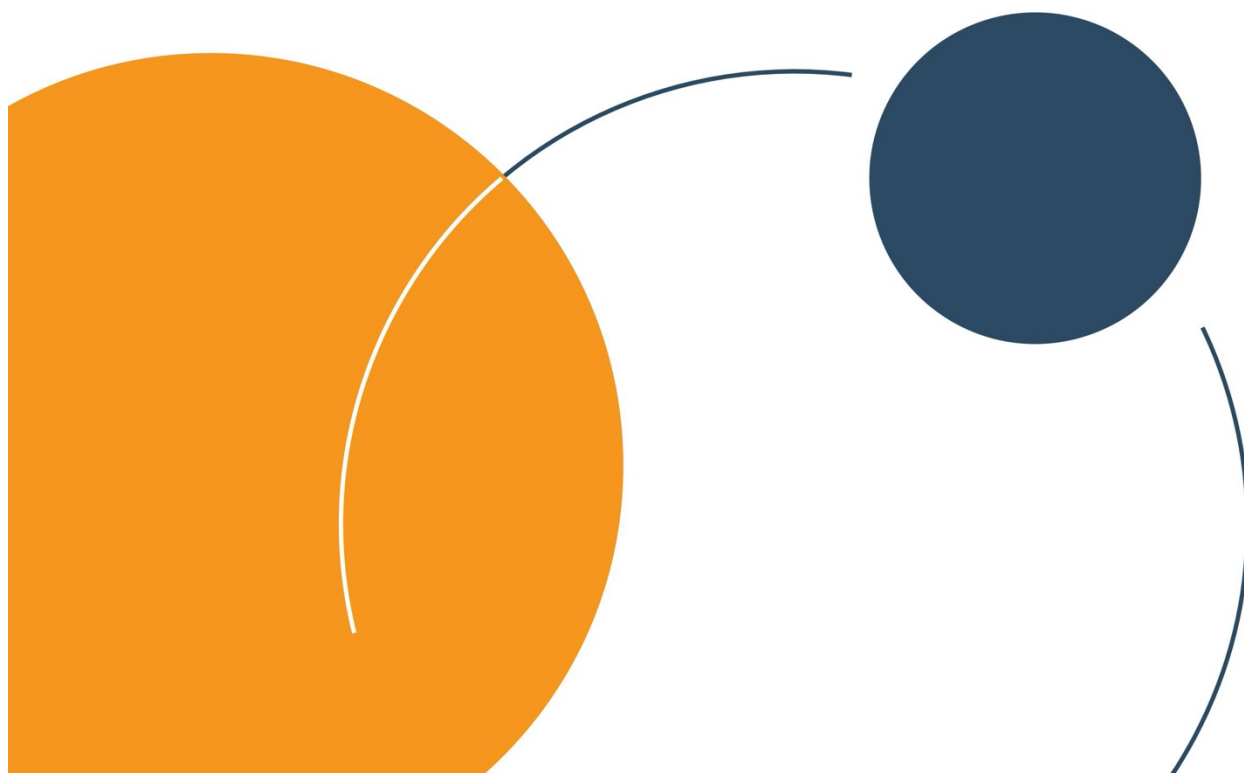


**OPENNESS
OF THE EXECUTIVE POWER
IN SERBIA AND IN THE REGION
2018**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE



OPENNESS OF THE EXECUTIVE POWER IN THE REGION AND IN SERBIA IN 2018

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CURRENT STATUS



**National Endowment
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Introduction

In cooperation with partners from the regional network NGO “ActionSEE”, the Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) prepared the index of openness of institutions in which we analyse a level of transparency, openness and accountability of the executive power in the Western Balkans region.

This proposal is a result of a detailed research, based on a scientific methodology undertaken by the ActionSEE members during the previous months. The aim of the entire research is to provide a thorough overview of the status in the aforesaid areas and to contribute to the quality of reforms in the work of the public administration, influence the good governance principle and help the very institutions to efficiently implement them. We are of the opinion that these are the aims that we share with the institutions comprised in this research.

