European Public Sector Information Platform

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Parliamentary informatics: *what* data should be open and *how* multi-stakeholder efforts can help parliaments achieve it

Author: Karolis Granickas

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Keywords

Transparency, Parliament, Accountability, Citizens, Open Data

Executive Summary

Parliaments are best-positioned to showcase and benchmark transparency and accountability **standards to other public sector institutions. This report analyses the latest developments with regards to** parliamentary transparency, suggests a systemic picture of what types of data most parliaments possess and offers a checklist of the most important aspects of implementing effective and efficient parliamentary openness policy. It also explores the relevance of the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness and its possible use towards increased parliamentary transparency and citizen engagement.

1. Introduction: background and rationale

This report will build on the topic report on re-use of parliamentary data by D. Dietrich.[1] While the previous report focused on re-use efforts, legal issues and barriers to re-use, this report will go one step back and explore two key aspects to development of open parliament information on national and international levels: 1) data management and provision by parliaments and; 2) how other stakeholders can help parliaments open their data using the key instrument worldwide in this regard – the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness.

1.1 Why open parliament data?

The growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) offers unique opportunities to explore ever-closer relationships and interaction between governments and the people in modern democracies. There is no technology-related barrier remaining to engage citizens in decision-making processes and also truly ensure citizens' right to information. Access to information and proactive provision of open government data is one of the key strategic elements towards furthering good governance on the one hand and civic engagement on another.

Parliaments, as representative bodies of governments, should be and often are on the frontline of encouraging provision and re-use of open data. They are in a good position to benchmark openness standards for other institutions as well as to improve open, accessible, transparent and accountable representation.

The proliferation of parliamentary monitoring organisations (PMOs hereinafter), the growing use of online tools re-using parliamentary information and the Declaration on Parliamentary

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[1] Dietrich D., European Public Sector Information Platform, Topic Report No. 2011 / 8, State of Play: Re-use of Parliamentary Data. It can be found at:
http://epsiplatform.eu/sites/default/files/Topic%20Report%20re-use%20of%20Parliamentary%20Data.pdf

Openness2 have put parliamentary data in focus and shaped an international demand in terms of its openness standards. Parliamentary data is particularly sensitive not only because of its potential of being re-used for commercial purposes, but also for its potential to contribute to political transparency and accountability, civic participation and also as a tool to curb corruption and bureaucracy.

1.2 Parliamentary data & PSI Directive

Parliamentary data is considered to be Public Sector Information (PSI) for the purposes of the EC Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information No. 2003/98/EC ("PSI Directive" hereinafter). Similar to other types of public sector information in the EU, its provision and re-use is directly governed by implementing domestic legislation, such as laws on access to information, public information resources, and also by statutes of parliaments, among others.

Current wording of the PSI Directive does not address a number of important aspects, such as licensing public sector information or the duty to proactively disclose government data. In the light of this, EU member states are free to provide public sector data formats, structures and principles of proactive disclosure as they see fit and are in principle free to regulate provision of public sector information beyond the minimum standards prescribed by the Directive. Many parliaments in the EU do just that and shape their provision of information policies in accordance to an international consensus on the main aspects of parliamentary data: 1) parliamentary data has to be provided in a structured way; 2) it has to be available in machine-readable formats and; 3) it should be openly licensed.

1.3 Open data and the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness

As some of the aspects mentioned above are not explicitly regulated by EU law, there have been other soft policy measures used to reach international consensus on key standards of parliamentary data. A key international document that addresses the abovementioned elements is the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness.3 The Declaration is a call to national parliaments by PMOs for an increased commitment to openness and to citizen engagement in parliamentary work. It addresses four main aspects:

1. Promoting a culture of openness by parliaments worldwide;
2. Making parliamentary information transparent;
3. Easing access to parliamentary information;
4. Enabling electronic communication of parliamentary information.

The Declaration has been supporting PMOs' efforts around the world to engage parliaments in conversation about transparency and accountability. Provision of parliamentary data is at the centre of the Declaration, which has served for a number of parliaments as a benchmark for their own openness policies. For instance, on 17 April 2013, the Mexican Senate endorsed the Declaration officially and will now base its openness policies on the principles of the

Declaration.[4] The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has also endorsed the Declaration and joined over a hundred organisations worldwide that have officially indicated support for the Declaration.

