



THE KNESSET הכנסת

OECD Global Parliamentary Network Achieving Transparent Government

CHAIR

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□ BACKGROUND NOTE

The idea of open government and transparency has long been gaining momentum. The last few decades and especially recent years, have seen governments and parliaments all over the world beginning to recognise the basic right of every citizen to information held and manufactured by the public sector. At its most basic form, transparency is about providing citizens with information about how their elected officials and civil servants are utilising their given mandate. In other words, simple information about what they are doing.

But Transparent Government encompasses far more, bearing on the fundamental relationship between the government and the public and championing participation, collaboration and accountability in policy making and implementation. Transparent 'Government' used in this sense encompasses the whole of the public sector, including the legislature, the judiciary and even extending to hybrid public-private entities, with the appropriate arrangements for each.

Transparent Government aims to promote accountability and foster public trust, thus strengthening democracy and ensuring more efficient and effective services. It is underlined by a conviction that information produced and maintained by the public sector is a public asset, given to the government in trust by the people for safe keeping, to maintain and conserve. Governments do not 'own' public information. Public information should therefore be made available to the public in an easy-to-use, timely, readily understandable and searchable system. Embracing new technologies, whilst maintaining data security, is therefore vital.

Transparent Government also aims to better the quality of its decisions, by actively encouraging public engagement. This allows openness which goes both ways: while government shares the information it holds with the public, it also benefits from the knowledge, feedback, opinions and increased participation of society at large. This participation can sometimes require compromise, whilst often providing opportunities for collaboration. Transparent Government makes use of innovative tools, methods, and systems to foster cooperation within government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals.

Why Is It Important to Foster Cooperation Amongst Parliamentarians, and Why Now?

Only 40% of citizens trust their government, and trust is deteriorating in many OECD countries¹. Trust is crucial for the success of policies that depend on public cooperation, from investment and consumption to tax compliance. Transparency is indeed a crucial component of sound economic policy,² as the recent debt crises in Europe have clearly shown. It can also

¹ Gallup World Poll – Government at a glance 2015.

² IMF, October 1996 World Economic Outlook, page xiii.



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affect wider social cohesion, in an increasingly divided political climate. But trust in the political system, and in politicians, is eroding, especially with younger demographics.

These changes are now occurring alongside a proliferation of information backed by technology the likes of which we have never known. Social media has made elected officials more accessible to voters than ever. Technology, and specifically, the internet, has greatly expanded the quantity and quality of easily accessible government information. It has also put government on display. Governments must rise to the challenge of transparency, by establishing mechanisms for inclusion, widening access to information and enacting policies for open consultation. Elected officials should be championing transparency while simultaneously setting reasonable boundaries, rather than following the inevitable trend. Such efforts are already apparent in the Open Government Partnership, in which 19 OECD member countries have commitments, and the OECD developed reference tools for budget and tax transparency.

Thus, the timing could not be better for developing a shared vision and network for like minded parliamentarians. Crucial tools and existing knowledge, resulting from the recent proliferation of public and private efforts, can now be shared and developed.

□ **METHOD**

- A series of discussions will be held in order to exchange ideas and identify best practices.
- The work of this peer-learning group will be supported by the OECD Secretariat, including access to experts, and to OECD's pioneering work on data collection and analysis, statistics, research and production of best policies in order to lead a forum in which parliamentarians can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to mutual problems.

□ **VISION**

To provide parliamentarians with the information and tools that would help them promote policies to improve government transparency and accountability, encourage public engagement and participation, and advance the use of innovative tools, methods, and systems for collaboration and cooperation within governments and beyond.

The initial meeting of the group, scheduled for 10 February 2016, will be an opportunity to discuss its organisation, activities and areas of work.

□ **GOALS**

- To help parliamentarians and staffers advance transparency by offering a platform to share experiences and peer-learning across countries.
- To provide an opportunity for members of parliament to come together with experts and elected officials to discuss the best ways to promote honest, open and transparent government.
- To collect and define best practices for national governments with an emphasis on transparency for accountability, public participation and global collaboration.

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- To initiate and organize meetings and conferences for decision makers at the national level, of OECD members and beyond, aimed to share knowledge, challenges and solutions as well as to set the agenda.

□ Potential longer-term goals to discuss:

- To produce strategic guides which would present a vision for transparent government, provide a list of achievable goals and set realistic steps to achieving them, paying attention to differing country circumstances.
- To collect and establish a database that could be used for research, documentation and comparison.

□ ABOUT MK STAV SHAFFIR

Member of Knesset Stav Shaffir of Israel's Labor Party is the youngest female member in history. Now in her second term in Knesset, she is the chair of the Transparency Committee which she established, as well as the Social Justice Caucus. As a member of the finance committee she led a reform for budget transparency, exposed the government's secret money transfers, and fought to end corrupt usage of tax payers' money. Formerly a journalist and social activist, Shaffir became one of the leaders of the Israeli social protest movement that brought hundreds of thousands of Israelis into the streets in the summer of 2011.

□ QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *How can we ensure the implementation of policies that require transparency, within government ministries, municipalities and other public institutions? Are sanctions against institutions that are not transparent or open to the public desirable?*
- *Is there a need to budget for transparency? What are the costs and benefits of transparency, such as opening databases online, holding public consultations and active vs. passive freedom of information laws?*
- *How does transparency contribute to financing democracy?*
- *What standards of transparency should political parties be held to?*
- *How should we regulate the growing role of social media vis-à-vis traditional propaganda? Should personal facebook, twitter and other accounts by leaders, such as heads of state, be regulated?*
- *How can institutions refine their evaluation of public policies increasing the quantity and quality of data on the effects of transparency? How can policy monitoring mechanisms also capture actual impact on policy?*
- *Should we compel asset disclosure for civil servants? Senior civil servants? To what degree? What would be the advantages and disadvantages?*
- *How can we make lobbying transparent? What are the policy options, such as a lobbying register? Should lobbyists be banned from participating in advisory groups? What stakeholders should be included?*
- *What are the best online tools for budgetary transparency? For monitoring public procurement processes?*
- *What are the best practice whistleblower protection mechanisms? What effect do they have on government efficiency and on public trust?*

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