues (career planning, life management, participation, etc.).

Ms Wilma Haan, CEO of Open State Foundation, reminds also the economic benefits of transparency by public bodies. Her Foundation publishes big databases: Open Spending (financial data of all the local governments in the Netherlands), Open 'Poen', Open municipality, Open multilaterals, PoliFLW NL/EU.

Mr JP Pinon shows some Belgian initiatives. WeCitizens started publishing a transparency index of political parties, and a database of politicians (PoliticiansOnline.be). Among many other initiatives, the portal Transparencia.be is more directly helping citizens to access documents from public bodies.

Mrs Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło, from Polish Economic Society Branch Gdansk, explains how

they intend to make young people familiar with their right to know, through Youth Advisory bodies like Youth Councils, Youth Boards in various organisations.

Mr Alexander Fanta, investigative journalist from Netzpolitik (Berlin), gives some examples of how citizens can make interesting investigation with using the access to public information. He tells that schools for journalists in his country (Austria) do not really teach the rights of such access.

Mrs Carina Paju mainly commented to initiatives of Transparency International Estonia : [Transparency in capital cities](#) (about response time) and [Political party financing data](#).

Mr Johannes Filter, from FragdenStaat.de (Germany), says that involving people will not happen, in the first place, with heavy investigation about corruption, but with very local questions. To get a youngster more involved in FoI, give him opportunities to find easily information he is personally interested in. FragdenStaat has a webpage allowing students to easily send requests concerning past examination questions for the General University Entrance Qualification.

Guide of good practice

Prof. S. Mrozowska and B. Kijewska, from the University of Gdansk, presented the outcome of their work about FoI, structured in three parts: (I) legal grounds, (II) youth policy and (III) examples of initiatives in the five partner countries.