The strength of the Declaration lies in its flexibility as a soft policy measure. Since its launch back in 2011, it has been used by many organisations for a wide variety of purposes, for instance:

- It can serve as a reference point for parliaments seeking to establish minimum openness and transparency standards.[5] For instance, the Mexican Parliament used the Declaration as an impetus for establishing its own openness policies.
- It can serve as a reference point for parliaments seeking to encourage citizens' understanding of parliaments and their activities.
- It can serve as a basis for multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen parliamentary transparency and accountability. For instance, back in May 2013, a study group was organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) with the support of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) which reviewed the CPA's Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures in light of the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness and other standards frameworks for the democratic functioning and performance of parliaments that have been adopted in recent years.[6]

1.4 Is opening parliamentary data the extent of the matter?

While introducing open data policies within parliaments is of immense importance, they should not be targeting the opening up and publishing of data alone. Transparency and availability of open data is not the goal in itself. A scheme of parliamentary data provision and re-use could look like this:
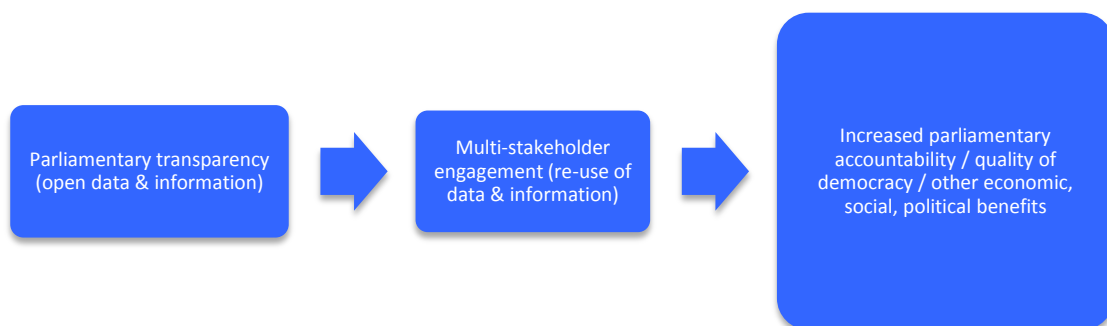

Table 1. Parliamentary data and its re-use.

The concept this logic suggests is simple: only effective re-use and multi-stakeholder engagement can make opening parliamentary data meaningful and only then can it lead to the ultimate goal – increased parliamentary accountability and improved quality of democracy. Therefore, parliamentary data provision policies should not be limited to creating information management systems and implementing open standards. It should also address issues, such as avenues for citizen engagement and encouraging re-use (see section 5 of this report).

2. Types of re-use and re-users of parliamentary data

2.1 How is parliamentary data being re-used?

The potential to re-use parliamentary data for commercial purposes is not as promising as with other types of data, such as scientific or transport data. However, there have been instances when parliamentary data was re-used for commercial purposes, such as www.parlementairemonitor.nl – a site that allows the Dutch Parliament to be tracked.

Parliamentary data is mostly re-used for political and civic purposes allowing organisations and individuals to monitor activities of parliaments and also engage with their work. The abovementioned report on re-use of parliamentary data by D. Dietrich suggests a solid overview of possible re-use of parliamentary data.[7] This aspect was also extensively covered by A. Mandelbaum in the study on Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations.[8]
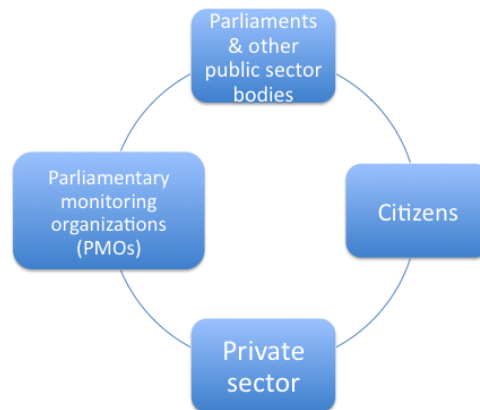
2.2 Re-users of parliamentary data

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer reveals that public trust of many parliaments and political parties in the EU is low for many years in a row.[9] While it is of paramount importance that parliaments do all within their power to ensure transparent and accessible legislative and administrative processes, re-use of parliamentary data should be encouraged by as many stakeholders as possible. Parliamentary data has been re-used by all major sectors:

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[7] Dietrich D., European Public Sector Information Platform, Topic Report No. 2011 / 8, State of Play: Re-use of Parliamentary Data.