The proposal for practical policies with concomitant analyses is the second document of this type. Last year too, having carried out the research, the network members prepared the recommendations for the improvement of the openness of the government institutions.

This document is the third in a row in which we review the state of openness of institutions and recommendations for improvement. After the first research that was done in 2016, we have started to improve and adapt the research methodology and its indicators, based on our knowledge on the findings and results of monitoring. This year's research has been carried out on the basis of indicators that will enable a precise picture of how many executive authorities have been working to improve their openness over the past year.

The policy of openness must be the policy of all governments in the region, it must be defined as all other important policies and should not be the result of a current decision or current mood of the authorities. Each country in the region has its own specific, political conditions in which it develops its openness, but there can be noticeable room for joint regional action to improve the status.

We remain open to all suggestions, good willed criticism and debates about our practical policies proposal.

Openness of the Executive Power in the Region

The executive authorities in the region meet on average 48.41% of openness criteria. Although this result represents a slight improvement of about 5% compared to the previous research, there are not many reasons for satisfaction. An increase in the level of openness is most commonly seen as an endorsement by individual authorities in the countries of the region, and not as a rule of the system of government. The reason for this lies in the lack of clear policies that preserve the value of openness and, above all, rules and sanctions in case of their failure to comply.

The research has once again confirmed that the institutions of executive power are more open as we are moving towards higher organizational levels of government. Thus, governments in the region fulfil on average 63.62% of openness indicators, line ministries 50.58% and state administration bodies 32.22% . Inequality has been observed within the group of institutions itself, which testifies that the issue of openness in principle depends on the will or commitment of the person who is the head of that institution, and not the developed practices and regulations of the state. Such a situation calls into question the good practice recognized by individual institutions in situations where personal changes occur.

It is to be expected that the presence of international initiatives in the countries of the region, such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP), will contribute to the development of the openness of institutions of executive power. The commitment and engagement of the countries of the region to this initiative is at a different level, which also testifies about the readiness of governments to implement and promote standards of openness and accountability.

Such standards also deserve the attention of the European Union (EU), bearing in mind that it is necessary to take place in parallel with other reforms that the state is pursuing on the road to the EU. In the recent progress reports, numerous problems are highlighted in the field of transparency, starting from the inconsistent application of the law on free access to information to insufficient transparency of the budget and the public procurement system.

All countries in the region should devote themselves to promoting the legally guaranteed proactive access to information, since no body should have a monopoly on information of public importance that belongs to citizens. Also, it is necessary to plan and develop openness policies that should be based on legal and strategic documents of the state. This would ultimately represent the crown of the multi-year process and the efforts of domestic and international actors in the "opening up" of state administration.

In order to contribute to the establishment of such a system, below are some of the key shortcomings that the countries of the region have to eliminate in order to ensure openness in the work of the public administration.

Organizational and financial transparency

The principle of proactive access to information is not being applied satisfactorily in the institutions of executive power in the region.

Citizens of the region continue to find difficult information about what institutions do and how they plan

and spend their funds. The problems are present in terms of transparency of the budget, final accounts and public procurement procedures. Also, there are rare institutions in the region that publish their periodical financial reports.

The situation is not satisfactory in terms of publishing programs and work reports, although these are the basic documents through which institutions should provide citizens with an idea of what they are planning to do and what they did during the year. The practice of compiling and publishing semi-annual work reports appears as an exception in a very small proportion of institutions.

Transparency of the decision-making process

Most of the countries in the region did not ensure the transparency of government sessions. Although transcripts should be published according to transparency standards as well as there should be video transmission from sessions, most governments do not publish even the minutes and materials from the sessions. Thus, citizens can be informed about the activities of the largest number of regional governments only on the basis of statements issued by governments after sessions. Such a practice must be changed urgently, as denial of information about key policies, that the government is planning, directly diminishes the ability of citizens to control the ones they have chosen and who should be responsible for their activities. A particular problem is the unjustifiable classification of documents with the mark of secrecy.

