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Transparency and privacy in democratic societies - two sides of the same coin

PROGRAMME

4 November 2025, 9.30 – 13.00
Strasbourg, Palais de l'Europe, Room 2

Introduction

In today's data driven economy in democratic societies, ensuring accountability of governments and fighting corruption is increasingly important, while safeguarding personal privacy is of growing concern. Public authorities must strike a delicate balance between guaranteeing access to the information that they hold and ensuring the right to personal data protection.

Under the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents – also known as the Tromsø Convention – everyone has the right to access State-held information regardless of the form in which it is recorded. Equally everyone has the right to protection of their personal data under the Council of Europe Convention for the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data – also known as “Convention 108”. Transparency of the public administration is also a key standard of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

The intersection of the right to access to official documents and the right to personal data protection is often perceived as a difficult area. The Tromsø Convention provides an exemption to this right of access in order to protect privacy. Conversely, Convention 108 permits an exemption to personal data protection to enable access to information of public interest. However, it is not always self-evident how public authorities should act when providing access to or publishing at their own initiative a document which contains personal data, when dealing with a request for access to such a document or processing complaints by the data subjects or applicants for information.

The meeting will explore this area of potential tension in an informative and pragmatic way.

Overall, the meeting will seek to promote a vision in which the balancing of transparency of the public administration and the responsible collection and handling of personal information is considered as an important indicator of good governance in democratic societies.

09.30 – 10.00 Opening of the meeting by Gianluca Esposito – Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law

Welcome addresses by Helena Jäderblom, President of the Council of Europe Access Info Group, Beatriz de Anchorena, Chair of the Committee of Convention 108, David Meyer, Chair of GRECO (Online)

10.00– 10.45 Balancing transparency and privacy – Council of Europe standards

This session will look at how the relationship of the right to access official documents and the right to protection of personal data is addressed under the Tromsø Convention and Convention 108. It will also highlight tools/methods used in law and practice in different States Parties to these Conventions to balance the rights when they collide (e.g. the overriding public interest test, redaction, anonymisation, consultation of data subjects, etc.)

Moderator: **Joan Barata Mir**, Legal expert, Fellow at the Cyber Policy Center of Stanford University

Speakers: **Päivi Korpisaari**, Professor of Communication Law, Helsinki University, AIG member; **Kristi Värk**, Director of Data Protection Law Division, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs of Estonia; **Beatriz de Anchorena**, Head of the Agency for Access to Public Information (AAIP), the Data Protection Authority (DPA) in Argentina.

10.45 – 11.00 Break

11:00 – 12.00 Manging information about public officials

This session will highlight different regulatory models of processing and ensuring access to personal data of public officials. Which officials are concerned and which data – e.g. names, job descriptions, CVs, contact information, salaries, tax information, other? What are the challenges in implementing mandatory transparency in respect of assets declarations and declarations of conflict of interest?

Moderator: **Tetyana Oleksiyuk**, Vice-President of the Council of Europe Access Info Group

Speakers: **Warren Seddon**, Director of Freedom of Information and Transparency, Information Commissioner Office, UK, **Alessandra Pierucci**, Data Protection Commissioner Italy; **Vladimir Georgiev**, Expert, former Commissioner State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, North Macedonia ; **Carlos Cordero Sanz**, founder of Access Info Europe.

12.00 – 13.00 Managing information about private persons dealing with public authorities

How is access to personal data of individuals working for private entities that deal with public authorities (e.g. through contracts, subsidies, grants) regulated? How is access to personal data of private persons participating in meetings with public bodies, contributing to consultations or engaging in lobbying activities regulated? What measures do public bodies holding personal data of persons dealing with them take to anticipate and facilitate disclosure?

Moderator: **Neus Vidal Martí**, SEEK Initiative Executive Director

Speakers: **Elona Hoxhaj**, General Director on the Right to Information, Albanian Information and Data Protection Commissioner; **Gonzalo Sosa**, Representative of the Electronic Government Agency and the Information and Knowledge Society, Uruguay; **Vita Habjan Barborič**, Head of the Development and Prevention Centre Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, Slovenia; **Ádám Földes**, Legal and Advocacy Advisor, Transparency International.

13.00 Closing of the workshop by AIG and TP-D chairs