[8] Mandelbaum, A., Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information: A Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations, 2011.

[9] http://www.transparency.org/research/gcb/overview

Table 2. Who re-uses parliamentary data?

The wide range of actors re-using parliamentary data includes journalists, academics, students, researchers, private companies, civil society organisations, think tanks and other stakeholders.

Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations (PMOs), most of which are civil society and non-governmental organisations, have been on the frontline of using parliamentary data and have been recognised for their important role in strengthening parliamentary transparency and accountability worldwide. As opposed to many parliaments, PMOs normally enjoy high public trust. Increasingly, parliaments recognise the benefit of collaboration with PMOs and there have been a number of instances when PMOs have become parliamentary partners in setting openness standards.

3. Open data & parliaments

3.1 Infrastructure for open parliament data

Opening parliamentary data is not about conducting an inventory on available data, converting it to open formats and publishing it online. Essentially, in order to effectively realise open parliamentary data, parliaments have to change the way they function. Undoubtedly, changing institutional functioning requires resources and understanding of the benefits of such actions. The infrastructure of effective open data strategy can encompass the following elements:

Table 3. Elements of open data strategy.
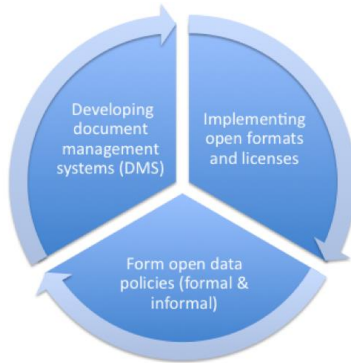
Suggested open parliamentary data strategy elements:
1. Developing document management systems;
2. Implementing open formats and licences;
3. Form open data policies (formal & informal).
Each strategy element is dependent on another. The provision of data in a structured way and implementation of open formats, for instance, are hardly possible without working document management systems. Long-term commitment to provide open data is hardly possible without policies and regulation governing management and provision of information.

3.2 Parliamentary practices with managing and providing data

Many parliaments, especially in higher income countries now have electronic document management systems (DMSs).[10] The World e-Parliament Report 2012[11] reveals that over 60 per cent of parliaments worldwide have DMSs for documents, such as committee meeting minutes, reports, hearings and plenary minutes, speeches, debates and votes. Many parliaments develop their own unique DMS. However, there is no need to reinvent the wheel and parliaments could potentially benefit from existing tools, such as Bungeni 2.0, which is a Java application that extends the OpenOffice.org word processor to support the mark up of parliamentary, legislative and judiciary documents in user-defined XML schemas. Currently the Akoma Ntoso[12] (see below) standard is supported by it.

Parliaments also innovate and experiment with open source tools. The European Parliament introduced the "AT4AM for All" which is the open source release of AT4AM, the web-based amendment authoring tool. The tool has been used in the European Parliament for more than two years and has managed more than 250 000 amendments. It has an easy-to-use user interface and makes the management of amendments simple and efficient.[13] The tool can be freely used by anyone.

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[10] A document management system (DMS) is a computer system (or set of computer programs) used to track and store electronic documents.

[11] The World e-Parliament Report 2012 documents the efforts of legislatures to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to support their constitutional functions. The Report is based on the Global Survey of ICT in Parliaments 2012 conducted by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament between February and May 2012, which is the third in a series of surveys that began in 2007. It can be found at: http://www.ictparliament.org/WePReport2012

[12] www.akomantoso.org

[13] www.at4am.org

The World e-Parliament Report reveals that, besides the promising fact that many parliaments have working document management systems, less than 20 % use XML standard for their data. Similar to DMSs, there are a number of open source tools that help parliaments adopt XML standard, for instance, Akoma Ntoso ("linked hearts" in the Akan language of West Africa), which defines a machine-readable set of simple technology-neutral electronic representations (in XML format) of parliamentary, legislative and judiciary documents.