Accessibility and communication with citizens

Most websites of executive authorities are regularly updated with news and current affairs. However, significant space for improvement is noted for the organization and content administration. Governments of most countries have obsolete internet sites that need to be reconstructed in line with the development of modern information and communication solutions.

The largest number of organs is currently very far from the standard that prescribes "three clicks to the desired information" on the website. Publishing data in open data format¹ is still not a practice in the region.

Although most governments in the region have established an e-government system, it has not been sufficiently implemented in practice. The usefulness of the many services offered through these portals is questionable due to their insufficient use. Although governments should make efforts to implement eGovernment promotion campaigns, a significant number of websites do not even have a banner or instruction on how to use this portal. Also, the eGovernment system in the region does not provide local services that would be important for improving the daily functioning of citizens.

¹ Open data is data structured in computer understandable format, which gives the possibility of free use and re-use.

The models of interaction with citizens are still dominated by conventional ways of communication. Less than half of the executive authorities have and regularly use social networks as a means of informing and communicating with citizens.

Policy Planning and Coordination

Governments in the region have yet to establish procedures and practices for better planning and coordination of their policies, as well as providing mechanisms through which citizens can clearly monitor their implementation.

Governments in the region generally do not have the practice of planning public policies in the long run in the form of a program of work. Executive authorities are also not sufficiently devoted to measuring the quality and impact of their work, or are rare institutions that have told us to use performance indicators when preparing their programs and work reports.

Openness of the Executive Power in Serbia

The openness of the public administration, that includes its transparency and accessibility to citizens and as well as the opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making, creation of policies and regulations is one of the main principles of the public administration reform in Serbia. The progress in the level of the public administration openness is a result of the European Union integration process established as one of the main preconditions for the EU accession. Nevertheless, deficiencies and problems still persist, whilst the stagnation if not backwardness dominates compared to the advancement in this area. Stagnation and backwardness have been identified while measuring the government openness in 2018. We would like to point out that it is necessary to invest further efforts to achieve full openness of the public administration in Serbia.

By monitoring the executive institutions work in 2018 in Serbia, we can conclude that the recorded problems and challenges are identical to those noted in 2017, but that they have become more complex in the meantime. The executive institutions openness index (the Government, ministries, the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and other executive bodies) is 42%, which is 6% lower than 2017. The executive institutions openness indicates an unequal practices in the conduct and the respect of regulations governing the issues of transparency, accessibility, integrity and efficiency by all bodies, as well as significant differences in the degree of fulfilment of indicators.

The **transparency** of institutions is positively influenced by the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and the application of the Law on free Access to Information of Public Importance. The Law stipulates the obligation for government bodies to publish an Information Booklet on their Work at least once a year and to inform the public about general data about the work, in order to contribute to the respect of proactive transparency principles. Nonetheless, the problem of non-compliance of the Information Booklets with the Guidelines for Publishing Information Booklets continues to restrict the public access to information. Furthermore, the format currently used for Information Booklets publishing (Word and/or PDF), as well as the updating system cause a difficult control over the application and a limited ability to search and compare the information.

In comparison to the access to organisational information, the access to information about public procurements and budgets is at lower level in 2018, which shows the tendency of the executive power to hide the information about economic affairs and management of public resources from the public.

The issue regarding the openness of the public administration has been recognised as an important preventive mechanism within the anti-corruption policies. The implementation of the anti-corruption legislature contributed to the higher access to sets of information about public officials, such as the public officials' property cards, income and sources of income, which can be found at the Anti-Corruption Agency's website in an organised and structured form. Nonetheless, the individual efforts made by the anti-corruption institutions and the fulfilment of the anti-corruption measures in that segment (such as the adoption of integrity plans) lack in practice. The result of monitoring of all the said segments is a score realised in the **integrity** indicator fulfilment.

