



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

“The Potential of Open Data in Enhancing Transparency and Accountability during the COVID-19 Crisis”

Vienna, ZOOM meeting, 22 July 2020

Opening Remarks

Ambassador Vuk Žugić,

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Dear Guest Speakers, Delegates, Colleagues,

I am pleased to welcome you to today’s webinar on open data organized by my Office following the series of previous webinars dedicated to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today we intend to look closer at the topic of transparency and open data and we will try, together with our distinguished guest speakers, to elaborate more extensively on the role of open data as a tool for fighting corruption, as well as on the potential role that the OSCE could play. Transparency and digitalization as part of good economic governance are significant areas of our work. We have been tasked by our participating States to explore the opportunities for co-operation with national, regional and international initiatives aimed at promoting the principles of transparency, citizen participation and accountability. This is a good opportunity, as well, to reiterate once again our strong commitment in these areas considering their importance in fighting corruption, improving the business climate and strengthening public institutions and rule of law in general.

In order for the open government reforms to take place, we have to be aware that full potential can be reached only through the participation of all levels of government as well as independent institutions. The open data principles should be primarily considered as a much wider range of internal and external policy objectives. The public sector possesses a wide spectrum of information across many areas such as economic data, education, tourism, etc. There is an enormous potential in the use of this data for improving economies, strengthening public trust and accountability, but also in dealing with crises and their consequences. Countries around the world are facing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, whose proportions, have not been experienced in the modern world before; the need for openness, transparency and accountability of institutions and governments have, similarly, never been more important than now. Wherever we look, there is a high demand for data in order to support the crisis response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Promoting transparency and the crucial role of innovation as the vital component of our efforts should be particularly emphasized. New technologies in the form of websites, online platforms and applications have been helpful in accessing the official information, monitoring and

reporting of corruption, monitoring the efficiency and integrity of social services and making the information easily available to all stakeholders. Over the past couple of years, governments from all around the OSCE area have been able to launch an increasing number of open e-government initiatives to enhance the efficiency and transparency of public administration and improve their interaction with the citizens. These efforts need to be continued and strengthened, as the new technologies and innovation are the mechanisms that will enable us to improve transparency and accountability in the public sector.

Efficient, accessible, accountable, and transparent public service delivery is a key component in building a functioning public sector, and this is particularly important when we are talking about procurement procedures.

On the other hand, freedom of information and access to information fosters openness and accountability in public policy and procurement. It is obvious that multi-stakeholder approach and civil society organizations can and should support oversight processes and limit opportunities for corruption at all levels.

Dear participants,

Before concluding, let me use this opportunity to inform you again that the Office is successfully implementing an extra-budgetary project entitled '*Promoting Good Governance and Enhancing Anti—corruption Efforts in the OSCE Area through the Use of Open Data and New Digital Technologies*' in close co-operation with other partner organizations. We are currently working to expand the scope of the project to make it more relevant during the COVID-19 crisis. The OSCE is well positioned to address this issue and will continue assisting participating States in fighting and preventing corruption, including through our assistance in implementing their open data commitments.

Thank you for your participation once again. I am happy to give floor back to Iris Pilika, Programme Officer in the Economic Governance Unit who will moderate the discussions today.