Akoma Ntoso XML schemas make the structure and semantic components of relevant digital documents visible so as to support the creation of high-value information services to deliver the power of ICTs to increase efficiency and accountability in parliamentary, legislative and judiciary contexts.

Akoma Ntoso is an initiative of the Africa i-Parliament Action Plan[14] – a UN/DESA programme.[15]

For instance, the Italian Senate has recently used Akoma Ntoso as a way to adopt XML standards. The European Parliament is also using Akoma Ntoso for its legislative data.

The World e-Parliament Report suggests a number of benefits of using XML for parliamentary documents, such as:

- Simple exchange of documents with individuals and other institutions/organisations;
- More accurate search results;
- Linking among documents and simple re-use;
- Consistency in formatting;
- Ease of preparation;
- Preservation of documents;
- Access to citizens and other stakeholders.

As noted, introducing unified data standards within a parliament requires effort. The challenges outlined in the World e-Parliament Report include:

- Lack of staff knowledge and a need for training;
- Difficulty in finding or developing software for authoring and editing;
- Lack of financial resources;
- Complexity of using XML;
- User resistance;
- Lack of management support.

3.3 What data and information do parliaments possess?

Parliaments produce large volumes of data every working day. Understanding types of parliamentary data is of paramount importance. While most PMO efforts have centred around

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[14] www.parliaments.info
[15] http://www.un.org/esa/desa/

legislative processes (voting records, attendance to plenary sessions etc.), there is a huge amount of information and data that parliaments possess which is equally important in its potential to contribute to parliamentary monitoring and citizen engagement. This part of the report will address the question of what data most parliaments possess and will give key examples of re-use of different data types.

3.4 International efforts to benchmark parliamentary openness standards

There have been a number of international efforts to establish a standard as to what data parliaments should make available. Perhaps the most successful attempt up to now was the Regional Index of Parliamentary Transparency in Latin America,[16] assessing parliamentary transparency in four areas using 62 indicators. It was particularly successful in encouraging the parliaments concerned to open up more data, as they were (and still are) competing against each other regionally.

Table 4. Example of scoring by the Regional Index of Parliamentary Transparency.

	REFERENTE	ARGENTINA	CHILE	COLOMBIA	MÉXICO	PERÚ						
Marco Normativo	6	5.5	5.5	5.5	6.0	4.5						
Transparencia Normativa	8	1.0	5.0	1.0	4.0	5.5						
Reglamentación del cabildeo	3	0.0	0.0	3.0	2.0	3.0						
Total	17	6.5	10.5	9.5	12.0	13.0						

This is an example of how the Regional Index of Parliamentary Transparency scores different parliaments in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru based on 62 indicators of parliamentary openness. It addresses four different areas: 1) Normative framework for transparency; 2) Legislative transparency; 3) Budget and administration transparency; 4) Citizen engagement.

Another study focusing on parliamentary transparency was the plea for Open Parliaments in the Black Sea Region, assessing parliaments on mutually agreed criteria of openness.[17] It is a study elaborating concrete areas concerning the perception of transparency and access to information in four parliaments in Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova and Romania.

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[16] The first Index can be found at:
http://www.bibliocivica.org/images/d/d9/Regional_Index_of_Parliament_Transparency.pdf
[17] A plea for Open Parliaments in the Black Sea Region: http://www.ipp.ro/eng/pagini/a-plea-for-open-parliaments-in-the-black.php

3.5 Open parliamentary data policies

The starting point of any of the mentioned indexes and also the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness is a recommendation for parliaments to adopt separate policies on transparency, openness, access to information and provision of open data. Strong reasoning for such a recommendation is suggested by Lukas Obholzer in his policy paper: A call to members of the European Parliament; take transparency seriously and enact the 'legislative footprint'.[18]

The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness suggests that enacted policies should:

•   Ensure the proactive dissemination of parliamentary information;
•   Include the regulation of the formats in which the parliamentary information will be published;
•   Be publicly available and also specify terms for their periodic review to take advantage of technological innovations and evolving good practices.