Although there is a number of mechanisms aiming to attain the openness, one of the most frequent ones are public consultations with the interested public. The gaps in communication and **interaction with citizens** were noticed in practice within some institutions. Legislation process improvements, aiming to include citizens in the public policies creation, have been continually repeated in a series of documents adopted in the previous period. However, civil society participation in creation of public policies is more the exception than the rule. It is partly the consequence of the lack of systemic approach to the civil society engagement in policy development, as the space that national institutions give to civil society and the consultation with civil society remain mainly formal and do not influence the decision-makers, but rather serve to satisfy basic standards. It is important to highlight that in 2018 only 5 out of 18 ministries has provided their answers to research questionnaire, in comparison to 2017 when their answers submitted 11 ministries.

Executive institutions show very low level of **efficiency**. Such score can be linked to the absence of an organised planning system and public policies governing systems in the Republic of Serbia and to the lack of an efficient mechanism aiming to undertake and follow-up the implementation of public policies. Our research team expects that this situation shall change from 2018 on, having in mind that during this year a set of documents regarding a planned system of creating and managing the policies and decision-making has been adopted.

1. The Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

The Government of the Republic of Serbia (National Government) and the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Province Government) fulfil 53% of indicators, which is 4% lower than in 2017 (57%). The National Government's results is somewhat better than Province's with 56% in comparison to 50%. However, both institutions almost equally backslided in their openness, by having in mind that the National Government's results is for 5% lower, while the Province's is for 3% lower, than in 2017.

The total **transparency** is 49%, which is somewhat lower than in 2017 (52%). The most questionable aspect in the area of transparency remains the preparation and publishing of the annual budget. Despite the fact that National Government (45%) made better result than the Province's (34%) result, it should be underlined that in 2018, as in many years before, the Government of Serbia failed to adopt the proposal of the law on the state budget on time. Instead on 1st of November 2018, the Government adopted the proposal with the delay of 20 days, limiting again the time for MPs to consider this document properly before its adoption in the Parliament.

Additionally, although the Budget System Law stipulates the obligation to publish the budget and the annual financial statements on the website of each public resources beneficiary, this obligation was partially fulfilled only by the National Government. The National Government publishes budgets and annual financial statements that are available for the last two years. However, like last year, it is impossible to find such information on the Province Government website. There is a website "Transparency of the

budget of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina” where budgets for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 have been published, as well as annual financial statements for the period from 2004 to 2018, but is not well linked to the Provincial Government website. Civil budget is not prepared by any other institutions, whereas the principles of transparency and participation in the preparation of the budget are not established by positive legislation.

Both National and Province Governments fulfil 62% of indicators set in the area of *public procurement*, which is the area in which both institutions score **significant backsliding** of 10% in comparison to 2017. Legal framework for public procurement procedures is defined by the Public Procurement Law. The Public Procurement Portal has been established so that citizens can use it as a research tool. Public authorities are obliged to publish bids and agreements with suppliers on the Public Procurement Portal and on their websites. The National Government still fails to publish the plans for public procurement. In comparison to year 2017, it is not possible to find public calls for submission of tender documents for low value bids undertaken in 2018, as well as decisions on contracts.

Both National and Province Governments achieve the same result in the area of publishing of *organisational information* as in 2017. Their total score is 47%. The annual reports on the work remain inaccessible on the websites of the National Government and the General Secretariat. These documents were impossible to find for three previous years. When these information were being gathered, the calendar of the National Government sessions was unavailable, as well as materials and minutes from sessions. When it comes to the Provincial Government, it was impossible to find a legal frame establishing and regulating its work, the annual work plan and reports on the work, nor agendas, materials, transcripts and decisions adopted at sessions. Furthermore, both governments continued with their practice not to broadcast their sessions.

The total **accessibility** in 2018 (61%) is lower in relation to 2017 (64%). For the second consecutive year, the National Government (67%) had a better result than the Province Government (55%). The Law on Public Administration stipulates the obligation for Ministries and special organisations to undertake public debates “in the procedure of preparation of a law which essentially changes the legal regime in one field or which regulates issues of particular relevance for public”. The conduct of public debate in the preparation of a law shall be regulated in detail by the Rules of Procedure of the Government of Serbia. Nevertheless, the Law on Public Administration does not define this issue for the Province Government, whereby the participation of citizens is not the object of the Law on Establishing the Competences of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, either.

In Serbia in 2018 was adopted the Planning System Law. However, bylaws that are essential for implementation of this law regarding early inclusion of the public in the process of developing policy documents, came into force only in February 2019. When it comes to non-binding legal acts, the National Government adopted in 2014 Guidelines for civil society organisations’ participation in the preparing of regulations and recommendations aiming towards all levels of power: central, provincial and local. Nonetheless, these Guidelines did not have any effect in practice due to their non-binding character. It is also worth mentioning that the Serbian Government started to develop one additional non-binding document – *Guidelines for Participation of the Civil Society in Working Groups for Developing Policy Documents Proposals*. Final consultations on this document were held in May 2019.

National Government fulfilled 64% of indicators when it comes to *everyday interaction with citizens*, which is twice as higher than the Provincial Government (31%). The E-Administration Portal contributes to a better interaction with citizens. However, a Twitter account of the Province Government was opened in 2013, but to this day there have been no tweets from that account. On the other hand, the Government of Serbia has got a Twitter account that is regularly updated. Nevertheless, neither the National, nor the Provincial Governments have a strategy for the improvement of civil servants' competences for communication with the public via modern channels of communication.

Regarding the participation and interaction with citizens on the state and provincial level, both governments fulfil a significant percentage of indicators when it comes to the *access to information of public importance*. In 2018, the National and the Provincial Governments realised almost equal result and fulfilled 73% of indicators. Such a high score emanates from provisions of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance and from the practice of publishing and keeping up-to-date the Information Booklet on the Work. However, the results of the application of the Law often lack in practice, while both institutions still lack proactivity. Also, they still fail to publish the data in an open format. Moreover, the National Government has not proceeded for eight years in a row in a single case when the Commissioner asked for assistance in acting of his decisions, in accordance with article 28 of the Law. In this way, the Government neglects but also undermines the role and the importance of the Commissioner, and of all independent institutions that control the respect of human rights and good governance principle in the work of the state bodies.

As far as the area of **integrity** is concerned, both institutions fulfil 73%, which is almost the same as in 2017. It can be concluded that such a high score in fulfilment of indicators in this area is achieved by the National and Provincial Governments because they fulfilled a set of standards in the area of *prevention of conflicts of interest*. What contributes to this result is the fact that data such as the public officials' property cards, income and sources of income can be found at the Anti-Corruption Agency's website in an organised and structured form. The Anti-Corruption Agency also publishes a gift catalogue. At the end, legal framework foresees sanctions in case of giving false/incomplete information as well as in case of non-respect of deadlines stipulated for submission of all information and data.

On the other hand, the high result comes from the fact that in Autumn 2018, Republic of Serbia has finally adopted the Law on Lobbying.

As in the last year's research, both institutions show very low level in the area of **efficiency**. When it comes to reporting, only the Rules of Procedure of the Government of Serbia define the form and deadlines for reporting by corresponding Ministries. However, the Rules of Procedure of the Government do not prescribe the type of information that reports prepared by Ministries should comprise, nor the procedure that ensures the reporting on realised and unrealised results of public policies. Systemic monitoring of the effects of regulations and planned management of public policies is still in its infancy. What is positive, it is that on the national level, the Republic Secretariat for Public Policies has been established in 2014 as a body that performs professional work and gives support to the Government in analysing and strategic management of public policies. As the results in this field are the worst, there is room for a significant improvement of institutions. In relation to that, the long awaited Planning System Law should contribute to enhancement of results in the area of efficiency.