In addition, there have been a number of efforts to provide recommendations for open parliament data policies, such as:

•   The Sunlight Foundation's [Guidelines for Open Data Policies](link);[19]
•   The Open House Project's [Themes for Legislative Information Publication](link);[20]
•   The Open Knowledge Foundation's [Open Definition](link);[21]
•   Section on the principles of open government data at [Open Government Data](link) by Joshua Tauberer.[22]

4. What data do parliaments possess?

The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness defines parliamentary information in the following manner:

"Parliamentary information includes information about parliament's roles and functions, and information generated throughout the legislative process, including the text of introduced legislation and amendments, votes, the parliamentary agenda and schedule, records of plenary and committee proceedings, historical information, and all other information that forms a part of the parliamentary record, such as reports created for or by parliament. Parliament shall provide information on the management and administration of parliament, parliamentary staff, and comprehensive and detailed parliamentary budget information. Parliament shall provide information about the backgrounds, activities and affairs of members, including

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[18] Obholzer, Lukas, *A call to members of the European Parliament; take transparency seriously and enact the 'legislative footprint'. CEPS Policy Brief No. 256, October 2011.* http://aei.pitt.edu/32965/

[19] http://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/opendata/
[20] http://www.theopenhouseproject.com/2007/02/12/themes-for-legislative-information-publication/
[21] http://opendefinition.org/okd/
[22] http://opengovdata.io/
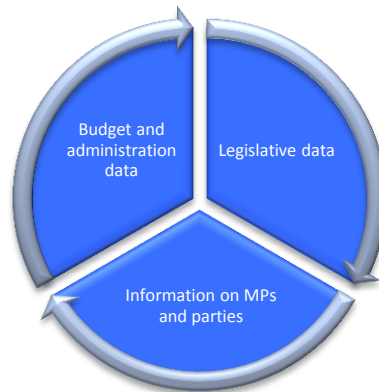
sufficient information for citizens to make informed judgments regarding their integrity and probity, and potential conflicts of interest."

Drawing on previous efforts to benchmark the standards of parliamentary transparency, the data and information parliaments possess can be split into three main categories:

Table 5. Categories of parliamentary data.

Categories of parliamentary data:

- Information about MPs and parties;
- Legislative data;
- Budget & administration management data.

4.1 Information on MPs and political parties

Monitoring individual MPs has been the very first priority focus for the majority of parliamentary monitoring organisations. Presenting sufficient information on individual MPs and political parties is important for a number of reasons. It helps voters know who their representatives are and it encourages a culture of accountability, putting MPs and political parties in a position of more effective public scrutiny. The most relevant details on MPs include:

- Educational and professional background information;

- Personal information (marital status, age, children);

- Contact information (email/telephone/mailing address);

- Party affiliation;

- Statistics on parliamentary performance;

- List of campaign contributors and sponsors;

- Parliamentary positions (including previous posts);

- Career accomplishments;

- Asset and interest declarations;

- Links to other sources of information (blogs);

The most important data on political parties includes:

- Detailed budgetary information;
- Financial (income and expenditure) and activity reports;
- List of members and affiliations;
- List of donors and political contributors;
- Party members' interest and asset declarations.

A large number of parliamentary monitoring tools online have been focusing on re-using information on MPs and political parties. According to the PMO study,[23] more than 80 % of parliamentary monitoring organisations re-use this type of information in one way or another. One of the most successful examples, overseeing nearly 7 000 visitors a day and handling more than 80 % of MP/citizen questions in Germany, is www.abgeordnetenwatch.de which contains information on German Bundestag MPs and parties, and provides an easy avenue for communication with MPs.

Example of re-use: www.abgeordnetenwatch.de

Parliament Watch enables citizens to:

- Question members of parliament in a public environment;
- Find out about the voting record of members of parliament;
- Follow up on promises made (all questions and answers are saved forever);
- Learn about any additional earnings of members of parliament.

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[23] Mandelbaum, A., Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information: A Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations, 2011.

4.2 Legislative data

As legislating is the primary parliamentary function, access to data related to legislative processes within parliaments should be at the top of the priority list. Most parliaments in the EU provide such information on their websites. However, as Andrew Mandelbaum puts it in the study: Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations:

"For parliaments, developing effective tools for informing citizens about the status of legislation and events surrounding its consideration remains a challenge. The reasons are varied, with some parliaments lacking the capacity or resources to create and maintain legislative tracking software, and others lacking the political will to open up the process to citizens. Often, a number of these challenges are in play simultaneously, and the timing and release of legislative information – at least components that are not required explicitly by law – can become political decisions."