2. Ministries

A total score of Ministries in Serbia in 2018 recorder backsliding of 13% in comparison to 2017 and amounts 45%. The differences in openness score between ministries vary is again recorded. The highest ranking ministry fulfils 53% of openness criteria (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Telecommunications), while the lowest ranking one only 37% (Ministry of Interior). Moreover, there are important differences between individual ministries in separately evaluated transparency, accessibility and efficiency aspects.

A total transparency score of Ministries in Serbia is lower than last year when it was 68%, amounting 60% in 2018. Despite the lower result, the highest transparency score of Ministries remains in the area of *organisational information* publishing – 64%. On the other hand, when it comes to the *public procurement*, openness has decreased for 16%, amounting 56% in 2018. Unlike in the previous cycle, higher number of ministries did not disclose the texts of agreements on public procurements and annexes to the agreements. Organisational information that comprise an organograms, ministries' competences, up-to-datedness of pages, names and biographies of ministers, as well as work plans are published by the majority of ministries. Nevertheless, ministries either do not publish at all or publish insufficient information about names, salaries and contacts of public officials and employees of ministries, or reports on their work.

The accessibility of the information about the *budget* (47%) is at a somewhat lower level that in the last year's research.

The majority of Ministries abide to the Budget System Law and publish the information on the budget and on the annual financial statements. However, both information are published in a different way at different ministries, i.e. there is no unified form and method of publishing. For example, there are comparative overviews of previous years at one site, on the other the information about the budget and the annual financial statements are put together within a single link, on the third these information appear independently.

A total **accessibility** score of Ministries in Serbia dropped from 45% in 2017 to 31% in 2018. The accessibility of organisational information remains the area in which ministries achieve the best result in total accessibility, scoring 64% of indicators. However, worrying is the fact that ministries mainly did not make accessible or easily accessible their annual work plans, annual or interim reports, nor did they engage in developing strategies of transparency and openness. Lower result ministries achieved in the area of communication with citizens (27%) and public consultations (27%) in comparison to 2017.

In the area of the free access to the information of public importance and amounts ministries score only 38%. Four one out of eighteen ministries has not got a designated contact person in charge of information of public importance. Moreover, due to the fact that only five ministries responded to questionnaire in 2018, research team was limited in determining how many institutions conducted capacity building for their staff in this area.

What is worrying is the fact that three ministries have not fulfilled any of the indicators when it comes to the interaction with citizens, which is identical to 2017. This result indicates the fact that three ministries do not have a Facebook or a Twitter account and that they do not enable citizens to simply and directly contact them by their websites. In 2018, fourteen ministries have accounts on social networks that are most often regularly managed – four ministries regularly update their Twitter accounts, while nine ministries regularly update their Facebook pages.

What poses a serious concern is the fact that four ministries have not fulfilled any indicator in the area of public consultations, as in the year before. A score of two ministries in this segment is a mere 9%. A total of 13 ministries have a below average score in the field of public consultations. Only one of eighteen ministries held public hearings and consultations via internet. Additionally, there are still no unique sections dedicated to the information on public debates on the ministries websites. Like in the last research, it was noted that several ministries' websites contain a section dedicated to public debates, whereas on other pages, such information are published under different section such as: "announcements", "information", "news", "projects of the Ministry", "draft laws", etc. Different solutions make the search for the information rather difficult, whereby the results depend on the perseverance of the researcher. On the other hand, websites of institutions that do have a special section dedicated to public consultations do not contain all information that regard the topic in question. Furthermore, contents of reports on the public consultations published by ministries differ by their structure and details provided. In view of the fact that the Report on the public consultation is the main source of information that can depict to what extent the public was involved, the quality of discussion and comments regarding the draft law, i.e. to what extent the public contributions were considered by the public authorities, it is extremely important to publish it and to unify its structure.

The Portal "e-Uprava" (e-Administration), maintained by the Directorate for Electronic Government, is supposed to be the main point of communication between the state authorities and public administration and citizens in order to facilitate the information research, as well as a platform ensuring the citizens' participation in public policies creation. However, we conclude like the last time, that public authorities do not recognise sufficiently this portal. Although the use of the "e- Administration" portal has been established as compulsory, it is not rare that competent institutions disregard this obligation. In the observed period, only three ministries conducted public debates online.