4.2.1 Legislative data within the European Union

A number of EU countries still do not provide legislative texts in machine-readable formats or sometimes even charge for such data. For an in-depth overview of legislative data provision in EU member states, refer to the EU Publication Office's Guide to the legal gazettes and other official information sources in the European Union and the European Free Trade Association.[24]

European integration shapes a demand for better access to legislation throughout the Union. The Publications Office of the European Union created the experimental N-Lex[25] website as a single access point with a common search interface to national legislation. N-Lex was launched in April 2006. As interest in the project has grown, the number of national sites has risen from 4 at the outset to 23 today – with the long-term goal to include all EU countries. The site was developed jointly by the EU Publications Office and EU governments. Still a pilot project, N-Lex requires considerable on-going collaboration on both sides, to create a stable, standardised system.

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[24]

http://circa.europa.eu/irc/opoce/ojf/info/data/prod/data/pdf/AccessToLegislationInEuropeGUIDE2009.pdf
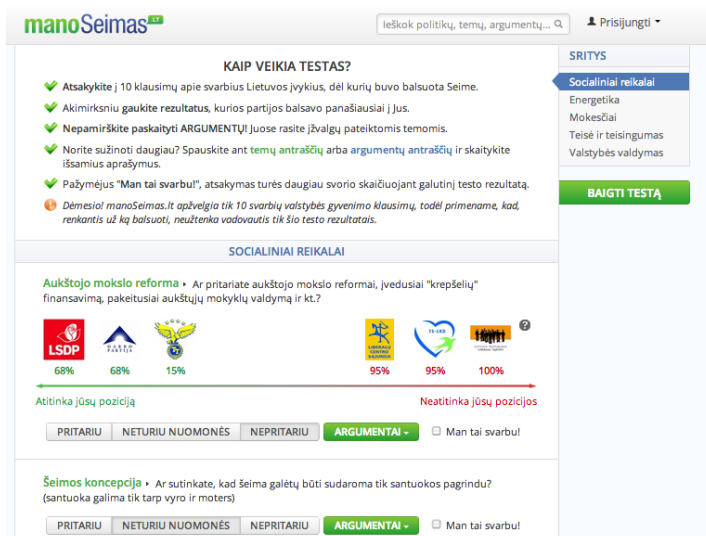[25] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/

4.2.2 Legislative data

Legislative data includes large volumes of data beyond legislation texts. In particular, legislative processes and related data can include the following:

- Text of laws, bills and complementing documents;
- Plenary sessions of the parliament and daily order (prior announcements);
- Publication of the constitution of the committees and their agendas;
- Plenary attendance;
- Committee attendance;
- Nominal voting in the plenary;
- Publication of the voting results in the committee sessions;
- Publication of the stenographic versions of the plenary sessions;
- Publication of the stenographic versions of the committees;
- Publication and registration of legislators' gifts;
- Publication of information regarding trips of legislators inside and outside the country.

Example of re-use: www.manoseimas.lt (my parliament)

The site aims to provide Lithuanians with easy access to the voting record of Lithuanian MPs. It allows voters to examine in a simple manner how political parties and individual parliamentarians voted on various issues over the past four years. The website also prompts its visitors to study the issues that have been voted on in greater depth by presenting arguments for and against such topics as higher education reform or internet voting. People can also test themselves by indicating how they would have voted on a particular issue and then see which party's voting record on featured issues corresponds with their position.

4.3 Budget and administrative management – related data

Parliamentary budget execution often comes to the fore during political scandals, therefore transparency concerning budgets and their execution is critical to ensuring trust in parliaments.

More data on parliamentary budgets and, specifically, expenses lead to increased transparency, accountability and effectiveness. The UK parliamentary expenses scandal[26] aroused widespread anger among the UK public towards MPs and a drop in confidence in the British Parliament. It resulted in a large number of resignations, sackings, de-selections and retirement announcements, together with public apologies and the repayment of expenses. Several members or former members of the House of Commons, and members of the House of Lords, were prosecuted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Most of the information that led to the exposure of scandalous parliamentary expenses was acquired by way of information requests.

Proactive disclosure of such information and data can help control parliament and hold MPs to account for wider audiences. It also helps answer questions such as, how much does my parliament cost me every year or how much does my elected MP earn and spend?

The most important parliamentary data on budgets and their execution, as well as on administrative management includes:

- Publication of the parliamentary budget;
- Publication of the budget execution of the parliamentary groups;
- Reports of parliamentary budget execution;
- Publication of parliamentary expenditure;
- Publication of internal and external audits of the parliament;
- Publication of the legislators' remunerations and other compensations;
- Publication of the parliament's organisation structure;
- Publication of the legislators' trips inside and outside the country, for work motives;
- Publication of public procurement calls, list of participants, list of suppliers, list of the selected suppliers for the acquisition of goods and services, whether or not they are put out to tender;
- Publication of public procurement calls for administrative charges and the number of parliamentary personnel (unionised, temporary, of trust with or without compensations, with honorary and of civil service of career).

[26] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1248648/MP-expenses-Shaming-389-greedy-politicians-went-far.html

Expenses

*Figures in brackets are ranks. Data from parliament.uk (source). Read **2004/05 – 2008/09 and 1st quarter 2009/10 receipts.***

Type	2008/09 (ranking out of 647)	2007/08 (ranking out of 645)	2006/07 (ranking out of 645)	2005/06	2004/05 (ranking out of 659)	2003/04 (ranking out of 658)	2002/03 (ranking out of 657)	2001/02 (ranking out of 657)
Staying away from main home	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
London costs	£2,916 (joint 1st with 49 others)	£2,812 (joint 1st with 47 others)	£2,712 (joint 1st with 46 others)	£2,613	£1,618 (joint 1st with 118 others)	£1,574 (joint 1st with 101 others)	£1,527 (joint 1st with 101 others)	£1,227 (joint 1st with 81 others)
Office running costs	£14,225 (460th)	£20,178 (234th)	£20,306 (334th)	£20,225	£19,323 (joint 99th with 1 other)	£18,789 (joint 246th with 3 others)	£18,233 (joint 185th with 7 others)	£13,965 (380th)
Staffing costs	£105,341 (48th)	£90,325 (208th)	£81,807 (408th)	£83,818	£83,648 (26th)	£68,114 (223rd)	£72,310 (joint 1st with 23 others)	£46,812 (289th)
Communications Allowance	£12,233 (85th)	£7,948 (334th)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Members' Travel	£234 (635th)[1]	£1,789 (593rd)[2]	£2,415 (574th)[3]	£3,466	£4,064 (564th)	£4,761 (535th)	£4,219 (555th)	£4,581 (487th)
Members' Staff Travel	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

*Example: re-use of budget data – www.theyworkforyou.com*

The UK-based website www.theyworkforyou.com shows the detailed expenses of particular MPs, such as travel expenses, allowances, stationery, staffing costs, etc.

5. Citizen participation

While access to data and information is at the heart of open, transparent and accountable parliaments, publishing open data online is not sufficient when speaking about effective communication between parliaments and citizens. As suggested by the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, parliaments should ensure that citizens have legal recourse to enforce their right to access parliamentary information.

The Hansard Society suggests a simple scheme for how a cycle of citizen engagement could look:

Table 6. Cycle of citizen engagement.
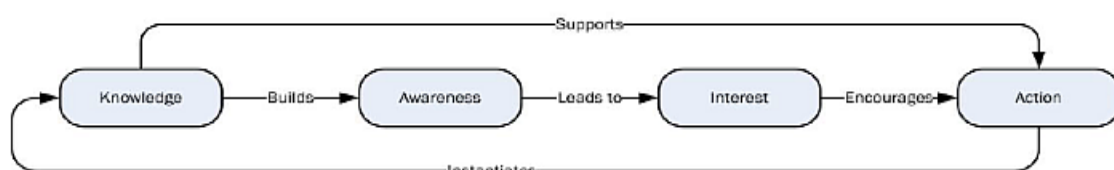
Although the Society's research on how to engage more effectively with hard to reach groups[27] focused on UK society, it suggest a solid systemic picture of how parliaments should approach the issue of people engagement.

Most EU parliaments have created their own avenues for access to information. Also, the European Parliament has created an avenue for citizens to search for documents. It has established an electronic Register of Documents allowing citizens to search documents drawn up or received by the European Parliament.