The **integrity** score of ministries remains low, despite the slight progress recorded in 2018. As a matter of fact, the results in the area of integrity show that ministries in Serbia fulfil only 51% of indicators (as oppose to last year when that score was 49%). We would like to emphasise a positive example – the fact that all ministries abide by the law governing the prevention of the conflict of interests and that all ministers submit reports on their property and income.

The results in the field of **efficiency** are the lowest in the entire research, amounting only 12% of indicators. The *monitoring and self-assessment* scored highest with 17%, while *reporting* is the worst graded area with only 9%. Again, one of the consequences of such result is the fact that only five ministries provided their written answers to the questionnaire.

3. Other executive institutions in Serbia

Other executive institutions in Serbia fulfilled only 29% of openness indicators in 2018, which is significantly lower than in the previous measurement year (41%). Again, the lowest ranking result was in the area of integrity - 9%.

The publicity of work of other executive institutions, including agencies and other services founded by the Government, has been determined by the Law on State Administration as “the obligation of institutions to enable the public an insight into their work in accordance with the law regulating free access to the information of public importance“. Besides this regulation which guarantees to the public an access to the documents owned by executive government institutions, state administration institutions also have the obligation to inform the public about their work through the means of public information and in other appropriate ways, such as via information technologies and new media.

In the area of **transparency**, other executive institutions scored 10% lower than in 2017, reaching the final result of 39%. The indicator of the openness of the *budget* remained rather low and amounts 25% in 2018. Reports on the work and expenditure of budget resources are irregular or completely non-existent. The level of proactive transparency of other executive government institutions is low in terms of availability of information regarding incomes and expenditures. It is indicative that more than a half of the sample do not publish their financial plans or reports on the budgetary execution, i.e. annual or biannual financial statement, or none of the said documents.

The openness of the process of *public procurement* scores 31% in 2018, in comparison to 58% in 2017. Nearly one third of the observed bodies do not publish public procurement plans. Calls for bids and decisions on public procurements are mostly published on websites but agreements and annexes to the agreements with suppliers are not at all published on the other executive bodies’ internet pages. The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance pointed to the problem of inaccessibility of information regarding big economic state jobs in his annual reports.

The *organisational information* is the area which scored the highest transparency result with 47% of fulfilled indicators. More than a half of monitored executive bodies did not have or had dysfunctional option to search their websites, while six bodies did not update their websites regularly. Also, almost two thirds of executive bodies did not publish the annual work reports, while only 10 (out of 41) did not disclose their annual work plans. The information about names, positions, salaries and officials’ contacts are not published timely nor they are complete in many cases. In this case, too, we can conclude that the high level of accessibility of data about the salaries of public officials is due to the implementation of the Law on the Free Access to Information and the Instructions for the Creation and Publishing of the Information Booklet about the Work.

When it comes to **accessibility** of other executive institutions, they fulfil 15% of indicators which is twice as lower than last year when the score was 29%.

Other executive government institutions fulfil 11% of indicators of the *access to information*. We would like to underline that more than one third of bodies do not possess publicly available information about the person of reference responsible for the access to information of public importance. Moreover, in 2018, only six executive bodies updated the Information Booklet about the Work in the moment of data collection, while certain institutions did not publish the Information Booklet about the Work on their official web presentations which is in line with the Instructions for Publishing of the Information Booklet about the Work. Executive institutions still pay little attention to strengthening the capacities of employees to implement the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance

Interaction of other public administration institutions with citizens has fulfilled 19% of indicators. This result also implies that the level of openness of institutions in Serbia is not high enough. In 90% of the cases, the procedure for filing complaints and addressing the institution in terms of decisions and actions concerning the institution is not accessible and clearly defined on the Internet pages of other public administration institutions. Nearly 63% of other executive bodies do not have an active Facebook account, while almost 87% do not have a Twitter account.