Example: European Parliament's Register of Documents.
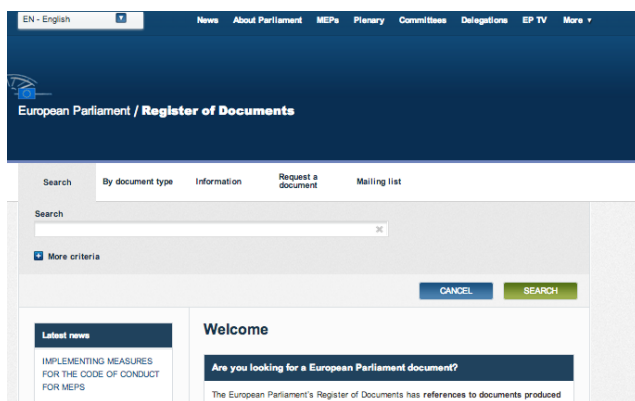
The European Parliament's Register of Documents has references to documents produced or received by the European Parliament since 3 December 2001, the date on which Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 came into effect. The public has direct access to the vast majority of these documents. Electronic access is free and no justification is necessary.

Often, avenues created by other stakeholders experience broader success in terms of popularity than those initiated by parliaments. One of the more successful examples is the Brazilian project, e-Democracia.

Example: Brazilian e-Democracia project.

Relying on the use of social media, combined with offline legislative events (e.g., committee hearings, conferences), the initiative is intended to reach a broad segment of the public, including citizens, parliamentarians, civil servants, researchers, non-governmental organisations and interest groups. The main goal is to permit easier access to the decision-making process by citizens who are not associated with strong interest groups or corporations that usually lobby for access to the centre of power in Brasilia where the national government is located.

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[27] The Hansard Society, Connecting Citizens to Parliament: How Parliament can engage more effectively with hard to reach groups:
http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2011/09/19/connecting-citizens-to-parliament.aspx

6. Summary and recommendations

As representative bodies of government, parliaments have a duty to benchmark openness standards to other institutions and should pay particular attention to the transparency of their work and the accountability of their members. However, publishing parliamentary data in a structured way, in machine-readable, openly licensed formats is not enough to effectively strengthen good governance on the one hand and civic engagement on the other. It is also important to engage in multi-stakeholder conversations about parliamentary openness, create avenues for others to use the data and educate citizens on parliamentary functions.

When considering open data strategies, parliaments should at least touch upon these aspects:

- Creating an effective and efficient document management system;
- Implementing open standards and open licensing;
- Creating working open data policies.

Parliaments are not best positioned for technological inventions and limited resources should be allocated for adoption and implementation of existing open source tools, standards and policy recommendations. An effort has been made on an international level to support parliaments on their way to providing more parliamentary information and creating effective open data policies.

There has also been a solid international effort to benchmark the most important parliamentary data that parliaments should make available. There are three main groups of parliamentary information:

- Information on MPs and political parties;
- Legislative information;
- Budget and administrative management information.

As noted, data falling within the scope of these categories and beyond should be provided in a structured way, in machine-readable formats (XML, for instance) and should also be openly licensed.

As the PSI Directive does not cover certain aspects, such as a principle for proactive disclosure or licensing of public sector information, there have been other soft policy measures created that have been widely used in the last two years – the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, for instance. The Declaration can be used by stakeholders for a large number of purposes:

- It can serve as a reference point for parliaments seeking to establish minimum openness and transparency standards;
- It can serve as a reference point for parliaments seeking to encourage citizen understanding of parliaments and their activities;
- It can serve as a reference point for PMOs to monitor parliaments.

Crucially, the Declaration provides fertile ground for the most important aspect of development for opening up parliamentary data nationally and internationally, that is, multi-stakeholder collaboration and cooperation to improve political transparency, parliamentary accountability and civic engagement.

About the author

Karolis Granickas works for Transparency International's Lithuanian Chapter. He works on people engagement using ICT and coordinates the Chapter's digital initiatives such as www.manoseimas.lt (parliamentary monitoring tool) and www.parasykjiems.lt (freedom of information tool), among others. He also actively promotes open government data in Lithuania and has overseen the solid growth of an open data community in Lithuania. Karolis has an LLB in International Law from Westminster University, London, and an LLM in EU Law from Maastricht University, The Netherlands.

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