The total fulfilment of indicators of **integrity** is still rather low and demonstrates a drastic drop in comparison to last year's research. Namely, other executive bodies fulfilled only 10% of indicators in the area of integrity (last year, for example, the score was 18%). The decline in indicator fulfilment can be partly attributed to the change in methodology in this research, but also to a missed opportunity of other executive bodies to fulfil their obligations foreseen by the anti-corruption legislation and obligations that the Republic of Serbia assumed in the European Union integration process. We would like to point to the indicator relating to integrity plans adoption which did not have 80% of the executive bodies in the observed period.

The area of **efficiency** demonstrated also demonstrates a decline. Other executive institutions fulfilled only 25% of indicators in the area of efficiency, while the last year's result was only 44%. We expect that by an adequate implementation of the Planning System Law other executive bodies shall improve their procedures for measuring of results and effects of their plans and programmes. However, we would also like to point out that the decline in the final score is also influenced by the fact that almost 60% of executive bodies did not provide their answers to the questionnaire, further limiting the available information on their efficiency.

Research methodology

Openness is a key requirement of democracy because it enables citizens to obtain the information and knowledge needed for equal participation in political life, efficient decision-making and holding institutions accountable for policies they implement.

Institutions around the world are undertaking concrete actions in order to increase their transparency and accountability towards citizens. With a view to determine the extent to which the citizens of the Western Balkans receive timely and understandable information from their institutions, the Regional Openness Index has been developed.

The Regional Openness Index measures the degree to which the institutions of the Western Balkan countries are open to citizens and society, based on four principles: (1) transparency (2) accessibility (3) integrity and (4) efficiency.

The principle of **transparency** implies that organisational information, budget and public procurement procedures be publicly available and published. **Accessibility** refers to the provision of and abiding by procedures for free access to information and to the enhancement of the information accessibility through the mechanism of public hearings and strengthening of interaction with citizens. **Integrity** includes mechanisms for the prevention of corruption, the implementation of the Codes of Ethics and the regulation of lobbying. The last principle, **efficiency**, concerns the monitoring and evaluation of policies implemented by institutions. Following international standards, recommendations² and examples of good practice, these principles are further elaborated through specific quantitative and qualitative indicators that are assessed on the basis of availability of information on official internet sites of institutions, the quality of the legal framework for individual issues, other sources of public information and questionnaires forwarded to institutions.

Through around 80 indicators per institution, we measured and analysed the openness of 275 executive authorities and collected over 15,000 data on institutions. After the completed monitoring, a control phase followed which showed a standard error of +/- 3%. The measurement was carried out from December 2018 to end of April 2019. Based on the results of the research, we developed a set of recommendations and guidelines for institutions.

² Standards and recommendations of numerous international institutions were analysed, such as: Access Info Europe, EU, OECD, OGP, SIGMA, World Bank, etc.

ActionSEE is a network of organisation of the entire society that works together in order to promote and ensure transparency and accountability of institutions in the entire south-east Europe, to enhance the potential for citizen activism and participation, to promote and protect human rights on the internet as well as to build capacities for the use of new technologies.

The CRTA is an independent, non-partisan civil society organisation that advocates the concept of accountability and transparency and develops citizens' and media skills for an active participation in the control of decision-making process.

In order to give more strength to citizens, other NGOs and media to call public officials accountable, the CRTA uses information and communication technologies for exchange of data gathered by monitoring of the work of public institutions, by research and "data" journalism, research and surveys. The CRTA develops as well ICT tools that enable citizens to research and publish the information on their own and establishes publicly available mechanisms to call politicians and institutions accountable. The CRTA and its partners use information, tools and mechanisms in order to provoke public reactions to abuses of public functions and to urge institutions to improve the existing procedures in view of the accountability concept. In order to incite more profound changes at the institutional level, the CRTA launches initiatives that promote the accountability and transparency concepts and prompt the others to advocate them.

www.crtars.org